

## STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My teaching, creative and service work are inherently interconnected and include a variety of theatre disciplines—acting, directing, devising and new work—unified by the concepts of connection and taking risks. These concepts ground me as a teacher - helping students to take risks in developing their own personal creative process and connecting them to artists and employers in the professional world.

My teaching career evolved organically from my creative career. Acting is as much a practice as a study, and my acting career was foundational in the development of my teaching practice. I began my experience as teacher at the University of Washington, where as part of the M.F.A. program, we were able to teach the basic level undergraduate acting courses. I loved it right away, and first began to perceive the classroom as a sort of laboratory space, where lots of risks could be taken, without the pressure and expectation of a full production. This was in stark contrast to some of the training I had received as an undergrad, where the goal was to curry favor with the instructor, and your worth as an actor was based in their appraisal of you. When I began to teach, I knew that a sense of supportive experimentation, versus evaluative criticism, was imperative to a student's ability to chart their own sense of growth and creative process.

I was fortunately hired as an actor right out of graduate school, in the resident company of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where I also taught in their school programs. From there, I was hired by the Sacramento Theatre Company to perform a variety of roles in a production of Antoine de Exupery's *The Little Prince*. The artistic director had just formed a training program for young actors, and saw how well I connected with the middle school aged performers, and asked me to head the education program, STC-2. I created and taught in the 10-month conservatory training program as well as directed and curated the three-play season. This experience was the crucible in terms of defining my teaching values. I taught nearly every subject related to acting, while diving head first into directing student actors. If the experience at UW helped me define my classroom as a safe space for risk taking, the work at STC-2 helped me communicate how training translated to the stage. What skills did developing actors need to know to show up professionally in rehearsal and production? My student actors began to learn about the nuts and bolts of professional comportment as well as the focus, work ethic and skills necessary for the rigors of live theatre.

Next, I moved to Los Angeles, where I was eventually the lead undergraduate movement teacher at University of Southern California. I taught basic and advanced movement classes. Teaching in an academic environment again allowed me to synthesize the teaching work I'd done thus far, combining a safe classroom with professional preparation, while understanding another foundational element – how to begin to really see the student individually, and help them recognize and free themselves from habitual choices to allow them greater expression in their voices, bodies and character creation. I continued to act, teach and direct when I left Los Angeles, and was an Associate Director in arts administration at the University of Iowa, where I learned more about the pace and perspective needed to become a full-time faculty member.

I realized that goal when I began the tenure track process at Miami University in Oxford, OH, as one of the main acting teachers and season directors. The full-time position and resources available to me at Miami allowed me to take my teaching to an entirely new level, where I was exposed to educational theory and science through their Alumni Teaching Program and annual Lilly Conference on Education. Most importantly, perhaps, was the time to focus on the classroom work, where I began to see how the students themselves were changing. Millennials had different needs and learning styles than those I'd experienced. They needed clearer structure, and much more support to feel safe inside of sharing vulnerability and expression than students I'd previously had. This is when the vocabularies of risk, intimacy and vulnerability began to be at the center of my teaching practice, with acting study as the vehicle for student process and self-awareness. From that insight, I developed the Creative Risk Project, which I used in my primary level acting courses at Miami. The project encourages autonomy and personal awareness in one's creative and personal practices, bringing longevity and health in to a developing artist's life. For me, the nuts and bolts of acting study run concurrent to the student's personal development in the four years I have them in a liberal arts environment - their growth as actors and artists is directly connected to their growth as people. A creative process is not just for the stage, but can be integrated in all aspects of life, and this holistic approach to living and working is one I bring to Colorado State.

Now, as one of the main acting teachers and head of performance at CSU, I have continued to develop my teaching practice with the TILT and EnCircle programs. I interact with students from a beginning freshman level and take them through a cumulative experience as seniors ready to enter the profession. The arc of my methodology is first based in connection (ensemble), and continues to grow with increasing levels of challenge and experimentation (specialties such as

voice and movement) to full autonomy as a creative theatre artist. Out of the Creative Risk Project, my teaching in TH 451 (Advanced Topics in Acting) really focuses on the student articulating their own process, vision and creative expression through the methodologies of devised theatre. Students graduate with a perspective and independent creative process that allows them to move into the world and job market with confidence and the ability to begin a career. I include elements of experimentation and risk-taking in all classes, helping students to develop sophistication with their independent process and individual creative expression. Ultimately, I unite this teaching philosophy with my service efforts, creating connections between our community and the professional world.

To this end, I have been receiving training in Mental Health First Aid and Theatrical Intimacy Education (TIE). I am certified in basic Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) practice, which unites my teaching and service goals in terms of bringing sustainable health to not only the students in the classroom, but to their longevity as artists, as well as joining the current conversations in both education and professional theatre about boundaries, consent and representation.

MHFA (<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org>) gives training in best practices to assess and provide resources for self-care and mental health challenges. The MHFA workshop is the first step of the larger training in theatre intimacy practices through Theatrical Intimacy Education, or TIE (<https://www.theatricalintimacyed.com>). TIE was founded in 2017 in response to the “#metoo and #notinmyhouse movements to address consent, safety, and healthy practices in acting classrooms as well as film and theatre productions. Their mission is to research, develop, and teach best practices for ethical staging of theatrical intimacy (staged intimacy, nudity, and non-consensual contact).

These methodologies work in concert with each other as practices rooted in consent, and encourage participants to define and clarify personal boundaries to care for themselves in creative processes and environments. Our students are in various stages of mental health needs, made ever more urgent due to the shifting backdrop of the pandemic. Concurrently, the clarification of consent in our classroom and rehearsal practices have never been more needed.

This training is integrated into finding connection and exploring risk in philosophy and practice. These elements are at the core of my work and through them I am able to help students grow creatively over time, using a vocabulary that engages them artistically and encourages them to be healthy, conscientious human beings with a sense of community, identity, and creative autonomy.