

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY AND ARC

When I transitioned from high school to the vibrant atmosphere of the Boston Conservatory, my drama director imparted a piece of wisdom that has resonated with me throughout my three-decade journey in the professional performing arts industry: "Remember, the actor gets the job." This notion has not only shaped my own career but has become the guiding principle behind my approach to teaching Musical Theatre.

In my view, everything in Musical Theatre performance is an extension of Acting. I firmly believe there aren't distinct categories of acting; there is only acting that, if executed adeptly, and supported by substantial technique, is able to manifest itself in song and dance. Lackluster performances in Musical Theatre often stem from individuals who have been instructed in diluted versions of the essential skills required for acting.

Renowned Musical Theatre performance instructor and composer Craig Carnelia, in his book "A Reason To Sing," underscores this sentiment, stating, "...yes, in this field, we do want to make an impression. But aiming at qualities or choosing emotions as if they were spices from a spice rack is not the way to succeed in that aim. We don't play qualities, attitudes, and emotions. We play action" (p.xv). The dedication to portraying a character's action, rather than merely playing at the emotion of a scene, constitutes the substantial work of acting, applicable across all performance genres.

The crux of excellence in Musical Theatre performance lies not in what you say, sing, or dance, but rather in the fundamental question of why. This fundamental principle forms the backbone of the program I am constructing at CSU, where we prioritize the art of acting as the cornerstone of exceptional Musical Theatre education.

TEACHING ARC

I came to Colorado State University after 27 years in the professional entertainment industry, hired specifically *because* I was not an academic. As a Broadway actor and Song & Dance professional, I came with a sense of excitement and a desire to share my passion for musical theater. Having had national and international success as a masterclass teacher, I assumed transitioning to a life in academia would be a simple move. Instead, I discovered masterclass teaching and creating a semester-long curricular arc, though closely related, were not *at all* the same.

Over the course of the last five years, I have made a transformative shift. As is evidenced in materials like my syllabus, which, due to the widely divergent examples I was given at the onset of University Teaching, show a progression from extremely minimal (limited) details and structure to far more robust and student oriented documents, my teaching arc is one of intense growth and improvement. Using Course Surveys as well as peer reviews to identify my strengths and shortcomings, I embarked on a personal and professional growth journey, seeking out resources and training to develop a more holistic inclusive teaching approach. I engaged with literature on pedagogical strategies, attended workshops and conferences, and sought guidance from colleagues experienced in current educational trends.

Einstein said "I never teach my pupils. I only provide the conditions in which they can learn."

Collaboration is not just a cornerstone of theatre—it is an integral part of my teaching philosophy. Drawing from Einstein’s sentiment, I see my role not as an authoritative superior bestowing wisdom, but as a collaborator. From my professional experience I’ve learned that quick solutions and praise don’t foster genuine growth. Instead, acknowledging an actor’s effort, creating vocabulary that enables me to genuinely witness and reflect their developing skill level creates a foundation of trust that will allow me to speak directly and frankly to their efforts, and give them the kind of support that a performer needs to thrive.

Overcoming the impulse to meet deadlines and provide the "right" answers solely to "get the show open" signifies an evolution in my teaching method that directly mirrors my growth as a theatre maker. Einstein's concept of creating conditions for learning deeply resonates with me. Whether in an academic or professional context, acknowledging and ensuring the presence of all the right components allows artists the freedom to make their own discoveries. This aspect, the ownership of discovery, holds equal importance for both professional artists and developing students. Embracing this collaborative method aligns seamlessly with DEISJ principles, stepping back from my own narrative and encouraging students to infuse their unique identities into their work.

When I worked with students at creating Musical Theatre – be it directing a show, working on a monologue, song, or choreography, I excelled. My performance classes were exciting and inspiring;

“Noah is amazing, he pushed me and made me feel comfortable at the same time!” – FA2019 TH492, Freshman Seminar

“I think that this class was perfect for the first semester because it helped me grow as a person and as an actor. I learned so much more about acting and what that means.” – FA2020 TH150, Voice & Movement for the Stage

I firmly believe that the power of positive student engagement can create a channel for truth telling that cuts directly to the work at hand, and doesn’t require me to sugar coat the feedback I give.

“[Noah is] honest about places for improvement (ex. Not making yourself smaller, second guessing [your] work). We don’t always get the straightforward truth about acting in other classes.” – FA2023 TH373, Musical Theatre History & Repertory I

However, in my lecture classes, specifically the History & Rep classes, maintaining an overall environment for a full semester as we researched and worked in areas that were decidedly *not* my strong suit – namely History – my skills were in need of a serious overhaul.

“I understand that there are many factors that are in play, as this is a new class that has not been fully established. But as the students we deserve a clear, fully developed syllabus, clearer course materials and expectations, and improved communication. It is difficult to judge a class that is still in the works, however the required reading and the in class discussions simply don’t go hand in hand. Quizzes are never predictable, and no matter what you study or how many notes you’ve taken, it feels impossible to succeed as a student.” – FA2021 TH392, Theatre History Seminar

“It’s a great environment, but I think overall the course could do with a lot more structure. The material is important and exciting, but we could do with a new textbook or just pdf selections from several books. Some of the talks we had were fantastic, but others were repetitive and kind of just filled time.” – FA2021 TH392, Theatre History Seminar

“I spoke with him about the only issue: time. He should assign someone in the class to keep track of how long he spends with actors, so he doesn’t run out of time.” – Peer Review 2019, Prof. Walt Jones

I was able to assess and improve my teaching practices by making evidence-based adjustments and enhancements. I have also actively sought feedback from my students, giving them two different opportunities throughout the semester to speak directly to their experience in class, letting me know what they need more or less of. With time and experience under my belt, I am able to utilize the suggestions of my colleagues, and mentors.

Drawing inspiration from the Teaching Effectiveness Framework (TEF) provided by The Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT) program at Colorado State, I identified three of the 7 TEF domains of effective teaching practices to chart my improvement:

1. Feedback and Assessment
2. Inclusive Pedagogy
3. Classroom Climate

Timely Feedback has become an important part of my pedagogical reform. From 25 years of teaching in the master class format, I am very skilled at giving feedback in a manner that is constructive, encouraging, and specific, highlighting areas of strength while also identifying areas for improvement; assessments that cut directly to the thrill and challenges they are encountering in the work, a subject I touched on when I was asked to take part in a [panel for the Association for Theatre in Higher Learning \(08/03/2023\)](#).

Feedback means very little if it is not timely. When a student gives their final presentation of a song they’ve been working on, my feedback will have diminishing effects the longer I wait to give it. These improvements in my teaching not only cultivate a growth mindset among my students but also reinforce a sense of trust and willingness to collaborate together.

I endeavor to craft vibrant and engaging learning experiences, combining theoretical concepts with practical applications. While a Broadway career might seem theoretical to my students, I bridge the gap by linking the challenges they face with my own experiences of struggle, success, failure, and triumph on Broadway. By drawing these parallels, I make these experiences immediate for them, emphasizing that there’s no need to wait for the future to be brave and daring in their work. Through individual attention, group discussions, collaborative projects, and hands-on activities like in-class workshops, guest artists, and videos, I actively encourage each student to take personal ownership of their learning journey. This deliberate approach aims to celebrate and showcase the distinct talents and contributions of every student, fostering a strong sense of belonging and pride within the classroom.

“Noah has a specific relationship with each person in the class, and we all had different goals for acting and our careers that he helped us pinpoint and discuss. I thought the expectations were high in a good way.” – FA2021 TH450, Professional Actor Preparation

I emphasized **Inclusive Pedagogy** because it's fundamental to the success of a course; everyone is engaged, regardless of who attends. This focus is crucial amid the ongoing, and widely acknowledged, overhaul of exclusive pedagogies in today’s academic world. Jennifer Todd, the Teaching Effectiveness Framework Program Manager at Colorado State University, suggested a valuable approach. I now implement clear and effective Rubrics, collaboratively created with students at the beginning of each semester, charting the elements of a superb performance. Guiding students, we dissect aspects of performing, letting them define what these aspects look like at different stages - emerging, in development, or at a proficient level. Encouraging students to develop their own standard for excellence, drawing from their experiences and using familiar vocabulary, has proven highly effective in creating a level playing field. This approach promotes equity in students' ability and willingness to discuss their process and their peers' performances, aligning seamlessly with our DEISJ principles.

Example of Student-Generated Rubric:

TH373_FA23 Musical Theatre Workshop – Scene to Song – Reflection/Critique Rubric

	Emerging	Developing	Proficient
Memorization	Still On Book Dropping Lines/lyrics Imprecise Musicianship Paraphrasing	Effectively Calling Line Flubbing Lines Musical Recovery	Off Book Word Perfect Pacing/Cue pick up Transcendent Animal
Given Circumstances/Believability	Vague tactics/actions Unmotivated choices (Physical/Emotional) Breaking Character Inconsistencies/lies	More Intentional Taking Risks/Experimenting Low Stakes Wavering Commitment	Consistent Intentionality Specificity (not vague) Fully Committed High Stakes
Listening/Responding	Isolated Selfish Non-reactive/responsive	Conversational Taking Risks Passive Action/Tactic	Intimacy Receptive/Responsive Energized Action/Tactic
Transitions Scn-2-Sng	Awkward Unsynchronized Dropping character/underscore	Recovering from Clunk More synchronization	Seamless Synchronized Consistent GC/B

One of the strongest ingredients of a healthy **Classroom Climate** is inclusivity in teaching materials, everyone in the class feeling like they are not only given room to share, but feeling like they are represented in the subject matter we are studying. I actively seek opportunities to include culturally diverse materials (Scripts, Scores, and Guest artists) from underrepresented and historically marginalized voices – (LGBTQIA - *La Cage Aux Folles*, *A Strange Loop*; BIPOC – *The Wiz*, *A Strange Loop*, *Capeman*, *Caroline or Change*); ensuring that students of all identities can see themselves represented and empowered in the material we explore.

Most importantly I try to impress upon my students that the audience is an artist's chief collaborator, that our art is rooted in aural tradition, with the most impactful performance moments happening when they have ignited the mind of the audience, when the ideas they are sharing resonate within the audience. All emotions and dramatics are vital, but they must play a supportive role to the *ideas* we are sharing with the audience.

My work in these three areas have helped me grow into a much more effective educator, better able to foster environments where all students feel valued, supported, and motivated to excel, which in turn brings out the very best they have to offer.

The workshops and courses I have taken through TILT have been extremely helpful, offering me powerful and precise tools for effectively acknowledging the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and learning styles of my students. I strive to create a safe and welcoming classroom environment, where every creative voice is heard and respected.

“Noah, I have learned the most from you this semester than any semester I have had you before. I dunno what changed but I feel like the way you communicate with students is clearer, there is more knowledge in the air, and I really appreciate how ready to talk about your class you are. I think that is a real strength and if you have changed anything about the way you are teaching, keep doing it.” – FA2023 TH373

MUSICAL THEATRE CONCENTRATION (2022 – Present)

The courses of the new Musical Theatre Concentration emphasize the trio of musical theatre disciplines: acting, singing, and movement.

Through carefully structured research, discussion, and performance, my Musical Theatre History and Rep courses (TH371 and TH372) look at the history of Musical Theatre and not only celebrate it's accomplishments and evolution, but confront the deeply entrenched biases and stereotypes in the artform, delving into its problematic history, such as its blackface origins and prevailing sexism. This is paired with discussions on progressive works that highlight the voices of underrepresented communities; earlier shows like *In Dahomey*, and *Shuffle Along*; and contemporary pieces like “*Hamilton*” and “*Strange Loop*”.

In these classes, I blend historical context with present day malleability. I emphasize that songs aren't just static relics but dynamic, living experiences. For students, understanding performance as a collaboration—with composers, lyricists, accompanists, and more—shifts their mindset. It provides them with both accountability to, and support from their collaborators. Building an abiding respect for the effort that has gone into a piece of music long before they pick it up puts young performers in the mindset of collaborative humility and starts their journey to realizing a performance on very strong footing. My feedback encourages students to see every action as part of their storytelling collaboration. Using video, songs, and my own industry anecdotes, I contextualize my teaching to enrich the learning experience.

Cultivating this collaborative approach equips students to seamlessly fit into any professional setting. They're prepared to work with their fellow actors, directors, designers, and most importantly, they are prepared to bring the sense of play and inquiry to their process that are such positive work traits.

TH373

This is the advanced class in the Musical Theatre performance arc. Here, I collaborate with students on what makes creating and performing musical theatre such an exacting process.. The complexities are numerous—shifting seamlessly between disciplines, negotiating various factors—but that is what I love about my art. It feels like I'm finally fully embracing what I was hired to do.

“I love our new system of reflecting and giving feedback to one another, I think it greatly strengthens our ability to engage critically with our art form and also to help ourselves improve. The expectations for this grading system are very clear, as we built the rubric ourselves; however, I think it can be a little nebulous as to what steps one needs to take in order to get a better grade in the class as a whole.”

“We laid out the exact specifics of what we're looking for in each scene in our rubric! And we hold ourselves to a very high standard of performance, always looking to improve.”

Undoubtedly, my communication skills have flourished, and my awareness of the class's overall needs has deepened, marking a significant tapping into my skill set. While there's always room for growth, my experiment with turning over grading responsibilities to the students yielded promising results, albeit with a valuable lesson. Some surveys reminded me to maintain a stronger presence in the mix, balancing my voice with theirs.

“I actually would love to get your rubrics filled out for our songs too, not just our classmates. I can write down as many notes as I want, but sometimes your brain doesn't process everything in the moment it is told to you, so having something physical to refer back to might be really beneficial.”

Implementing the Complete/Incomplete system for non-traditional grading posed its challenges. Students needed to track their progress more actively, highlighting the importance of maintaining a visible feedback presence.

“Having that ultimate letter be a big question mark I found quite stressful and overwhelming and I have thought about it a lot because I wasn't able to track my process. I just think you have to grade things as you go. You could always have an assignment that is like grade yourself on how you feel your growth was, or lets talk about what you learned and what could improve if you wanted to keep that aspect, but I think you gotta grade stuff.”

My goal is to enhance my teaching further by refining the alternative grading concept, drawing inspiration from Jennifer Todd and TILT. Specifically, I aim to fine-tune the Complete/Incomplete grading system and utilize Canvas to empower students in monitoring their progress through a well-organized framework. Jennifer's guidance, resources, and connections have been invaluable in shaping this innovative approach to "non-grading." By integrating the self-reflective and self-reliant nature of this concept with Canvas's

user-friendly tools, my vision is to create a grounded, structured environment that enables students to step out of their comfort zones and engage in the risky exploratory work that Musical Theatre requires.

To help make these courses come alive, I used my Broadway connections to bring in guest speakers:

- Tony Award Nominee Norm Lewis to discuss his experiences as the very first African American *Phantom of the Opera* as well as the process of playing one of the titular roles in a reimaged revival of *The Gershwins Porgy & Bess*
- Tony Award winning actress Cady Huffman whose Broadway debut was in the ground breaking LGBTQ musical *La Cage Aux Folles*
- Tony Award winner Jerry Mitchell, who talked about his path from ensemble performer to featured dancer, to one of the strongest Director/Choreographers in the business today, and how the industry has evolved (and remained the same) during his career.

Through providing timely feedback, embracing inclusive pedagogy, and fostering positive student engagement to create a supportive and brave classroom climate, I am fostering a learning environment that celebrates diversity, nurtures growth, and inspires a respect and love for musical theater. I continue to remain committed to self-improvement, seeking opportunities to deepen and refine my teaching practices. I aspire to continue empowering and uplifting my students, preparing them for success both on and off the stage.