

Anne Mundell-Professional Statement

Teaching is connecting: the melding of seemingly disparate ideas and disciplines into an artistic whole that is far more than the sum of its constituent parts. My central objective is to connect students with opportunities to face this ambiguous process of attaching inspiration to action. I work alongside students to help them recognize the ephemeral web of possibility that leads to the discovery of new forms of collaboration and new ways to approach problems. The answers aren't the mission of my classes. The goal is for students to learn how to fearlessly ask relevant questions. Often the queries students believe are foundational are already constructed on a rickety series of assumptions that don't provide enough support upon which to build ideas. This insight led me to investigate how to prompt students to invent the very physics of the worlds they are building.

My class projects are designed to break down complex problems into exercises that encourage students to learn how to quest for the foundational questions that will allow them to discover revelatory connections. For example, in my Explorations in Scenic Design Class, rather than having students design an entire play at the outset, I have them create worlds for a single word in order to discover how much richness lies within the simplest particle of theater. Without being constrained by the complexity of an entire play, the students learn how to ask questions about the story of a single word. The results are surprisingly rich and theatrical.

Within the School of Drama, I have led and participated in various curricular designs, and I am convinced that our job as educators is to create the crucible for idea building, and then to restrain ourselves from filling it. In my ten years as the leader for the Design Option within the School of Drama, we reexamined our mission as educators, overhauled the curriculum, hired a number of forward-thinking faculty, codified policy, grew production values, enhanced connections with practicing artists in the profession and alumni and grew our national and international reputation. The theater and entertainment industry is changing so rapidly that we must prepare students to be successful no matter in which direction the industry evolves. In designing curricula, my objective is not to train students for the world we currently inhabit, but to equip them with the tools they need to invent future iterations of how we tell stories. As part of this new curriculum, and although I do not teach it, one of my proudest accomplishments is in participating in the ongoing development of a course called "Oswald". The name and design of the class changes every year in order to challenge student expectations. Flying in the face of current educational best practices, there is no syllabus delivered to students; that would be giving too much away. Instead, with each class, the faculty attempt to throw students off balance in order to force them to ask different kinds of questions. For example, one day a stranger may enter the class and outline a project for students in a language that is not English and they have to come up with non-language based ways to interpret, define and solve the problems presented. The goal of the class is to help millennial students learn to celebrate ambiguity as a creative muse, not as something that needs to be avoided. Many alumni comment that the class was a central part of their education at Carnegie Mellon.

Connecting unlikely collaborators often results in some of the most interesting work. I have partnered to create projects between Art and Scenic Design as well as Architecture and Scenic Design, but the collaboration that has compelled my students and me to really reinvent the storytelling paradigm is my partnership in the Social Robots project. Over the last ten years, I have worked with a number of students and faculty in the School of Drama and the Robotics Institute to develop several robotic characters, each with a personality and a back-story. The questions that have to be asked in order to build a character that does not even have the basic scaffold of humanity are formulated entirely differently than those for current theater practice, yet the idea of "story" remains constant. Two of these robots, Tank and Victor, are ongoing members of the CMU campus and have been recognized nationally and internationally in multiple media outlets, including recently in Time Magazine and the Wall Street Journal. The Robotics project has inspired me to become an active participant in the

creation of IDeATe, which will join art and science in inspiring new leaders and thinkers to invent the next incarnation of storytelling, both in terms of technology and content. I am currently collaborating on developing two courses for the IDeATe initiative, the first one of which will be called "Robotics for Creative Practice".

Most students feel as though they are engaging in a unique and isolated struggle as they attempt to birth ideas, so it is my job to expose students to as many creative points of view and approaches as possible, connecting these students to new opportunities and new ways of working. Over the years I have brought in as guests many of the top professionals in my field. This spring, I am hosting Erik Ehn, the Head of Playwrighting at Brown University. While he is not in my discipline, he has a unique way of thinking about process and creativity that I believe can benefit all disciplines in Drama. In collaboration with faculty from other areas, we are designing a workshop on how to reach for ideas in a different way. Thanks to a Berkman Grant, I have been fortunate enough to begin travelling the world doing short residences and interviews with ground-breaking artists. These interviews will be incorporated into a book, that will investigate how contemporarily-significant theater and performance storytelling artists mine their instincts, solidify or discard their ideas and construct work on the foundation of early impulses. This text will be designed to be used in my Scenic Design Explorations Class.

The lab in which theater educators are able to put all of our classroom theory into practice is the stage. In working as an advisor to student designers for plays, opera and television and on their thesis projects, I am able to help them take the theory and creative processes from their classwork and connect it to the process of actual collaboration through the realization of a professional level production on the School of Drama stages. This is an extensive undertaking: students work from basic research, collaborate with their colleagues, develop ideas, create drawings and models, and collaborate in the work of bringing a production to life on stage. It is often the capstone to their educational tenure at the School of Drama.

While building connections within the rich environment of the School of Drama, Carnegie Mellon and the theatre profession is critical to our student's success, it is also important to extend the benefits of theater training beyond the expected academic and professional boundaries. One of the aspects of my teaching career which has been most rewarding is my leadership of the 13-year-old Growing Theater Outreach. Growing Theater is a class I created in which Carnegie Mellon students from across the university mentor at-risk third graders in the writing and production of their own play, performed in May every year at CMU. It is about connecting both the Carnegie Mellon students with opportunities to make a difference and connecting the third-graders with opportunities to create and express their ideas. I have written a series of workbooks for the program and have been fortunate to also be able call upon the skills of many of my colleagues in the School of Drama as well experts from other departments within the University in delivering this program. Most of the Carnegie Mellon students who have experienced Growing Theater continue participating in outreach activities or working with children, post-graduation. I am in the process now of getting a grant from the Sprout Fund which will now allow me to create two new partnerships between other universities and schools with underserved children, starting next year.

Outside of the University, I am one of the instructors of a program called Self-Start which is designed to engender creative entrepreneurship amongst young artists in places where resources are scarce. My collaborators are from different fields, disciplines and organizations. Last summer we delivered two successful workshops over the course of two weeks in South Africa. Students who attended the program report significant traction in getting projects launched thanks, in part, to the Self-Start Program. We plan to expand the program this summer by delivering a workshop in Zimbabwe for forty mid-career artists.

Connecting students to career practices and resources and increasing their professional visibility is also central to my teaching philosophy. In my own professional design practice, I hire students or recent graduates to assist me on nearly every project undertaken in order to expose them to professional collaborations and expectations. This year, for example, I have been able to use students and/or recent graduates on four productions as paid assistants. My own professional practice garnered the 2014 Frankel Award for contribution to and leadership in the Arts, from City Theater and I have won a number of Pittsburgh "best set" awards in the Post-Gazette as well as getting positive reviews in the media in my work all over the US.

Additionally, each year I am in charge of planning and executing a large event that introduces all of the graduating students in Design, Production Technology and Management, Dramaturgy and Directing to members of the profession and to alumni in New York. Over the last few years, this event has continued to grow in attendance becoming more impactful for the graduating students. Working with the New York Drama Clan, I have increased the level of engagement with the graduating class, and I now serve as the School of Drama liaison on a number of initiatives that alumni are introducing to better inform students about life in New York and to welcome them to the profession.

Students from our program frequently garner national recognition. This year, for example, I nominated recent graduate, Patrick Rizzotti for a national award sponsored by the United States Institute for Theatre Technology, which he subsequently won. Graduates of the Scenic Design program work in all areas and at all levels of entertainment design, from Broadway to feature film and television, from regional theater and corporate event design to theme park design and experimental theater. I feel very fortunate to have been able to make many introductions and connections that have led to the first step on the career ladder for many students.

In order to best serve students and grow as an educator/artist have to continuously reconsider my image of the nature of teaching and learning. During my time at CMU, have been privileged to receive both the Horbostle and Ryan teaching awards. I continue to strive to create a more appropriate and adaptable learning model for my students, connecting them to opportunities and, more often than not, to themselves, creating a foundation for the launch of successful careers and lives as artists.