

April 16, 2026

Dear Heidi,

This semester went by so quickly! It is hard to believe that summer is just around the corner and that my classes, including the CDP micro-credential class, are coming to an end. I wonder where you are now, and what you are doing, as you read this. I hope that you are still excited by teaching, and that your drive to learn more about how to be an effective and inclusive instructor has not dimmed. I will provide an overview of what I have learned this semester in the CDP class, for your reference, just in case you need a refresher or encouragement to keep on fighting to make your classroom a place of open dialogue where students feel safe to share their experiences and thoughts with others.

I'll start by reflecting on two strengths that I believe I bring to the table as an instructor and graduate student. The first, and most important, strength that I possess is my desire to connect with others in deep and meaningful ways where people feel seen and understood. As an instructor, I want to understand my students as full human beings with their own hardships and joys in life. I want to hear their thoughts and experiences in class dialogue. As a student myself, I see this desire of connecting with others show up in wanting to get to know other graduate students better, such as by starting a social committee for CGSA to create opportunities for people to connect. The second strength that I want to highlight here is my zest for adventure and fun. I try to make class activities engaging and hands-on, such as using board games and group activities to help teach course concepts. As a student, I seek to create opportunities for fun through hosting events like tie-dye parties at my house to connect with others through art.

I gained many tools for critical dialogic pedagogy that I can use in my classroom going forward. Next semester, I will begin the semester by introducing the community agreement I

made for this program to my students. The community agreement will set a tone of acceptance and guidelines for engaging respectfully with others in the classroom, as well as allow students to take ownership over their own learning by deciding collectively their community agreements. I will also remember the facilitator moves we practiced during the CDP course dialogue workshops so that I can help students engage in productive dialogue with one another and help ease any tensions that arise as students work through difficult topics together. Utilizing practices like “pair and share” will help students feel more comfortable to talk with one another and build rapport.

My biggest revelation during the CDP program was crafting my positionality statement. It was a meaningful exercise where I gained a deeper understanding of myself as both a person and an educator. I had not realized beforehand just how much my experiences of having a sibling with a disability have shaped how I view what it means to belong in a classroom and how there are many different ways to learn. Another moment of insight from this course was the realization of how I value community and connection. This quote from bell hooks resonated with me: “Choosing love we also choose to live in community, and that means that we do not have to change by ourselves. We can count on critical affirmation and dialogue with comrades walking a similar path.” (2006, p. 296). Hooks reminds me to look to love and the people around me as I navigate life. In this journey of getting a Ph.D., I have had others tell me that it is a lonely path to walk. I choose instead to look for community, connection, and love instead of walking in loneliness.

Heidi, you’ve got this.

With love,

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## References

hooks, b. (2006). Love as the practice of freedom. In *Outlaw culture: Resisting representations* (pp. 289–298). Routledge.