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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

As a queer educator of color, I do not believe in reinventing the wheel, for the wheel is the master's tool. I strive to teach my students to smash the wheel and build something entirely new. I understand that my role as an educator is to be a catalyst for change. It is my duty to electrify my students so that they are empowered to create a culturally inclusive environment from which strong leaders emerge. My goals are as follows:

An Interdisciplinary Education

My work as an artist is interdisciplinary, drawing from activism and history as well as the arts, as evidenced by my creation of "The *columbinus* Project" in 2017. This project combined education on gun control, gun violence, mass shootings and mass shooter training with the text of Stephen Karam's *columbinus*. As the producer and director of this multi-faceted project, I lead many discussions on the implications of active shooter situations for college, high school, middle school and even elementary school campuses. Over the course of these discussions, I encouraged students not only to confront and consider the bullying that Karam's shooters faced, but also to imagine scenarios in which the proper steps for preventative intervention had been taken.

This is just one example of what I do: I seek to use theater as a practical and imaginative tool to investigate immediate cultural and social problems. I understand theater as a reflection of life, and therefore I expect my students to mine which aspect of life any given artist seeks to reflect in their pieces. This exploration requires a thorough understanding of global literature, including an advanced grasp on dramatic styles and structure. 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 correlate to her creation of the choreopoem?" These questions aim at a greater understanding of the artist, which consequently yields a greater understanding of the art. For I believe that all art is a window into the soul of the creator.

A Knack for Resistance

My understanding as a queer artist and educator is that queerness in of itself means a resistance to any and all binaries. I ask my students to imagine what it means to be in an eternal moment of resistance --- what it would mean if their very existence were a revolutionary act. I have lead and taught workshops on queer theory and LGBTQIA rights and revolutions, and 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 between gender, sex, and sexuality, and advocated for the consistent use of correct pronouns for students of all ages. By engaging in this work, not only do my students gain insight into the narratives and themes of the queer theatrical movement, they also gain compassion, empathy, and practical knowledge that they need to create their own thriving, inclusive spaces.

An Understanding That Ignorance is Inevitable

I strive to make every room -- whether it be a classroom, a rehearsal room, or a facilitated workshop space -- a collaborative experience. I aim for an atmosphere of transparency and partnership with my students: I lay out concrete goals at the beginning of the day, so that everyone in the room understands what we're working towards, and when I ask questions, it's never to undermine a student's status or to boost mine -- rather, questions are offered in a spirit of generosity and collective advancement. The rooms I lead belong to all who are in them. I understand that knowledge is not something that I dispense, but rather something that is generated between a group of engaged individuals; I freely admit the limits of my own expertise. For ignorance is simply the lack of knowledge. In every moment that I enrich my students' knowledge, I want them to know that they can also enrich me.

An Emphasis on Verbal Specificity

I believe that verbal specificity and eloquence are things to strive for; at the same time, I do not believe that such things are the sole determiner of one's intelligence or craft. No one is articulate all the time. While it is a skill to express oneself concisely and lucidly, it is also a skill to empathetically and actively interpret another's words, regardless of their dexterity -- and in my classroom, we exercise both skills. Above all, I challenge my students to speak and write deliberately, without generalities or verbal crutches. In all things, we must be specific and intentional.

A Well-Read Experience

The well-read artist can quote both Shakespeare and Lorca; however, just as importantly, the well-read artist understands that the classics are not the end-all-be-all of the artistic canon. As the genre of theater continues to evolve, so my reading list and materials continue to adapt. Along with classical texts, my students will study Jackie Sibblies Drury's *Fairview*, *Underground Railroad Game* by Jennifer Kidwell & Scott R. Sheppard, and *Slave Play* by Jeremy O'Harris. Along with Golden Age musicals, my students will examine contemporary and innovative musical pieces like *Hadestown*, *Six the Musical*, and *A Strange Loop*. We look into the development of adaptations, how they came to be and what or who inspired them. A well-read artist should not only be able to grasp the structure of the past -- they should also have the flexibility and innovative instincts to analyze contemporary and future work.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Equitable practices are crucial to student success. As a student who grew up financially challenged, and without access to materials to succeed, I ensure that my courses, in their structure and requirements, place accessibility at the forefront. A massive factor in creating an equitable classroom is ensuring that the syllabus engages with and acknowledges the contributions of artists from a wide variety of backgrounds. I seek to generate an expansive reading list that spans not only Western drama, but Global drama.

My courses are structured around group discussion, rather than lecture. Regardless of background or comfort with academia, all students are asked to engage with the readings on a personal level, and to voice their opinions with the group. I strive to structure the course in such a way that every student has the opportunity to see themselves represented in the reading list; if and when they do not see themselves represented, or represented fairly, students are encouraged to raise questions in class. In my class, students will engage in conversations around plays, ranging from classical texts to newly developed works, both published and unpublished. In these conversations, each student will be asked to examine essential questions around dramatic structure, meaning, artist intent, and placement in dramatic lineage, regardless of whether that student is an actor, director, designer, or playwright. It is crucially important that my students, regardless of concentration, understand that knowledge of a script does not belong to one person in a room. I seek to empower them with the dramaturgical skills they need to take ownership over their work in a new way, and not feel intimidated by those who would interpret texts for them.

And Finally, A Need For Liberation

My work continues long after my students and I part. The work I ask my students -- who are really my collaborators -- to engage with is designed to agitate their preconceived notions of power structures and artistic structures. I want to show them that their work is nothing short of revolution, and that it has only begun. 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 perpetual project of creating and maintaining right relationships between people and the land we inhabit. And our *articulation* of how we get there matters. Liberation entails freedom, and Freedom is not real if everyone cannot exercise it. Liberation is the removal of systems of oppression, the dismantling of the master's house, and the forging of a new community that is fully inclusive. Liberation means that feminist rights, black rights, LGBTQIA rights, differently abled rights and more exist *together*. Liberation is a collective effort, and theatre is a collaborative art form. Theatre is liberating, and artists can be liberators.