

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. My hands-on projects are designed to emulate as closely as possible the real-world design process. My goal is to provide a model of the challenging and often messy collaborative process of theatre at all levels of production.

In educational theatre the stage is a laboratory where students have the opportunity to experiment and apply the lessons that are learned in their coursework creating a bridge between the classroom and production. Working closely with students in the laboratory space of production there are numerous opportunities for instruction and mentorship. I act as a sounding board offering suggestions and alternative solutions to design challenges, guiding student designers to discover their own solution. Another form of mentorship is to serve as a professional example. I allow the student access to my process, involving them in design meetings and discussions about the production while modeling effective collaboration techniques. By working with student designers and artisans as peers, I challenge them to do their best work by giving them ownership in a project.

The bridge between the classroom and production should work both ways. While working on productions, students draw on the foundational skills that they gained through focused study and projects in the classroom. Conversely, the experience they gained in the laboratory space of production is a valuable resource in the classroom. Thus, the student brings a concrete background to build on while working on their own class projects, and their experience provides more depth for classroom discussion. I often encourage students to use 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.

In both the classroom and the laboratory space of theatre production, I strive to incorporate an element of self-reflection, encouraging the student to think critically about their design choices. Opportunities for self-reflection most often take the form of a post-mortem discussion, including a discussion of what did or didn't work on a particular production or project. Extending self-reflection and constructive criticism to the teacher as well as the student provides another opportunity to serve as a model for collaboration. 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. Being open to critical dialogue may help both teacher and student grow as artists.