

On the first day of class, I present students with a large empty container. I explain our collective responsibility, as open vessels, to pour into the container over the course of the semester. With all our contributions, the container will reach the brim – by the end of the course, we will have an overflowing libation from which we toast to our growth and learning and evolution.

I believe that learning is an active process. I believe that each person in the room is both teacher and student, fulfilling the roles of each in an organic flow. I believe that I have as much to gain, if not more, from my students. I believe in dismantling toxic hierarchical structures within the classroom – it carries rich potential as a safe haven from the outside. I believe in interrogating possibilities and unlocking new worlds. I believe the richest answers are in essence, questions. I believe students are complex beings first, with a host of experiences and expertise that inform their scholarship. As a result, it is important to build deep relationships in my classroom. I believe the body is our primary teacher; I am a facilitator of the learning process.

Seven years ago, I first stepped into a kindergarten classroom – 30 5-year-olds hung on my every word as they explored this foreign institution. I felt the magnanimous pressure as their introduction to the next 12+ years of learning and scholarship. Within the high stakes testing environment in which I taught, my students were with me for 8 hours a day, with 0 minutes of nap formally written into their schedule. We created our own schedule – we listened intently to each other and turned the lights off and put our heads down, if needed. I learned that my role as their teacher was to assist them in navigating a system that won't always have their best interest in the spotlight – how do I equip them to succeed in a structure that inherently did not meet their basic needs? I leaned into the power of the circle in my pedagogy - that in this structure, our energy flowed in and through each other and we could all be seen and honored in our community.

Regardless our educational level, I believe we are still kindergarteners in our heart – we walk into the classroom with hopeful expectations and open imaginations. While we may no longer have playgrounds and a costume closet and a toy kitchen set, we still have that desire to create and innovate and interrogate and problem-solve. I approach any classroom the same I did that first day of kindergarten. I stand on a legacy of amazing educators who have impacted and molded my worldview – I've witnessed and benefitted from the power of our role in society. We shepherd tomorrow's legislators, artists, politicians, citizens, parents, and presidents into their legacy – we are charged with the unique task of recognizing, supporting, and championing dreams.

Ah, yes – I am a dreamer. This may be the most crucial aspect of my identity as an educator. I balance my wishes for tomorrow with my realities of the present day. I charge my students to join me on this tightrope. It is in this between land that we continue to press forward; it is in this classroom that we chart out our blueprints and solidify our strategies.

So, here's a toast to all the dreamers – may our collective dreams create the sweetest nectar from which our great great grandchildren will continue to quench their thirst.