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Accessibility, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Statement:

Learning happens best when educators can adapt their own views and practices in response to the changes that each generation ushers in. I believe it is just as important for educators to listen to their students as it is to impart necessary practical skills and knowledge. We have to teach with the assumption that the values and expectations which were previously accepted practice—both professionally and academically—will change, and with the hope that those changes will be for the better. It is my responsibility to teach the next generation with the assumption that the progressive changes I have worked to see in my own professional life are slowly but surely remaking the world of professional theatre and the greater academic and social landscape.

Colonial Deconstruction:

Despite the lofty, moral ambitions of theatre as an art form of free expression, professional and academic theaters have historically been passive participants in a systemic culture of oppression that underserves and under-represents People of Color, women, the LGBTQx community and the disabled. These are subtle, quiet prejudices that place obstacles in the way of free and equitable expression. In the theatre industry, this quiet, systemic prejudice is allowed to continue through passive acceptance and a reluctance to “make waves” or be perceived as a “bad team player.” My own professional and academic experience has shown me that injustice is perpetuated by the acute reluctance of many to talk about systemic bias, particularly in the intimate, day-to-day interactions of our separate disciplines. As both an educator and a compassionate member of my global community, I take it as my personal responsibility to actively engage in necessary conversations about systemic bias in the classroom, the fitting room, the production meeting and at the dinner table, if that is what it takes. It is my responsibility to educate when and where I am empowered to do so, and it is my responsibility to remain available to be re-educated with grace and gratitude when necessary. This is a lifetime’s worth of work, but it is the work that I have been asking for as a student and as an educator.

Open Communication & Accountability:

Accountability and active critical conversation is a core value in my classroom. I have established this in a variety of ways, which in practice have proved both effective but also remarkably simple. My chief strategy has been to establish a time and space at the top of the class that I call “Corrections Corner”. This is a designated time for both students and instructor to

acknowledge any misstep or mistake made in previous classes, ask for feedback, and apologize if necessary. As the instructor, I include myself in this practice, and I am available for feedback and correction. I began this practice after I was given the courtesy of an emailed correction by a student after a lecture. The following class period, I began the class with a “Corrections Corner” in which I acknowledged my mistake, explained why I had been incorrect and apologized. The overall student response was stunning, not only had most of the other students not caught the misstep, but they then engaged in an active conversation about the experience. By being available for feedback and then modeling accountability, I provided an opening for greater understanding for everyone. What this experience taught me was that, rather than destabilizing my authority, modeling accountability actually strengthened my relationships with the students. Through that single demonstration of vulnerability, I became a safe resource, and my classroom was transformed from a space that was not only safe, but also brave— a brave space in which students were empowered to ask questions of me and of each other. This one common practice has had the ripple effect of making the whole class an accessible space for the work of examining, questioning & transforming the academic landscape— all the time and not just in the first ten minutes. Transformation that is a celebration rather than a hard won victory happens best when it can happen with as much comfort and as little shame as possible, and that is what I endeavor to model and nurture in my classroom. Moving forward in my teaching career, I will be continuously learning from my students as much as they learn from me, in order to work with them toward a better world than the one I grew up in.

Cultural Fluency & Artistic Ethics:

As theatre moves ever further away from the limitations of colonial traditions, our craft is entering a new era of responsibility in which we must commit to an active reexamination of accepted values and practices. As educators, it is our responsibility to integrate conversations about artistic ethics and cultural responsibility into our classrooms. Individuals are inevitably responsible for establishing their own moral code and set of ethical values by asking themselves the right questions. For any theatre artist, the first question should always be, “Am I the right artistic voice to be telling this story?” I try to describe this process to students as a flow chart where one question might have several answers that change depending on the individual and the circumstances. The responsibility of educators is not to give students a yes or no, rather it is to give students more questions they can ask themselves so they can reach the answer for themselves.

Reframing ‘Disability’ through ‘Accessibility’:

As a neurodiverse person, theatre provided an outlet in which my particular way of thinking and interacting with the world was not only acceptable, but welcomed and embraced. I think and work best in pictures, sounds, and through my hands. In my work as an educator, my neurodiversity has proved to be an advantage in the classroom because I have my own experience and kit of tools to draw upon. The work that I ask of my students engages them on every level, from traditional instruction methods to kinesthetic and auditory engagement. Different students need different tools, instruction, and explanation, and I strive to provide different approaches and ways of explaining things that are accessible for everyone. I am also open about my own limitations and coping mechanisms, and I demonstrate my availability for not only accommodation, but advocacy.

Body Positivity:

As costumers, our ethical responsibility extends beyond the scope of other disciplines. We are in the unique position of being responsible for the physical well-being of the performers who are doing the active work of our theatrical craft. Clothing and costumes are deeply personal because they are carried on peoples’ bodies. As costume designers, it is our responsibility to approach every body we dress with kindness and compassion. All bodies are good bodies. It is always my goal to establish a classroom and fitting room culture that deconstructs the social language and practices that actively perpetuate harm. I advocate for extending gratitude to our bodies, exactly as they are in the moment, and I will actively repudiate language or behavior that implies or states that any body is deficient. The backs that literally carry our labor as costumers must always be treated with care, because without their work our costumes are just clothes.