

## Teaching Philosophy

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*“Breakthrough innovation occurs when we bring down boundaries and encourage disciplines to learn from each other.”- Gyan Nagpal*

As an artist and educator, engaging in an artistic practice is vital to maintaining my pedagogical practice. The research that I do to prepare for acting roles and choreographic residencies simultaneously acts as preparation for lectures in my African American Studies courses. This specific engagement helps me to provide a foundational focus to the African American Studies program at Austin Peay; teaching African American history and culture through the lens of African American visual and performance art. I feel successful as a teacher when my students can hear multiple perspectives, think critically, make connections and draw conclusions independently. To achieve this success, I have developed specific teaching practices to ensure my students have a successful, insightful, and well-balanced learning experience.

Engaging students and helping them to develop knowledge, empathy, problem solving skills, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and a passion for learning are common goals that I bring to the classroom, and interdisciplinary instruction and exploration promotes realization of these objectives. I aim to engage students with appropriately challenging materials, providing a myriad of diverse content (videos, music, plays, articles, poetry, and visual art etc.) that pushes my students to think and act outside of their comfort zones, sparking insightful class discussions. For discussions, I follow the think-pair-share method; students think about materials presented, write down their thoughts, and share them with a neighbor before discussing it as a class. This method ensures that students have time to collect their thoughts which deepens the conversation. This process allows me to cultivate the genius in the room. By decentering myself as the sole authority and involving students in the creation of knowledge, I give students the opportunities to not only learn from me, but also each other.

In my studio practice, I work from a flexible place, referencing a multitude of disciplines (such as jazz, theatre and improvisation rooted in the aesthetics of African diasporic movement) to teach concepts that are universal foundations in movement practices (momentum, breath, fall, shift, swing, and release). My training is open for students to investigate the multiple ways these concepts can present themselves in their bodies and also specific enough for the dancers to embody them in performance, improvisation and composition when needed. I encourage my students to remain curious in an art form of limitless possibilities because the work is never done. I challenge them to push themselves -- want more, ask more. What more can my body do? What are my limits and how can I push past them?

In both classroom and studio practice, my main goal is to dismantle hierarchies, question power and challenge the devaluation of anything produced outside the historical canons. The artists and scholars who have been marginalized and historically overlooked are not overlooked in my course syllabi. It is important that my students are presented with multiple perspectives and narratives that enable them to subvert and resist the systems in place, knowing that they do not always work for the benefit of all.

Years ago, I knew I wanted to be a teacher after seeing the impact my former teachers had on my life. Higher education does not happen in a vacuum. When we can embody the response to what is happening culturally, we can find new methods of celebrating, coping, healing, and resisting. Our students are intellectuals, artists and citizens who have voices that matter. My purpose as an educator is realized when my students leave my class believing that their voices can make change in their lives and their communities.