

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

A student in my class can be described as the following:

Invested, Inquisitive and Innovative

The Learning Process

Being a teacher is like being a gardener. You plant the seed, but you can't just leave them there to grow alone if you want them to thrive. You have to water them and weed around them and cut off the dead pieces to help them focus on nurturing and growing the healthy pieces. It's the same in teaching. You plant seeds of knowledge for the students, but you can't speak the knowledge at them and expect them to magically retain all of that information and be able to synthesize it into practice. You need to guide them into moments of discovery, help them point out the areas they can grow in and weed out the things that are doing them a disservice.

I think it's incredibly important for a teacher to model and enforce what it looks like and means to be kind. Unfortunately some students don't receive that knowledge from their family units, so it's key for the teacher to show what it means to be a caring member of a community. In my classes I work hard to create an environment that eliminates competition. All classes begin with an emotional/mental check-point, establishing that the room is a safe space and that each member of the class will support the others. By establishing the safety and support of the classroom and my personal willingness to take risks, I encourage the students to take risks in their work, opening them up to fail without apologizing and to learn from everything that comes their way.

I was always told that one of the first rules of leadership is to understand that "everyone is not like me." It's important when teaching to take into account the different learning styles that could be present in the room. My pedagogy includes a hybrid method, catering to different learning styles, allowing space for people who learn in different ways to contribute to the learning happening within the community of their class. This includes lectures to establish information, demonstration of new techniques and practices, laboratory time for them to practically apply the knowledge they've learned, and journal entries to make space for reflection and goal setting. Every student is given an opportunity to receive the information in a way that is useful to them.

Goals

My approach to teaching dance and musical theater rests on the following goals:

- 1. Discovery** - my classes are formatted in a way to encourage and foster discovery within the study of performance and within the study of dance.
- 2. Synthesis** - the ability to synthesize knowledge provided and arrived at into thoughtful performances/presentations.
- 3. Pracademia** - a lovely professor of mine coined this term, meaning the practical application of academic material.

It is a goal of mine to foster a learning environment that encourages investigative and innovative learners. Through the mastery of a common vocabulary, students will be able to synthesize work intelligently and in such a way that prepares them to effectively collaborate in future projects and professional settings. Ideally, students of mine will be able to take what they learn about the history of theater and the dance community, and the knowledge and tools about performing, and contextualize them. This synthesis ultimately creates a well-rounded, well-educated, well-informed artist and collaborator.

I hope that in this approach to teaching I will inspire my students to become self-aware and self-regulated learners. They will learn how to take in information and synthesize it with the tools that work best for them. Students will invest themselves thoughtfully into work with knowledge of what has come before and how that will always have an effect on the work they make. They will learn to ask questions about the work and the tools, and to reflect on the outcome, acknowledging that in education there is no finished product, but everything is a part of the process leading towards a larger goal of understanding.

Philosophy in Action

I once had a professor who lived by the mantra “structure will set you free.” I believe this applies to theater and dance not only from an artistic, performative perspective but also from an educational standpoint. Classes that follow a predetermined structure free up both the educator and the students to explore and discover by working and collaborating in the space together.

Following this mantra, I structure my classes with an organized syllabus detailing my expectations in all areas of the class, specifically those that will be assessed with a grade. This includes brief descriptions of each assignment that will be turned in as well as my expectations for participation and what my attendance policy, or that of the institution’s, is and how that could potentially affect a student’s grade. Due to the subjectivity of performance study, it can be difficult to justify the assessment of students’ work. I handle this by creating detailed rubrics for each assignment. The rubrics outline my exact expectations for written and performed work, presenting the student with a level of objectivity; this structure allows them the freedom to investigate and discover within the work. It frees them from worrying about the grade outcome and allows them to focus on what they can take away from the experience.

When approaching assignments, I am a believer in allowing the students to have a say in what they choose to present for each assignment. Practicing this teaches the skills of collaboration, ultimately teaching them how to be a significant contributor in all future rooms they’ll be a part of. This allows for authentic ownership of the work because the student had a say in what they would be working on in the first place.

With all of this in mind, my main goal is to make sure that I have watered and weeded, and tended my little plants so that they can grow and bloom to the fullest potential in their pursuit of this career.