



Teaching is the greatest privilege and responsibility that any artist might undertake. By passing on skills, theory, and techniques to the next generation, we ensure the continuation of the artform and empower new artists to build upon the past to imagine and create new forms of theatre. My circuitous journey of 18 years of as a working artist and 13 years as an arts administrator have helped me develop a core philosophy of education. I know the value of collaboration and co-ownership of any project. I extend this philosophy into the classroom by recognizing and utilizing the fluidity of traditional roles between student and teacher.

I believe that a respectful and collaborative learning environment enables the freedom to create and to be fully self-expressive. This is important in any classroom but is especially true in theatre. Theatre as a practice is changing rapidly and it is vital that the teaching of it change as well. First and foremost, theatre education must be grounded in consent. That means that directors and educators must be willing to step back from the traditional power structures and negotiate community agreements for each class and production. By inviting students to feel the power of their half of the relationship, they gain ownership of the work. At the first meeting of every show that I direct and every class that I teach, I lead a series of exercises to help create expectations for the student teacher relationship as well as policies such as attendance, late work, and other aspects that are usually imposed. It is my experience that when people are working to the standards that they create for themselves, they have a tendency to far surpass their original expectations.

Learning is an idiomatic and deeply personal experience. Building trust is essential to making theatre and the first element of trust is respect. Because of this, I make a priority of knowing my casts and students as individuals. Each of us brings an entire universe of experiences to the learning conversation. This richness of diversity of point of view and experience must be validated and embraced. I work to get to know each student as a person and to share my genuine self with them. I respect each person for who they are and work to meet them where they are. This is the only way that the theatre can move on from its current hegemony to a place where all voices are invited to tell their stories.

Theatre education exists at the intersection of theory and practice. Effective theatre cannot be made in an intellectual void. To that end, I strive to help students begin to work and experiment with theory immediately in class and group work. Because theatre is a collaborative art, group work is an ideal vehicle for trying out new concepts in a real-world model. These exercises consist of presenting a real-world problem and asking the group to apply the theory or concept learned to address it. It is my intention to collapse the divide between theory and practice to unmask them as one and the same.

The arts are an especially tricky area for evaluation because the learning process and creation of work is tied to the personal. While there are some foundational skills that can be tested through traditional exams and evaluation techniques, the application and synthesis of learning requires space for taking chances. Students have a role to play in evaluating their work and that is included in how grades are assessed. Being told that a math problem was solved incorrectly is very different from receiving critical feedback on a piece of art which a student has poured much of themselves. We have been so heavily trained by society to avoid failure that it limits our capacity for taking risks. Taking a risk and failing is by far more valuable for learning than succeeding while being comfortable. We must destigmatize and celebrate failure. As a director, I often embody this with experiments in rehearsal. Sometimes these lead to wonderful new interpretations and sometimes they fall completely flat. I openly explore with the cast when an experiment fails. Showing and owning fallibility as the leader of the conversation makes the space available for everyone to experiment and learn.

Teaching, like theatre, is an ever-evolving conversation. To be an effective theatre artist and instructor, you must also be a generous audience member. Throughout the course of a class or show, there are opportunities, both formal and informal, for students and casts to evaluate my performance. When placed in a position of leadership, I search for ways that I may best serve those that I am asked to lead and hearing directly from them is the best way to do that. To be an effective teacher, you must also be an eager student. I have been proud to think of myself as a student through my whole life. My students teach me far more than I teach them. To me, this trading of knowledge and point of view is the highest and best human experience.

