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Teaching Statement

Teaching involves diving into archives to create opportunities for students to create new knowledge. This approach to teaching requires an awareness of what archives leave out. Teaching also entails an ability to discern the potential within an archive. Finally, teachers need practice using archives to create something new.

To rework archives, students need to recognize what those archives leave out. The architecture of the classroom contributes to the archiving of knowledge, backgrounding serendipity and embodied experiences with place. In my Place-based Curriculum Design course, students create a “curriculum walk,” an assignment that asks students to take a walk and create an artifact that demonstrates their reflection on the thoughts that occurred on the walk. The assignment foregrounds the knowledge creation de-emphasized by classroom architecture. Students have explored the affordances of a snow walk by embracing the unpredictable weather and the potential of snow to make a familiar walk strange. Another student addressed the gendered history of the flaneur by creating a timeline of her sense experiences and mapping instances of the male gaze she felt on her walk.

In addition to recognizing the limits of an archive, students also need to intuit the potential in an archive. In my classes, we use a resonance activity to foreground the potential within a text. In this activity, we write down passages that resonate with us, collect them, randomly redistribute them, and read them aloud. Sometimes they overlap and reinforce the resonance of a particular passage, but the activity always turns attention to the potential in a text. For example, in reading a challenging article on critical geography that upended conventional conceptions of place, students were inclined to dismiss the article as too difficult. However, through the resonance activity, the class uncovered a striking passage that three students noted. The conversation shifted from frustration to a consideration of the potential in that particular passage.

Beyond archival limitations and intuiting potential, teaching involves using an archive to create something new. In my Curriculum Theory and History course, students work with a partner to lead the class in a Curriculum Conversation. They take the week’s readings and create a lesson for the beginning of the class. In the midst of the college admission bribery scandal, the two students leading the lesson engaged with the scandal through a discussion of the hidden curriculum of lessons learned to keep people in their place in the social hierarchy and the social reproduction of inequity before asking the rest of the class to re-envision the admission process. During a local push for school integration, two students leading the lesson used texts on critical race theory to address the work that goes into creating schools that lack diversity before challenging the class to draft proposals to address issues related to school segregation.

In my teaching, my goal is to prepare pre-service teachers to bring creativity to archives to create new knowledge. My methods challenge them to recognize the limitations of archives, intuit the potential in archives, and engage in creativity with archives. As archives proliferate into different aspects of life, it becomes increasingly important that teachers critically and creatively engage with archives.