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**Statement of Teaching Philosophy**

*Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both.*  
--C. Wright Mills

*Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge.*  
--Paulo Freire

*Guarding knowledge is not a good way to understand. Understanding means to throw away your knowledge. You have to be able to transcend your knowledge the way people climb a ladder. If you are on the fifth step of a ladder and think that you are very high, there is no hope for you to climb to the sixth.*  
--Thich Nhat Hanh

When I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I started making mixtapes. These mixtapes were not intended to give to other people but were rather little gifts of sonic pleasure just for myself. Since I didn't have a lot of tapes and records of my own, I decided to record as much music from my favorite radio stations as possible. I would sit in my room for hours parked in front of my slim, white and purple boom box, ready to hit the red-dotted record button at any time. The product of my efforts was a pile of cassette tapes, each magnetically inscribed with a slightly different and far from well-crafted jumble of songs—"Vogue," minus the first thirty seconds, followed by the Power 99 jingle, giving way to the "Wind of Change," with a halting stop-button transition to the last warped seconds of a mattress commercial and Seal's "Crazy," then static silence and my favorite DJ stepping on the opening chords of "More Than Words," blending seamlessly and serendipitously into "Blame It on the Rain." Even today, I still can't hear some of those songs without expecting an ending to be abruptly cut off due to a full Side A or awaiting a transition into another song from the same era. Neither can I seem to pluck those songs from the context of their original mixtapes nor remove them from the flurry of persistent memories they stir in my mind.

By the time I got to high school, my mixtape-making skills had become more refined. During those four years, I made dozens of mixtapes for my friends and secret crushes, often including self-produced cover art and homemade liner notes, track lists and lyrics. I moved from my little boom box to my parents' behemoth stereo system, pressing my ear up against the soft, black panty-hose fabric of the speakers that towered like two faux wood-paneled skyscrapers over the shaggy living room carpet. I listened carefully for the end of each song to avoid too much of a lull between tracks. Sometimes I waited for songs to fade into silence, while other times I compared track lengths listed on the back of jewel cases to the glowing green blink of the stereo's LCD seconds counter to make sure I didn't hit the stop button too soon.

Making mixtapes took a lot of time and patience, but a great deal of thought also went into their production. There was the intended recipient to consider: What sorts of music did he or she like? What kind of music did I *want* him or her to like? Did the future beneficiary of my mixtape have a long bus or train ride to school or a need to tune out nagging parents or noisy siblings? Maybe there was a big game to get psyched up for or the loss of a grandparent or teenage relationship that called for a soundtrack conducive to thinking and grieving. All these factors required thorough consideration, and the structure of the mixtape had to reflect that process of deliberation. Songs were chosen carefully to create a comprehensible narrative, more like the movements of a symphony than a mishmash of greatest hits. Not only that—the selected songs needed to challenge the listener. They had to be palatable enough for the mixtape recipient to like and want to listen to again and again, but new and different enough to spark a reconsideration of his or her own personal taste and, if I was lucky, maybe even his or her beliefs

and perception of the world. Of course, the people who I made mixtapes for did not just idly receive my grand orchestrations but were active listeners who brought their own opinions and understanding to the music. I would always ask my friends what they thought of the mixes I made for them, and inevitably, they would end up hearing something I didn't—a lyric that had gone unnoticed or a key change that inspired an altogether different feeling in him or her than it had in me. New meaning was always created when the music fell on that fresh pair of ears, and the experience of listening to mixtape songs was never the same for me after I learned of the recipient's interpretations.

In my experience, teaching is not that dissimilar from making a good mixtape. I spend hours crafting a syllabus and course reader, carefully considering the account of sociology or society that my course and my teaching will create for students. My training in feminist pedagogy in the Feminist Studies parenthetical notation program at UCSC has made me leery of separating my syllabus into neat categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, with the effect of leading students to think that these things exist separately and not in interaction with each other. In developing course materials, I instead focus on the intersectionality of these issues and choose (sometimes unexpected or non-canonical) texts that will reflect this. I think about what my students' lives are like and about jobs, parties, families, and sleep deprivation. I push to constantly remind myself that my students are complicated and multifaceted people and that each person's identity as a university student and participant in my classroom is only one part of his or her busy and complex life. Rather than seeing this as a detriment to what I will be able to accomplish as a teacher each quarter, I strive to locate the possibilities within the situation.

Just as the recipients of my teenage mixtapes brought their own interpretations to the music I provided them, so do my students to the course material. I intentionally use strategies to tease out their perspectives in class, such as building a comfortable and communal atmosphere where students feel like they can participate without fear and with respect, breaking up my lectures with informal questions that can lead to lengthy and fruitful discussions, and providing students with structured opportunities to teach me and their classmates something not covered in class. But just as important as what the students bring to the course material in class are the connections they make to it outside of class. If I had to boil down my teaching to one goal, it would be to aid students in applying the concepts they learn in class to their own lives (and vice versa) because learning through experience is often the most meaningful and resonant way. This is not to say that students have any way of having experienced or of truly understanding all of the issues we tackle in sociology or the various forms of oppression we discuss, but if they can apply that knowledge to their own social context, sometimes rethinking and questioning their own opinions, it is my belief that they will have a deeper understanding of those foundational concepts. Further, I think students are more passionate about those concepts if they can relate them to their lives outside of the university. I love to hear stories from my students about having totally unexpected "aha!" moments outside of school, when something they see on TV, an experience at home, or a familiar song on the radio stirs up their memory and places them once more within the "playlist" I went to such pains to engineer.

In applying tenets of critical pedagogy in my classroom, I have also come to understand that not only must the students be teachers, but teachers must also be students. I try very earnestly to open myself up to the opinions and the knowledge of my students and also to remind myself that I still have a lot more to learn. If I ever let myself think that I have learned everything there is to know, that is the day I will cease to be a good teacher. Just as I was able to hear my mixtape selections anew after listening to my friends' interpretations of the music, so am I able to always see course material in a new light after learning from my students. Each quarter, I am a little more enriched by the group of students whom I come to care for and from whom I learn so much.

Sometimes I still make mixes of music for my friends, but the process is a little different now. I can just pop a CD into my laptop and burn a list of selected songs onto it within a few

minutes. This takes a lot of the tedium out of the process and reduces the likelihood of mistakes, but there was something kind of special about spending all that time trying to assemble a perfect aural experience for my listener. Of course, I still put the work of trying to build the best and most fluid musical narrative into my mixes, but I don't think the skills of patience and revising my mixes until they were just right—skills I first started learning in my clumsy mixtape-making attempts in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and cultivated in high school—have been lost at all. I like to think that, instead, those attempts have given me the foundation for the teacher I am today. Years from now, when my students are long graduated from college, I hope they will remember what they have learned in my classroom because they were able to refine the practice of listening for themselves in my lectures and our interesting discussions. When I hear one of my favorite songs and can't forget a DJ's voice or the pitch of a mattress salesman imprinted on it, I'll think of my students, and I'll hope they'll occasionally think about the mix I've worked so hard to make for them, too.