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Educational Philosophy

Collaboration, exploration, diversity, discipline, and discovery are the watchwords of my work. After working in both the professional and academic theatre as a director, dramaturg, actor, teacher, and student, I have found it is impossible to separate the worlds of theatrical practice and education. Every time I direct a play, it is an educational journey, both for me and the cast, and often for the audience as well. As such, my philosophy as a teacher is nearly identical to my philosophy as a director.

Collaboration is key to any good theatrical production, and it is equally important in the classroom. Unless a student actively engages in the process of learning, the teacher's work is all for naught. Therefore one of the most important aspects of my job is to create an environment in which students feel valued and comfortable, are invested in the work, and want to be active participants in their own education.

A large part of creating that positive collaborative environment is ensuring there is diversity and equity on the stage and in the classroom. Whether I am casting a production or planning a syllabus, I strive to incorporate as many diverse voices and viewpoints as possible. In production, this is also reflected in my practice of color conscious casting and commitment to BIPOC representation. For instruction, I use a variety of texts from diverse playwrights and authors for students to explore, not just works from the canon. And in both arenas, I always encourage open discussion and make sure every voice is heard, not just the ones of those most similar to me. I want to create a "brave space" in the classroom and rehearsal room where students can express their opinions and feelings related to these very personal and difficult topics. Even when teaching a Shakespeare class, which is all canon, I look for ways for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ students to connect personally to the material and foster frank conversations about racism and sexism in the texts, and what those "isms" looked like in Shakespeare's time. Recent events and conversations about racism and equity in the American theatre have also shown me that I have even more work and learning to do to make the theatre just and equitable for all.

Once the collaborative environment has been established, we can begin to explore. Sometimes there are courses where there are right answers, but often in theatre, there is no right and wrong, just an endless supply of possibilities. As a Directing teacher, I present students with a jumping off point of what I know and what has worked for me as a director. Then we read materials (directing guidebooks, plays, acting manuals) together to glean further truths we find useful to our art. For example, instead of simply providing a class with guidelines to use in blocking, we experiment. By exploring, the students begin to discover for themselves what does and does not work. Instead of me simply dictating rules of staging, the students experience when a choice is or is not effective, and are more likely to put that information to use in their own work.

As much as I love to explore, that exploration must be within the realm of reason and in service of a goal. I have high expectations for my students. In my courses I make use of techniques to reach a range of learners, including in class writings, discussions, scene work, and improvisational games. This enables me to assess student work on different levels and gives them multiple venues in which to show aptitude. The onus is still on the student to do the necessary work, however. I would not define myself as a strict teacher, but I do not hesitate to let students know when their work does not meet expectations.

The most thrilling moments in the classroom and in the rehearsal room are the "ah-has." When you see the light bulb go off in a student's mind, all the exploration, discipline, and collaboration come together in the form of a discovery. In my beginning acting classes, I love the moments when all of a sudden a student realizes they understand what an objective is, and how to play it in the text to get what the character wants. They get excited about performing, and I get excited about sharing their journey with them.

As a teacher I think it is extremely important to view my students as equal partners on the journey of education. I often learn as much from them as they do from me as we make discoveries about the art of theatre together. These discoveries can come from anywhere: current events, mathematics classes, even a chance encounter on the street. Theatre is about humanity, and the artists I want to work with are the ones who have a rich and varied human experience. By providing a safe, collaborative environment that connects the classroom to the rehearsal room to the world, I enable my students and myself to make new discoveries about who we are as artists and people.