

Educational Philosophy Statement

“Significant evolution” is just one phrase that could describe what my perspective on education has undergone. Though not atypical of educators, it will continue to evolve as the breadth of my experiences expand in the classroom while I witness its rippling impact on students’ lives. If one were to ask my parents their “why” of education’s importance, their Portuguese-immigrant status, from which their schooling capped at fourth grade in the Azores, would influence their answers to include its role in life-long success, American opportunity, or the ability to provide for a family using one’s intellectual pursuits, rather than subjecting to exhaustive physical labor like they have. This upbringing, rooted in a mindset that all things can be achieved through excellent education, is where my philosophy is rooted. However, the angle in which I view education extends beyond individual success; it remains chained to the values of using both mind and body to serve a grander purpose.

Students at all tiers of education are malleable and capable to achieve and learn at high levels. It is my responsibility to develop students who practice critical thinking in and outside the classroom. I strive to create an environment that encourages students to engage with information, question its validity, and evaluate its various dimensions to think critically. Furthermore, I am committed to helping students apply these skills in real-world situations. I yearn for students to become self-reflective, independent individuals that approach challenges with an investigative mindset, seeking out solutions, and differentiating controllable and uncontrollable aspects of problems. With these tools students become equipped to succeed academically and beyond.

Early in my college journey, pursuing a career in agriculture education was motivated by teaching students the prominence of the agriculture industry in our daily lives and its associated hands-on skills. Though this still holds true, said motivation has evolved into using agriculture as the vehicle in which all subjects can be taught. Whether it be art, economics, or science, there is a place for agriculture to be used as both the content and context for learning.

From here, building students’ intellectual thinking and technical and soft skills starts by first entering the student’s world. Adhering to a constructivist standpoint, active learning stems from a combination of engagement with the world through experimentation and using students’ previous experiences. However, as students come into my classroom with a diverse set of backgrounds, perspectives, and abilities, it is imperative to remove prohibitive barriers to learning. By using investigative and inquiry-based learning that is initiated with real-world agricultural problems, phenomena, and case-studies, all students are provided an equitable and shared context to build upon that resolves any needed previous experiences from students to understand a concept. Hands-on and soft skills are then embedded into student learning during active experimentation with the phenomena in which students are engaged with activities that require technical skills and soft skills such as research, equipment operation, collaboration, or public speaking to be practiced and mastered.

Students are to be challenged to explain these wonders of the world by demonstrating their investigative minds and independent thought. Ensuring a multitude of opportunities for students to show their learning allows for their strengths to be amplified. Using engaging and exciting forms of educational technology to gather real-time data on student performance will inform lessons and units of instruction to accommodate to all student levels. Moreover, I aim to empower students to take ownership of their learning by giving them the freedom to choose how they want to demonstrate what they have learned. “Choice boards” offer students a number of options to address target standards while allowing for students to express themselves through

written, visual, or digital formats to name a few. Finally, I strongly believe in the power higher-level modeling where students use supporting evidence and reasoning to support their claims through visual or written means. Whether it be diagrams, illustrations, or teacher-provided sentence frames, my students are to defend their thoughts and learning with a strong framework.

To make the most of all students' experience in my classroom, it is of utmost importance to establish a class culture of inclusion. This stems from setting explicit expectations for myself and my students that students are to be valued based on their character and not their identity or background. Respect of each other's experiences starts with critical self-reflection and awareness of student situations. Hence, removing all forms of learning barriers in daily instruction and designing instructional plans with accessibility in the forefront of my mind are just a few strides that I continue to take create an equitable learning environment. Moreover, in any school or community, it's important to recognize the students for who they are first, rather than what the data shows or community members believe. I have been fortunate to be involved in schools with overwhelming minority and underrepresented students that have allowed me to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for unique perspective and backgrounds that students bring to the classroom. I am able to create a classroom that is inclusive, welcoming, and empowering for all learners by actively seeking out and valuing the diverse voices and experiences of my students. In the end, I hope that putting equity and inclusion first in my teaching will make each student feel supported and valued and encourage a lifelong love of learning in them.

Education blazes a path for students of all levels to become effective and contributive young adults that not only think for themselves, but have the ability and tools to initiate change for those around them. As a teacher, I continue to ensure that I facilitate to student needs by eliminating obstacles for transformative learning experiences. Using agriculture as a vehicle, it is clear that this relevant industry plays a role in more than just an elective way, and so it should be integrated into everyday instruction. With these tools that students develop, they can achieve what my parents yearned for in their own children: a successful and purposeful life. With students learning at high levels, their education and skills are something that can never be taken away and serve as a foundation for their future endeavors. It is my hope that students look back on their time in my classroom with gratitude and empowerment, knowing that they received an excellent education and grew as talented, thriving individuals.