

Teaching Philosophy

Theatre is a collaborative art form; no single area of production exists on its own. This collaborative nature must also extend into theatre education. Communication and collaboration skills are fundamental components of my approach to theatre education. While many aspects of design can be taught through traditional classroom lecture or reading and writing assignments, a more meaningful understanding of theatre design can only come through experiential learning. Hands-on projects designed to emulate the real world design process are a component of all my courses. The nature of these projects vary depending on the subject but the goal is to provide a model of the collaborative process of theatre.

In educational theatre the stage is our laboratory where students have the opportunity to experiment and apply the lessons that are learned in their coursework. Working closely with students in the laboratory space of production there are numerous opportunities for instruction and mentorship. Acting as a mentor does not mean that I provide the student with all of the answers. Instead I act as a sounding board offering suggestions and alternative solutions to design challenges guiding the student to discover their own solution. Another form of mentorship is to serve as an example through the design process. I allow the students access, involving them in design meetings and discussions about the production while modeling effective collaboration techniques. Working with student designers and artisans as peers I involve them in discussions with the director and production team to provide them with firsthand experience in the design process. Working with students as peers not only gives the student some ownership in the production but also challenges them to do their best work. If there are no stakes there is little motivation to strive to grow as an artist.

The bridge between the classroom and production should work both ways. While working on productions, students draw on the foundational skills that are gained through focused study and projects in the classroom. Conversely, the experience that is gained in the laboratory space of production is a valuable resource in the classroom. In addition to providing a stronger background for the student to build on while working on their own projects, this experience also provides more depth for classroom discussion. I often encourage students to try a solution that they have tried in production and apply it to a classroom project, or to share their successes and pitfalls with the rest of the class. Students with production experience also act as sounding boards or peer resources for their fellow students while working on group projects or during feedback sessions.

Evaluation of theatre projects and productions is intrinsically difficult as they both can be highly subjective. In both the classroom and the laboratory space of theatre production I strive to incorporate an element of self-reflection into the evaluation process allowing the student to think critically about their design choices. For productions, this may be in the form of a post-mortem discussion of the production and the design process. This may include a discussion of what did or didn't work on a particular production. Detailed discussion of the relative success of a design must also include taking ownership of the elements that weren't successful and may include soliciting suggestions from fellow designers and artisans, including

students, to determine what may be the most effective solution to the design challenge. Self-reflection and constructive criticism extend to the teacher as well as the student. This is another opportunity to serve as a model for collaboration, being open to critical dialogue may help both teacher and student grow as artists.