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TEACHING PHILOSOPHY:

A TRANSFORMATIVE EPISTEMOLOGY

My approach to Theatre Arts education provides an embodied way of knowing: an epistemology that catalyzes students to grow, not just as artists, but as engaged citizens in the diverse world they inhabit. In this model, students' theatrical skills develop symbiotically with their self-knowledge, empathy, and agency. As awareness grows, intentionality flourishes. Compassionate self-observation fortifies the ability to align personal and artistic choices with authentic and aesthetic values. Exploration and affirmation of identity make space for the celebration of diversity. In this model, students learn that obstacles can be viewed as opportunities that increase motivation and problem-solving abilities. They translate the friction inherent in deep collaborative goal attainment into dynamic solutions. They experience the potential of manifesting a shared theatrical vision and, through this experience, become capable of working with others to envision and manifest a more inclusive and equitable world. Regardless of what I teach, *how* I teach engenders compassionate awareness, corporeal intelligence, personal agency, critical thinking, brave and imaginative expression, interpersonal communication, innovative problem-solving, and intercultural knowledge. These are the foundational skills of the creative process.

To empower students to become physically astute makers, engaged citizens, and champions of equity and belonging, I facilitate an expansive educational model rather than a corrective one. Influenced by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's Buddhist philosophy and contemplative arts practices, this expansive model recognizes and values each person's unique individuality, inherent worth, and expressive potential. It fosters growth that emerges from an intrinsic sense of personal agency, rather than extrinsic demands for conformity. Unlike the corrective model, expansive education dispenses with the assumption that the student needs "fixing" and creates an environment of radical acceptance that encourages learners to embrace difficulty, take charge of their growth, courageously expand their expressive capacity, and engage in authentic creativity. Replacing normative and culturally biased training models with one that is exploratory, inclusive, and personal lies at the heart of my pedagogy.

Mindfulness plays a significant role in my teaching. I approach the studio as a laboratory of self-awareness and discovery, offering tools for self-regulation, resilience, and consent. These skills are fundamental to supporting an inclusive and transformational space where students can differentiate between comfort and safety, self-determine levels of acceptable risk, and recognize present resources to articulate personal and professional boundaries. Somatic practices that encourage interoception nourish compassion and curiosity, inviting students to trade harsh judgment for wonder and gentle discernment. Daily psychophysical warm-ups that center the act of noticing, encourage students to build holistic habits that feed their personal well-being and professional growth. These everyday activities become a self-diagnostic - a point of contemplation and awareness - out of which self-trust accumulates. Through this grounding in corporeal wisdom, learners find the freedom to confidently explore exercises designed to ignite personal imagery, bold precise action and sound, and deep somatically derived emotion. This deep play combined with a disciplined habit of inner listening, allows students to identify and trust their impulses and craft them into elegant choices. Building the courage to step into the unknown and embrace ambiguity, they experience the dedication it takes to stay in the question. Supported by Carol Dweck's theories of Mindset (2006), they learn to view productive failure and perseverance as necessary for personal growth and the creative process. Performance training proposes not only a career-enhancing routine but a valued daily ritual that offers an incremental process of becoming.

My approach to both praxis and scholarly education prioritizes experiential learning and then provides contextual theory to help students further metabolize their direct perceptions. In the studio, everyone works on their feet every day. Even in the classroom, questions are examined first through embodied research. Low-stakes reflective assignments then offer opportunities to deepen in-class discoveries. Mini-lectures, in-class discussions, and curricular materials drawn from diverse perspectives contextualize and strengthen meaning helping students draw connections and integrate their findings across the curriculum. Frequent in-class projects and studio performances allow growing artists to produce a volume of work where they can apply newly gained skills while gaining constructive feedback. Meta-cognitive tasks empower learners to plan, monitor, and assess their own growth. Rather than dictating the terms of their development, we collaborate on the benchmarks of their success. Mentorship in self-assessment encourages performers, makers, teachers, scholars, and entrepreneurs to develop their potential unlimited by externalized conceptions of what is possible or appropriate. My goal is to develop the self-teacher inside each student so that when they leave our classroom, they have built a disciplined and delight-filled practice with which to continue crafting their own artistic and personal journey.

Building community and engendering belonging are central to supporting that journey. By responding to the moment, my own learning, and those in the room, I employ a reflexive and transgressive pedagogy (hooks, 1994) that is ever-iterating toward a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Seeing students as co-creators of an extra-ordinary culture, we craft consensual ground rules and practices to interrogate systems of the oppressive ordinary. Materials selected from a wide spectrum of cultural and theoretical perspectives offer a sense of belonging as learners see themselves reflected and held within the continuity of their own artistic and cultural lineages. By de-centering traditional Western epistemologies and disrupting historical hierarchies, learners are welcomed back to themselves. Moving at the speed of trust, we nurture an ensemble that supports both the independence of the maverick and the cohesion of the whole. In our dedication to being fully present, we develop practices of integrity and accountability. Learning to “show up” for ourselves and each other, we create an environment where we can collaborate on what we are making together as we support each other on the journey of who we are choosing to become.

My job as a Theatre educator is not only to facilitate students' personal, artistic, and professional journeys, it is also to continue my own. I bring the same sense of curiosity, compassion, and disciplined delight to the process of facilitating my own craft, as I do to that of developing my students'. As a Certified Mindfulness Teacher, I maintain an active meditation practice and a contemplative approach to creativity. I regularly train at the intersection of Viewpoints and Grotowski-inspired psychophysical practices. Convening with esteemed mentors-turned-collaborators Steve Wangh and Wendell Beavers as well as other like-minded teachers, we explore pedagogical questions and share best practices. I keep abreast of current theory and praxis by reading scholarly texts and pursuing professional development through the National Alliance of Acting Teachers and Tectonic Theatre Project's Moment Work Institute. My studies at the nexus of embodiment and liberatory practices with the Embody Lab and other social justice organizations strengthen my understanding of the interlocking systems of oppression and fortify my commitment to providing inclusive, identity-conscious spaces. Finally, my creative research as a professional artist supports my pedagogical choices, just as my work with students informs the iterative process that enables me to direct and devise interdisciplinary, highly theatrical work that sparks civic dialogue and catalyzes cultural change.

As an arts practitioner, I have an abiding sense of mission as a reflexive educator. Through a sustained commitment to an ever-iterating pedagogical craft, I have created a contemplative, expansive, experiential, and transgressive educational model that strives to foster the evolution of the next generation of innovative artists, engaged global citizens, and equity-minded culture holders.