

Teaching Philosophy

My goal as a teacher is to inspire students to look both outward and inward: outward to academic resources and new experiences, and inward to better understand the self at the center of all the questions and opinions. As a teacher of theatre, I hope to give students a strong sense of perspective. To see live theatre as an audience member is to gain literal perspective on our humanity and the social, political and personal challenges we face. In an increasingly mediated world, I bring this sense of human perspective to the classroom. I recognize that I am teaching students that have been raised on mass media, and my first job is to replace the autocratic sender/receiver model with a democratic model of group participation.

Today's students seek active engagement, but can easily shift into passive "observer mode." I challenge myself to think of each class as a shared experience. The more I can engage my students through small and large group discussion, physical exploration and role play, the richer their learning will be. One of my favorite teaching tools is to have small groups discuss and then bring concepts to life for the larger group. Such methods keep students from simply regurgitating information that they have read or heard.

I want my classroom to be a supportive, challenging and joyful place. Students deserve a strong structure from the moment they enter the class to the final day. This structure comes from an organized syllabus and clear expectations. Clearly communicated parameters allow for freedom, creativity and risk-taking for those working within them. Theatre can be intimidating to some students and they need to trust that they will also be supported as human beings.

In larger "lecture" classes, organization is key. Students should be engaged with an anticipatory set at the start of class to personalize the day's lesson. As a lecturer, "covering" a lesson is akin to "going through the motions." A lesson must meet the students where they are in their learning and their lives. In smaller classes, I start each new group with games to lower anxiety, facilitate interaction and encourage students to trust their impulses. In a subjective art, An "A" student is one who participates, takes risks and puts her heart and mind into all that she does. Activities like the "failure bow" emphasize an environment of risk-taking over correctness. My students know that personal exploration is of greater value than seeking "right" answers. Alternately, there are times when understanding key concepts or content is measured objectively, and students are made aware of the difference.

The joy of learning comes through study, play and discovery, but a greater joy comes when the work deepens a student's sense of self. An education in theatre involves history, communication, movement, psychology, stagecraft and literature. I am doing my job when students have the tools to connect all these to their sense of self, their relationships with others, and their place in the cosmos. I can honestly say that my participation in this process does the same for me.