

Student Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Statement

I have been privileged the opportunities to learn a multitude of techniques and tools as an interdisciplinary artist, and I have cross-trained to ensure that I know upon whose many shoulders I stand when I teach, direct, design, and activate other artists. I have developed a curricular and theatrical practice that honors student identity, empowers learners, and has provided spaces that are not merely safe, but brave. While I teach all of my classes through the lens of Michael Chekhov, which means radical creative individuality and the tools that open up pathways to that, I teach techniques that come from women and BIPOC artists from around the world. By centering a plurality of tools, I hope to open students to the various forms their work can take and the incredible impact they can have on a community.

In the classroom, I teach skills that allow students a path to fight internal colonization through the possibilities of transformation. I invite students to experiment with different performance tools and find the ones that will give them the most holistic and lasting outcome as artists, as well as to combat their internal oppressions. Early exercises begin with completing a Root Search activity, modified from Twyla Tharp and Anne Bogarts texts. This positions students to see themselves in the legacy of artists before them as well as allow them to voice their personal experiences that led them to be an artist. Pairing devising practices with each of my different class' core content, this provides students the agency to create alongside the artists we study and own their place as the next generation of artists. Throughout the semester, we explore cultures in context with artist's voices, and I invite guest artists to augment our work with their experience and expertise.

An example of my work toward empowering students is a devised, anti-bullying production I collaborated with my students and school community to create that used Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre anti-model. The rehearsal process began with research about national bullying statistics, collecting local data from our students, as well as interviewing community members regarding their experiences with bullying. We developed scenes that centered around a bullied student, accounting for variations of bullying from physical, to verbal, to cyber bullying, as well as interactions with family and friends. With Forum Theatre's anti-model approach, we created scenes that called for the audience to intervene. The anti-model format has the performers show a scene where oppression occurs without a conclusion and then invites the audience to come on the stage and take one of the performers roles and change the scene. The production was invited to perform at the University of Illinois, as well as for a number of elementary schools. While our student body remains predominantly white, the theatre department is a racially diverse group of students. This production highlighted a major lesson for our community that listening to each other and standing up for those who need us most is what binds a community together. With a diverse cast, we were able to investigate how the relationship between power and identity tie in to cycles of violence, and through community engagement, we found solutions that could be used to break these cycles.

In guiding emergent artists, we can only do so be recognizing our biases and privilege and create art that celebrates what makes us human. When theaters reopen and companies return to in-person performances, my hope is that we do it wiser in compassion, smarter in nurturing tools, and more aware of how we affect each other's lives.

*"I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they are looking for the experience of being alive."
Joseph Campbell*