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### Teaching Philosophy

I am a director, adaptor, and intimacy choreographer, who views my work in each arena as part of a lemniscate, influencing and being fed by the others. My impulse to make and teach theater stems from my interest in the depth and complexity of what it means to be human, and a desire to use the theater to rehearse, literally and metaphorically, for the significant moments in our lives, both the challenges and the pleasures.

As a teacher, I am both participant and witness. I hold the experience of my students and let them know that their progress is being noticed and appreciated. I ask them questions, offer them tools, and give them space and time within which to make connections. It is not my job to rank student theater artists as “good” or “bad,” whether they are majors or non-majors; I believe that the study of theater is a lifelong endeavor, and that anyone can make immense progress over time. It is true of any course of study that students will inevitably become better through hard work. Thus, I acknowledge strong work ethics and offer specific, non-judgmental feedback.

A theater class can offer students the opportunity to bring their bodies to the forefront and to reconnect them to their brains and emotions. It offers a level of kinesthetic learning that cannot help but enhance a student’s ability to stay present in lectures and labs.

Through the study of acting, students grow into themselves. They learn to take up space, harness time, speak without apology, and offer up their vulnerabilities in safe and channelled ways. These qualities and benefits exist across methodologies, and I draw on and connect many of them in my teaching. My acting courses are rooted in Stanislavski’s “System,” yet are infused with movement-based approaches such as those of Michael Chekhov, Tadashi Suzuki, Anne Bogart, and Mary Overlie. This combination of techniques strengthens the mind-body connection and adds purpose, specificity, and clarity to organic impulse.

Acting requires regular voice and movement work, self-understanding, careful study of the text, a grasp of the needs and desires of the character, deep listening, relaxed breath, attentiveness to detail, and trust in oneself and others. I begin the semester with a series of exercises which encourage listening, openness, honesty, and physical and emotional connection. By the end of this portion of the semester, my class feels like an ensemble of actors who know one another’s fears, strengths, and passions. If it is a text-based class, I choose challenging, complex pieces, even for beginning acting students. My students have worked on monologues and scenes from plays by Anton Chekhov, Maria Irene Fornes, Henrik Ibsen, Dominique Morisseau, Harrison David Rivers, and Sarah Ruhl, amongst others. I believe that students rise to the challenge of a well-written text. I encourage students to let a text lead them into unexpected places, and to avoid making “character” decisions too early on. I describe “character” as the explosive coming together of an actor’s voice and body, a set of given circumstances, and a piece of text. I utilize physical and vocal techniques to open students up to the myriad possibilities which lie within the text, so that their approach is full of unexpected variety.

My directing process places a particular focus on the arts of observation, communication, and collaboration, and the growth and discovery that comes from collective inquiry. My teaching of directing extends my research concerns, with students exploring these three arenas through different types of projects, including the staging of memories, neutral scenes, short stories, scenes, and plays. Students are encouraged to enter the rehearsal room having done extensive preparatory work, and to then be keenly present with what is. My students do research on the piece or source material, learn thoughtful habits of collaboration with both performers and designers, explore beat demarcation and character objectives, and develop a core concept (“Matrix”) which can be integrally applied to all aspects of production. They explore ensemble-building through different theatrical traditions and learn a wide variety of techniques with which to create a community of engaged theater artists who feel joy, trust, and agency in the process. They engage with readings and exercises to promote color-conscious casting, ethical and trauma-informed rehearsal practices, and ways to subvert canonical texts. Finally, they learn various approaches to scene work and how to sculpt dynamic, effective blocking.

Over the past ten years, I have worked with many diverse populations. This has included teaching mostly first generation college students at American International College and an incredibly economically and racially diverse student body at Holyoke Community College. I have taught movement to high school students from Asia and South America at the Stoneleigh-Burnham School and voice to college students from Africa and India in the First Generation Ensemble of Springfield, Massachusetts. At Colby College, my students came from all over the country and the world. At Cleveland State University, I teach an economically and racially diverse student body, many of whom are, again, first generation college students.

My work across these different institutions has underscored the importance of creating an inclusive classroom, not only through choosing diverse texts, but also through continual student outreach, inviting the sharing of different experiences and perspectives, and deep listening on my part. My students teach me how to be there for them, and how to shape the material so that it can serve them, and so that they can transform it. My primary aim as a teacher is to empower students to find their voices and to bring them alive onstage, and so everything I do is in service of that. In both the classroom and rehearsal room, I invite students to bring the fullness of their identities to their work. I teach them that, rather than narrowing themselves to fit canonical roles, they can manipulate these texts to tell their own stories, or find or create new texts spacious enough to hold their experiences.

I approach students as wise and sensitive beings who have as much to offer the material as it has to offer them. I listen deeply to them, I am fully present with them, and I allow them to constantly delight and surprise me. My classes abound with creative interchange and dynamic discovery.