**Teaching Philosophy**

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Dance has always been my chief passion in life. It defines who I am and it is how I express myself. It is my first love. When I discovered teaching, however, I discovered my calling in life – it is how I share what is so central to me, but as importantly, is a way I can make a difference in the world, by empowering others to achieve their greatest potential. In my twenty plus years of teaching in both the K-12 schools and higher education, I have seen first-hand and repeatedly how the art of dance can transform not only the learning experience in a classroom, but the students themselves. It is an agreed upon perspective that a quality education must equip students with the skills, knowledge and dispositions needed to succeed in the world, but I also believe that teaching must be rooted in guiding students to discover, define and claim their place in the world. Teaching students, in any subject but particularly the arts, should result in helping them to make a good living, but also to create for themselves a great life where what they love most is central and serves others in meaningful ways.

As a professor in dance education, and a “teacher of teachers,” I am rooted in the above perspective and all that I do in teaching supports it. It informs the development, instruction, and assessment of every assignment, and it is what I have come to believe ensures that our program’s artist/educators will be able to do the same in their own classrooms and associated (school and larger) communities – make a difference where a difference needs to be made. Our graduates are confident in their abilities and lead by example. They are advocates for the individual and their unique potential, and they effectively share the essential benefits and curricular standards of an education in dance with others. My work is motivated by maintaining and expanding the impact of this objective. Ultimately as Director of Dance Education and the author and overseer of the dance education licensure curriculum, I serve the students our students will one day teach and the schools that become their permanent professional homes.

As a teacher in both pedagogical and dance technique classes, I am defined by rigor, a spirit of investigation and creative exchange, and addressing all learners in the classroom. I do this in part by using inventive teaching strategies. I believe that meaningful learning happens in three distinct stages: information (cognitive understanding), formation (assimilation into working knowledge that is personalized and applicable) and transformation (the emergence of self in action). I am also defined by how much feedback (instructive, corrective and encouraging) I give. I model and insist upon reflective practice, assigning written work in this area to reinforce that the body and the mind learn together and that information given is not meant for regurgitation, but for application. This approach promotes self-actualization, an essential step in the maturing of the student. A goal in my teaching is to eventually render myself unnecessary in terms of student motivation and a pursuit of excellence. The quote that hangs above my office door is “Good is not good enough when great is possible” (Eleanor Roosevelt). I firmly believe this and consider this a part of empowering and professionally preparing my students.

I also feel strongly that an essential part of good teaching practices is the development and utilization of quality assessment tools. If objectives tell us where we are headed, rubrics can tell us if we have successfully “arrived.” In the arts, the integration of formalized and specific grading practices is widely resisted, but I have become an advocate for the importance of defining what we do, how to do it, and whether we have done it well – in instruction and on paper. In addition to making expectations clear to students in instruction and more objectively assessing their final product, these instruments provide invaluable data when advocating the importance of dance in education. Much of my research and scholarly work is now focused here and in every class I teach, every assignment has an accompanying rubric that is used to make formative and summative evaluations of student progress and performance. Additionally, I have seen how students’ knowing what “meeting and exceeding expectations” does in terms of involving students in instruction. They take greater responsibility for their learning, and go beyond simply fulfilling assignments and instead work to master the work given. Because they know that they have earned what they achieve, they also take great pride in their accomplishments.

Finally, my primary research and professional service over the last five years has involved advocating for the essential inclusion of dance (as a discipline as well as in integrated academic instruction) in every student’s K12 education. I have done this through K12 residencies where I model both types of instruction and lead professional development seminars for classroom teachers, in presentations at both the state and national levels on the topic, and in extensive outreach and performance work associated with the USM dance department. My work as co-founder and education director of the Mississippi Dance Festival also evidences this. The focus of this three-day intensive and festival that serves both K12 students and professional dance and traditional classroom educators, is fostering a deep commitment to collaboration, connection, and community in partnership with providing valuable educational and artistic opportunities.

In 2013, I was recognized by the state arts organization for my contributions to art and education in higher education (MAAE’s “Excellence in Higher Education Award”). This same year I was also awarded the College of Arts and Letters “Teacher of the Year Award” for my work in arts and education curriculum, assessment, instruction, and mentorship. In 2016, I was selected and appointed to the Mississippi Arts Commission’s Teaching Artist Roster, a high honor and evidence of being a master teacher in arts education to the degree that I am vetted and recommended by this esteemed state organization. This three-year appointment will allow me to receive funding and promotional support so that I can continue to partner with K12 schools throughout Mississippi in interdisciplinary work. Awards and honors affirm effort and for this I am grateful – I have put my heart into my work – but I am most proud of the accomplishments of the students and teachers I work with. It is through our collaborative discoveries that we make progress and continue to define and demonstrate best practices in arts and education moving forward.

In summary, I feel that teaching is a process and does not have an “arrival” point. I uphold this for myself as an ongoing learner, in that I have never taught the same course the same way twice and am dedicated to being deeply informed on the most current instructional and artistic practices in education and the larger dance profession. Learning is about “becoming” and involves an integration of given material with the self. Thus, it must remain flexible with room for valuable “failure,” insight and growth. For me, teaching is about giving back and paying it forward, particularly in dance education. At Southern Miss, through the instruction of so many different types of classes and the supporting educational experiences in the K-12 schools, teaching is what I do and well, but it is also a direct reflection of who I am and what I care about most. My greatest hope is that through my instruction of (and investment in) others in this way, that I empower students to find their own calling in life and develop the abilities needed to pursue it without limit, so that they can ultimately do the same for the students in their charge.