

Teaching Philosophy

For the **master's tools** will never **dismantle the master's house**. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.

- Audre Lorde

Audre Lorde's quote is the basis of my teaching philosophy. I believe in order to bring about change, students must be empowered to not reinvent the wheel, but rather to imagine a world without the wheel and build something new. As an educator, I play a crucial role as the catalyst for said change. It is my duty to promote and encourage my students not only to dream of a culturally open environment, but to create one from which strong leaders emerge. The tools I aim to give my students are the following:

Interdisciplinary Education

As an artist, my work is interdisciplinary, covering many facets/areas of social justice to bring about change. As evidenced in my creation of "The *columbinus* Project" in 2017. This project paired education on gun control, gun violence, mass shootings and mass shooter training while paired with the theatre production *columbinus* by Stephen Karam. As producer and director of the project, I led many discussions on what it meant for not only college campuses, but high school, middle school and elementary school campuses to be prepared for situations in which a shooter may be present. Leading in depth discussions and analysis on Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris and the bullying they faced, we discussed the effects bullying may have had on the two notorious shooters and even imagined a world where the proper steps for intervention in their lives had been taken.

That is one of many ways in which I bring real world discussions and application to theatrical productions. My understanding as a director is that theatre is an imitation of life; therefore I expect my students to seek out what exactly the playwright/artist is seeking to imitate or examine in their pieces. This can only be done by understanding the vast amounts of global literature, and the varying dramatic styles and structures. I ask students: "What is The Estrangement Effect and what exactly was Brecht's intent when he coined the term?" "How did the style of Epic theatre and expression influence Ntozake Shange in her adaptation of *Mother Courage and Her Children*", and "How does Shange's childhood and life directly relate to her creation of the choreopoem?" These are questions that allow us to understand the artist, and then consequently the art. For all art is a window into the soul of its creator.

A Knack for Resistance

Queerness in of itself means a resistance to binary. I ask my students to imagine what it must mean to constantly be in a state of resistance, that your mere existence alone is a revolutionary act. I have led and taught workshops on queer theory and LGBTQIA rights and revolutions, I led organizations and created programs and events to support GSA groups at local high schools in Lycoming County Pennsylvania. Additionally, I have worked tirelessly to communicate the difference in gender, sex, and sexuality, and advocated for the consistent use of correct pronouns for students of all ages. By engaging in this work, my students not only gain clarity into the characters and stories in queer theatre but provides them with the compassion and tools they need to facilitate and foster thriving and inclusive spaces.

An Understanding That Ignorance is Inevitable

I strive to make every class/rehearsal room/facilitated workshop space an interactive experience. Goals for the day are laid out so that students understand what it is we are working towards. I ask questions to push them, not to undermine their intelligence or to boost mine. The rooms I work in and frequent belong to all who are in them. I surrender to the knowledge and knowledge alone because ignorance is simply the lack of knowledge, and we are always in a constant state of ignorance.

Articulation and Specificity:

I believe that articulation is something for which to strive, but also, something that does not govern or determine one's intelligence. No one is articulate all the time, and that is okay. Inarticulation does not diminish one's work or intelligence. I challenge my students to eliminate words such as "um" and phrases such as "well it is like this" or "I like this, or I didn't like this", because the work they do must be deliberate, it must be specific. In all things required of my students, specificity is among the most important, for it is when we become incredibly specific that our work becomes universal.

A Well-Read Experience

The well-read artist can both quote Shakespeare, and the words of Federico Garcia Lorca, and not only that, but the well-read artist also understands that while the classics hold importance, they are not the pinnacle of academic excellence. My reading lists, and materials are constantly changing as theater makers continue to create new and innovative work. I look not to rid the world of the traditional Western theatre canon. In the words of Toni Morrison "I do not want to alter one hierarchy in order to institute another." I seek to add to the canon, in Felicia Rose Chavez's terms, I aim to "Complete the Canon," to place BIPOC, queer, women, and nonbinary works into the canon. In my class, my students participate in a cultural call and response, engaging with works by the oppressor and oppressed.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Equitable practices are crucial to the success of students. As a student who grew up financially challenged, and without access to materials to succeed, I make sure that my resources and accessibility becomes my students' resources and accessibility when formulating materials and reading lists for coursework. Engaging with artists of all backgrounds, and their contributions to the theatre canon is an important factor in teaching diversity. By generating expansive reading lists, spanning not only western theatre, but global theatre is the way in which to educate theatre artists. I believe this is the only way to provide a cultural understanding of the world that may be outside of individuals POV.

While lecture based courses have their place in academia, my courses are driven by discussion of course material. Regardless of background, all students are asked to engage with readings personally in order to form opinions and allow students to see the world differently than they may have before. Course materials and reading lists are always comprehensive to the many identities that make up the world to ensure that students have the chance to place themselves in the literature they are asked to engage with, and to question the work if their identity appears to be lacking, or under attack in other works. In my class, students will engage in conversations around plays, ranging from classical text to newly developed work, both published and unpublished. In these conversations, students, whether an actor, director, designer, or playwright, examine topics such as dramatic structure, its meaning, creator's intent, and its overall place in the vast theatrical canon. It is important that regardless of concentration, all my students leave the room better dramaturgs than they arrived, and that they understand that knowledge of a production/script does not belong to one person in the room. My pedagogical approach is to give them as many tools as I can that they may need to analyze a script, character or production so that they can make bold, daring and *informed* choices when creating art.

And Finally, A Desire for Liberation

My work does not stop once my students/collaborators and I part. The work with which I ask my students and collaborators to engage agitates, questions, and sometimes place them in uncomfortable places to show them that the only action they must seek is revolution. They must work to not only shake systems of oppressions but dismantle them and build anew. Whether my students' activism and assault on oppression begins or continues once they leave my classrooms, my hope is that their work not only as artists, but as people contribute to a collective liberation. For equity, diversity and inclusion are not the goals, but the tools provided to achieve liberation.

Liberation is a marathon. It is the removal of systems of oppression, the dismantling of the master's house, and the forging of a new community that is accepting for all. Liberation means feminist rights, Black rights, LGBTQIA rights, differently abled rights and more exist *together*. Liberation entails freedom, and Freedom is not real if everyone cannot exercise it. Liberation is a collective effort, and theatre is a collaborative art form. Theatre is liberating, and artists can be liberators. It is my duty to provide liberation to my students at every chance I get, for they will continue to build the future so that my children, and their children and so on can experience true liberation . . . whenever that may come.

An Anti-Racist Education Action Plan

For too long the mode of academia has been a top down structure. The professor is the keeper of knowledge, thus also the keeper of power. We teach how we have learned, and we have been taught to mimic our predecessors to achieve that which we perceive as success and power. In order to teach an anti-racist tradition we must do the following to challenge this traditional model of academia.

1. Decenter the ego: acknowledging that my students can teach me as much as I can teach them. Acknowledging when I have made mistakes and providing opportunities for feedback on myself and my own work.
2. Empower discussions on equity and power: Students today want to discuss and learn about equity, and power just as much as they want to learn about their craft. I plan to incorporate discussion on power, equity and social justice into my lessons. Whether this be discussing the movements that spark inspiration for antoinette nwandu's *pass over*, or discussing the history of Black face and minstrelsy and it's critique in Ntozake Shange's *Spell #7*.
3. Establish culture in classrooms by developing community. In my courses and workshops as a community we build community guidelines for how we will operate together. By developing language as a community, and defining that language and terminology together we work from a shared language. Doing so provides students with ownership over the space, and thus ownership of their education.
4. Completing the Canon and Creating a Living Archive
 - Developing reading lists that are expansive and inclusive.
 - Developing reading lists from the students list of artistic inspirations.
 - Reading for understanding.
 - Pairing play readings/assignments with adhoc reading to better grasp the meaning and story of the play.
 - ex: Amiri Baraka's "The Revolutionary Theatre" with *The Dutchman*.
5. Offer courses outside of traditional western American theatre. I can offer workshops and courses in the following areas:
 - Ntozake Shange and the Choreopoem and examination and study of Ntozake Shange's work and dramatic structure that is the choreopoem.
 - Global Drama and Decentering White American Theatre (focuses on African, Aboriginal, Japanese, and other NonWestern forms of Theatre)
 - Queer Theatre Studies - an examination on queerness, plays written by queer, trans and nonbinary playwrights and what queer expression looks like in theatre.
 - Contemporary Black Theatre: an exploration of current theatre by new and rising contemporary Black playwrights.

6. Teaching alternative methods. I.E. teaching Black Acting Methodology, different approaches to dramatic structures and script analysis. Approaching scene work and class assignments by centering students' voices, providing different and varying forms of feedback and criticism. Providing frequent opportunities for growth in the classroom, thus releasing the stress and the need students develop to perfect and please the instructor. Eliminating top down teaching entirely and embodying teaching methods and philosophies.

Here is an example list of readings, plays, and viewings I have taught in my courses:
(*course syllabi and assignment documents available upon request.*)

hamletmachine by Heiner Muller
448 Psychosis by Sarah Kane
Dutchman by Leroi Jones
Owl Answers by Adrienne Kennedy
Indecent by Paula Vogel
The Long Christmas Ride Home by Paula Vogel
God of Vengeance by Shalem Asch
Spell No. 7 by Ntozake Shange
For Colored Girls by Ntozake Shange
We Are Proud to Present by Jackie Sibblies Drury
References to Salvador Dali Make Me Hot by Jose Rivera
What to Send Up When It Goes Down by Aleshea Harris
pass over by antoinette nwanu
Blood Wedding by Federica Lorca
Everybody by Brandon Jacob Jenkins
Seven Guitars by August Wilson

Example Viewings:

Paris is Burning Documentary
Do The Right Thing Film by Spike Lee
Indecent performed and filmed on Broadway PBS
passover by antoinette nwanu filmed by Spike Lee
A Queer Future (a poem/speech performed by Jordan E. Cooper)
Les Blancs by Lorraine Hansberry filmed by The National Theatre

Example Readings:

The Revolutionary Theatre by Amiri Baraka
The Master's Tools by Audre Lorde
Aristotle's Poetics
lost in language & sound or how i found my way to the arts by ntozake shange
The Theater of War by Bryan Doerries
The Director's Craft by Katie Mitchell
*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination by Toni Morrison

new addition to coursework