

Teaching Philosophy

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A fine arts educator, and more specifically a teacher of theatrical design and technology, is charged with a mission of rich complexity. We strive not only to teach the practical aspects of theatre: collaboration, hard work, and technical proficiency, we must also broach the more esoteric topics: creativity, emotion, and art. It is my belief that the teacher of theatrical arts has three main goals: to encourage curiosity, challenge creativity, and support professional development.

Curiosity is the mode of modern education. In an age where all the knowledge of the world is contained in every student's pocket, it is no longer enough to teach facts and methods. Awakening the student's desire to experiment, explore, and independently seek knowledge is fundamental to problem solving, which is the foundation of any collaborative art. These skills serve the student in the academic environment and are crucial to the mind of a working artist. The process of critical thinking and self-guided education is taught best through a combination of theoretical design and practical experience. A successful design program should give a student ample opportunity to excel at both.

Some students enter a design program with great natural talent, others with great passion but limited artistic ability. Both deserve equal opportunity to grow as artists. Creativity, no matter the innate talent, must be taught as rigorously as any other academic subject and should be challenged and tested through a process of formal critique. These critiques should be a collaborative process in which the professor and the student's peers share thoughtful, constructive comments with the goal of strengthening and expanding the creative expression of not only the students, but the professor as well.

A teacher's job is not confined to the classroom or the timeframe of the student's academic career. The true test of a professor's effectiveness comes after graduation, when the cap and gown are put away. I strongly believe that our job as educators is to cultivate students into professionals, which is best accomplished by maintaining a professional career in the arts. This enables us to keep up with current trends and technologies in the ever-changing world of professional theatre, and keeps us connected to the network of theatre artists. In my career, I have founded and managed internship programs that have trained artists and connected them to the professional community, leading directly to careers working on Broadway and in other top theatres. Mixing the scholarly pursuits of a professor with the pragmatic sensibilities of an industry professional is a recipe for successful students and fulfilled professors.

These methodologies can be translated into a curriculum that focuses on classical learning outcomes and personal artistic growth. While creativity can be taught, passion can only be awoken. This is the greatest struggle any educator faces. We are lucky as theatre teachers to have a student base largely motivated by their passion, and with proper cultivation those students can become valuable contributing members of this ancient yet living art form.