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Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Central to my praxis is critical Democratic pedagogy, which emerges from theories that posit “education or learning as an on-going, two-way, dialectic process that is built around the experiences of the student and allows for critical thinking and action to help students grow.”¹ The critical Democratic theories most relevant to my praxis are those by Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire, and American Sociologist and educator Jack Mezirow. Freire identifies education as a tool capable of transforming individual students, as well as the world.² His theories were implemented into theatre practice by Augusto Boal, who describes an artist as one who “works with human beings, and therefore works with herself, on the infinite process of discovering the human.”³ For both Freire and Boal, dialectics—between educator/student and actor/audience, respectively—are crucial. Mezirow theorizes transformational learning, emphasizing the connections between experience, meaning-making, and action.⁴ Cumulatively, these theories inform my work in both the classroom and rehearsal hall, where **I am dedicated to creating and sustaining learning environments that are sites of dialecticism, creativity and experience, and discovery. The goals of these efforts are to promote academic, artistic, and personal transformation that enables students to develop into theatre practitioners and**

¹ Mary Drinkwater, “Radical Educational Policy: Critical Democratic Pedagogy and the Reinfusion of the Arts in Secondary Schools,” *What’s Next*, 2009. Accessed on May 19, 2020. Web. <http://whatsnext.net/197>.

² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 30th Anniversary Edition*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York: Continuum, 2000).

³ Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire*, trans. Adrian Jackson, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 37.

⁴ Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 2000).

citizens who make meaningful and informed contributions to their communities and beyond.

Dialecticism

I view my roles in the educational process as twofold; I am both a facilitator and a collaborator in the educational process. I recognize the importance of sharing my specialized knowledge and robust experiences with students, but I also value—and, importantly, make space for—dialogue. I am energized by academic pluralism, artistic interpretation, multiplicity of meaning, and the notion that knowledge is constructed. Together, my students and I comprise a learning community, each member of which has the innate potential to contribute, learn, and grow. **I view antiracist pedagogies as absolutely fundamental to creating a successful dialectic environment.** My work to move beyond a non-racist pedagogy toward an antiracist pedagogy has been especially informed by Alda M. Blakeney’s “Antiracist Pedagogy: Definition, Theory, Purpose, and Professional Development,” in which the author leverages Freire (among others) to argue for the importance of paradigmatic shifts in instruction that enable critical consciousness and empower voices to denounce historical and ongoing structural racism. Race is a part of every course I teach. **I extend antiracist pedagogies to also critique issues of systemic sexism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, and ableism. I am committed to creating and sustaining dialectic teaching and learning environments in which all voices are valued, and in which underrepresented voices are particularly encouraged.**

To further prepare and encourage students for a dialectic learning environment, I employ a range of pedagogies. Drawing from Vygotsky’s *zone of proximal development*, I begin each course with an informal assessment of student prior knowledge. I employ strategies such as discussions, reflective writing exercises, and (when applicable) “placement” quizzes to ensure

that course learning objectives are approached from the students' initial orientation to course material, incorporating remedial instruction as necessary. I have found these strategies valuable not only because they foster meaningful learning, but also because they help create a safe learning environment, one in which active participation and risk-taking is not only plausible, but probable. Throughout the semester, I use formative exercises like guided reading questions and annotation checks to help students arrive to class prepared to contribute. Even when I lecture, I do so Socratically, routinely asking students the questions that will guide our navigation through new material. I also assign larger projects like discussion leader presentations, which bring student engagement and leadership to the fore. Cumulatively, these pedagogical tactics assist students with taking ownership over their education, stimulate greater accountability, and have—with few exceptions—yielded improved student academic success.

Creativity and Experience

As a theatre historian who functions within a department as a generalist, I teach many of the courses that are typically considered by undergraduate students as less engaging: history, script analysis, dramatic literature, dramaturgy, and introductory and survey courses. However, I find these classes not only essential for the context that they provide all other areas of practice/production, but dynamic in their own rights. I am an enthusiastic pedagogue who relishes witnessing students come to share in that enthusiasm for the subject. Routinely, I emphasize skill-building and real-life applications, designing assignments that “transform accessible information into useable knowledge.”⁵ For example, students in Script Analysis and Dramatic Literature conduct dramaturgical research and present it as they would at an initial production meeting and/or rehearsal. Finally, because I view the work of artists as intellectual,

⁵ David H. Rose, and Jenna Gravel, “Universal Design for Learning Guidelines version 2.0,” *National Center on Universal Design for Learning*, at CAST, 16 Jul. 2013. Web. 15 Nov. 2013. <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines/principle1>.

and the work of intellectuals as artistic, I design activities that seek to blur those distinctions. My theatre history students engage in a range of embodied learning exercises: using Virtual Reality technology to explore the Theatre of Dionysus, engaging in a Kabuki makeup workshop, reading a medieval miracle play in a Catholic church, and presenting their research on an historical figure while in costume as the research subject. **I seek to help students cultivate identities as scholar-artists.**

Discovery

Beyond fostering students' discoveries of themselves as scholar-artists, I am invested in discovering who students are, and who they desire to become, both professionally and personally. **My praxis as an educator and advisor is holistic.** The essential starting point for this work is acknowledging that each student I encounter has a lived history and an intersectional identity. I am in accord with the great Peter Brook, who has conceptualized the theatre as "a vehicle, a means for self-study, self-exploration."⁶ I propose that the same is true for the theatre classroom. I want my students to see themselves represented in subject matter, as this is an entrance point to self-study. In assigning readings, I intentionally engage diversity by pursuing gender parity, and by assigning texts written by and about people of color and from other historically underrepresented groups. I ask students to think deeply about the ways that our art has, throughout history, reflected and (re)envisioned society, and the ways that plays urge us to engage in critical reflection and to consider philosophical and ethical questions.

As theatre is centrally concerned with the human condition and experience, I fully embrace the opportunity to be a part of not only my students' academic and artistic development, but also their human development. I have studied and subscribe to the latest theories on and best practices for holistic teaching and advising.

⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space*, (New York: Touchstone, 1968), 59.

Conclusion

Education is my vocation. I am loyal to my students, my colleagues, and my institution. I take seriously the fact that students accrue obscene amounts of debt to interact with me. I am an educator-scholar-artist who is utterly committed to those students. I thrive in the liberal arts context and when working in concert with colleagues who are similarly motivated and committed. I am a mission-based educator and the mission remains **to create and sustain learning environments that are sites of dialecticism, creativity and experience, and discovery.**