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Teaching Philosophy

I teach to help students draw connections, setting off a blinking web of firing synapses when a bridge is formed across a chasm of previously assumed disjunct territories. I teach to help others remember what it is to play, to reactivate our oft-quelled youthful imaginations, to take risks. I teach to bring people together, reveling in a supportive community that recognizes the gift of our bodies and their infinite possibilities for movement. I teach to help students gain confidence in their unique individuality as they courageously make choices. I teach to make a positive difference in the lives of my students as I share insights about the gospel in relation to my life, dance, and the intersections between them.

The Technique Class

I believe there are multiple purposes of the technique class: to develop a mastery of technical skills—as well as discover the unique potential of one's own body—to prepare for performance—as well as to find joy in the present act of moving. Technical training also provides the basis from which individual style can emerge, acting as a gateway to artistry as students develop their distinct voices. Like many in our field, I draw from an eclectic blend of postmodern, classical, and somatic forms, and am additionally influenced by my study of kinesiology and anatomy.

In my class I encourage students to think about and utilize their full self, integrating bones, muscles, tissue, thought, and senses, resulting in clear and efficient movement pathways and fully embodied movement. I encourage clarity by calling attention to the spatial, physical, and intentional origin of movement initiation. Tenets of my class include a focus on qualitative range in effort and dynamics, attention to weight and tone to find release in movement, and a play between balance and a genuine falling off center. I expressly endeavor to create dynamic movers, with a strong emphasis on varied rhythmic and timing choices—sometimes dictated by gravity as we fall and suspend, at other times, through distinct choices initiated by the mover themselves. Succumbing to the powers of gravity, students discover momentum as a force to propel themselves voraciously through space. Drawing on concepts of Contact Improvisation, I familiarize students with a sense of their own weight through the management of weight-sharing with other bodies.

Improvisation/Composition

Becoming a mature dancer requires knowledge of self and confidence in one's unique individuality. I seek to foster this individual artistry and increased self-confidence through the use of improvisation, encouraging students to make bold choices. Improvisation is an undercurrent throughout all of my dance life, and I regard it as an art form and performance in and of itself. I practice and teach improvisation for many purposes:

- to discover and remember how to play as one makes both spontaneous and informed decisions
- to increase sensory awareness of one's self—mind, body, and the connections between

- to increase awareness of one's surroundings—environment, and those with whom we come in contact

Group improvisation, or real-time composition, is an integral part of my pedagogy and physical practice. As I teach students methods for making choices in relationship to others, I emphasize the larger implications of community building, cooperation, and responsiveness.

In the **technique class** I give pointed improvisational prompts focused around fundamental principles of technique, allowing students the time and freedom to investigate individually before applying this knowledge to a set sequence of choreography, resulting in a deeper embodiment of material. I utilize improvisation to explore nuances of performance, focusing on dynamics and qualitative range, as I cultivate the ability to embody and switch between many contrasting sensibilities, as well as varied timing of phrasing, breath, and diverse rhythms. I utilize group improvisation to develop a sense of community as students play and riff off of each other. In discussions afterward, I bring to light the intense engagement of the mind in order to make informed (or ridiculous and fun) physical decisions while composing in the moment. I encourage students to make courageous choices inside the studio, empowering them to do the same outside, as they carry these skills into other areas of their lives.

In **composition courses**, I aim for my teaching objectives and feedback to help students further what *they* are trying to say, rather than impose my personal aesthetics or view. I encourage vulnerable and risky choice-making over “correct form” in order to expand students’ creative process and push them to make new and exciting discoveries, even while it may feel uncomfortable. I seek to help them view their patterns, tendencies, likes and dislikes with an objective eye to arrive at more sophisticated or challenging artistic decisions, and to develop the ability to give open-minded, aware, constructive feedback to their peers.

Pedagogy Courses

My philosophy of dance education lies in practice—I believe that one is drawn to dance because of some joy, interest, or challenge found in movement, and more particularly the coalescence of body, mind, and soul that occurs when dancing. As such, I find it paramount to remain close to the physical practice of dance and the creative process in order to best teach it. I guide prospective teachers in learning best teaching practices and honing pedagogical skills, while simultaneously helping them discover their individual teaching and artistic voices through a deepening of their physical understanding of dance.

I help students articulate their movement values in relation to technique and performance, and uncover biases as they create unit and lesson plans that respond to the The National Core Arts Standards in Dance, addressing dance curriculum in a holistic manner, emphasizing technique, improvisation and composition, written and verbal response and analysis, and connection to other disciplines and the world at large. I teach prospective educators to emphasize the *how* of dancing by giving constructive, pointed feedback which relates back to their stated objectives and goals. I encourage them to push their prospective students beyond replication of steps or simple completion of compositional instructions, in

order to develop artistry—the performative nuances that transform ordinary movement into dance.

Feedback/Assessment

Of utmost importance to me is a connection with my students, and as such, a specific area of pedagogical study for me is that of offering feedback. I strive to instill a healthy self-image through constructive feedback to as many as possible during every class. I specifically utilize inquiry, questioning my students to understand their thinking before I state my own. I aim to trust that learning will take place through many means— often not because of something I said in direct effort to create a teaching moment—but rather through experiences students might have out of the classroom, engagement with their peers’ work, or an “a-ha” moment months or years later. Through these efforts, I work to create a positive learning atmosphere that also encourages rigorous growth as I challenge students to question their biases and patterns.

To foster community and positive interaction between students, I utilize strategies of peer feedback through working in partners. I assess students based on their fully invested participation and effort, as well as their ability to embody skills and concepts taught in class. Additionally, improvisation acts as an assessment tool, allowing me to gauge students’ physical understanding through their own exploration of a conceptually-based improvisational prompt. I hope my classroom is a place where students feel safe to make mistakes, laugh, fall, and fail, supporting their classmates throughout the journey.