

## TEACHING STATEMENT

My classroom is built on co-creation. In my Masters program for special education, I became introduced to Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which focuses on students becoming storytellers. As I created a theater department in a neighborhood school in West Humboldt Park, I relied heavily on subsequent training in Theater for Civic Practice and Forum Theater to create a non-hierarchical classroom in which each participant is treated as an artist and collaborator. In this democratic classroom, students aged 8-14 wrote, designed, directed and performed in over 16 original plays for their school community. Student artists showed growth in their social-emotional coping mechanisms, leadership in their classrooms, and engagement in the school community. Hearing from administrators and teachers at other schools about the arts gap for young people on the south and west sides, I became interested in proliferating theater education as a tool for trauma-response and amplifying student voice.

With a team of former high-school-aged students, licensed therapists, school administrators, working artists and teachers I created an arts education nonprofit, Backyard Chicago Ensemble. This team co-authored a trauma-responsive devising curriculum. We trained a diverse team of teaching artists to implement this curriculum at two schools on the west side of Chicago. As we collected promising data on our theater education method, I taught other teachers and arts nonprofit personnel about the devising based approach. Through an emphasis on embodied participation, trying before you are ready, and prioritization of each participant as master of their own story, these adult learners engaged in devising work and dissected its embedded educational and artistic tools.

My pedagogy rests on creating a partial structure, giving students a two-legged stool to balance on. Students should feel that unless they put their own foot down to stabilize the chair, it will topple. This enables students to bring their bodies and ideas into the arena as emboldened co-conspirators rather than passive learners. Relying on student power and choice in the classroom plays out in our creative process, our classroom structures, and our assessment practices.

As a teaching artist, curriculum consultant and residency coordinator at the Chicago Children's Theatre (CCT), I have applied my pedagogy in classes and camps of children from around the city, ages 3-14. During quarantine, I've risen to the challenge of adopting this democratic, student-centered approach to the online classroom. To train and evaluate CCT teaching artists, I created tools for coaching and assessment of adult teachers. As a part of the CCT team collaborating with Lurie Children's Hospital to create a trauma-responsive workshop series for kindergartners, I've gained knowledge on the medical effects of trauma and the trauma-mitigating role theater can play.

In Backyard Chicago, we devised work for young audiences around grief and creative expression. This work was created in an intergenerational ensemble of students and professional actors in which the autonomy of each individual storyteller was oriented towards generating a coherent story as a community. As a playwright, I've also written and developed plays in intergenerational table reads, workshops, staged readings and full productions.

Theater for Young Audiences, nonprofit construction and management, and playwriting/development are all highly collaborative, fully embodied tasks. Those engaged must bring their most original, daring and open selves into the process. The best teaching also accomplishes this.

Facilitating a series of professional developments in anti-racist pedagogy for teachers, I adapted my teaching for a discussion style of learning with peers. I embedded theater activities and devising work in discussion of anti-racist literature, encouraging personal storytelling as a way to engage in the work. Through collaborative learning and un-learning, I saw the power of theater and storytelling techniques for adult learners seeking to excavate self and society.

These experiences form the backbone of my teaching approach. My teaching would bring to the college classroom the integration of radical theater pedagogy and lived experience working in theater education and performance, playwriting and nonprofit management. I'm committed to connecting these worlds to the emerging perspectives of college students. I believe that theater has a trauma-responsive, anti-racist role to play in our evolving world.