

Rebecca Bailey

Educator/Director

rebeccajeannebailey@gmail.com

www.rebeccajeannebailey.com

Teaching Philosophy

At the Heart

I believe at the heart of teaching and producing theatre, exists a practical and hands-on curriculum that can only be discovered by active physical encounters. Theatre must be inclusive and open to all while still challenging ideas and the status quo. It is our responsibility to reflect diversity in productions, curriculum, texts, and environments allowing students and communities access to a variety of perspectives and stories. The theatre classroom and rehearsal space provide a safe space for all to contemplate the difficult questions, make new connections, and explore the nuances that make us human. I work to use my privilege to amplify the diverse voices of my students, to bring to life their stories, and engage them in narratives that stretch their understanding of the world around them.

In the Classroom

Theatre teaches artists and students to grapple with the human condition. It demands empathy, critical analysis, problem solving, collaboration, openness, and independence. It is truly the art of collective creation. Theatre provides an exploration of identity – it explores culture, creates culture, and then interrogates it. The role of the student artist is as important now as ever, and I believe should be nurtured in the university setting. This is the time and place to inspire, challenge, and unearth the new and stimulating artist of tomorrow by identifying and shaping their one-of-a kind voice. This perspective emphasizes bringing together a diverse ensemble by uniting us in our humanness while celebrating the beauty of what makes us unique.

I believe that the classroom is a process-based living laboratory, where through on-your-feet exercises and thoughtful reflection students and teachers alike mature as artists, individuals, and communities. My role as a teacher should be dynamic and engaging, trusting in the power of this non-traditional classroom. The atmosphere established by the teacher is safe, embracing individuality and collaboration. The classes should develop student's ability to articulate their work in both written and verbal forms, in addition to their practical experiences engaging them physically and intellectually. Collaboration is at the heart of theatre and this should be shown by example as well as implementing shared multi-cultural and interdisciplinary opportunities. I am dedicated to shaping curriculum that represents both traditional teachings and Non-Eurocentric texts. As a teacher, I am on my feet investigating my own research alongside students. I have acknowledged when the texts I worked from and stories I told reflected one perspective and have continued to expand my courses and readings. In performance classes, I have expanded the scenes and monologues to better include diverse playwrights and stories. Students also benefit from providing constructive feedback and support to their fellow students. Maturing this skill allows students to begin to analyze their own work, so that they will become self-aware artists. Most importantly, I serve to highlight the individual voices of my students, so that their work reflects and articulates their culture, ideas, and aspirations.

In Production

The opportunity to direct strengthens my work in the classroom because it involves the actual laboratory for the lessons learned in class. I believe that it is impossible to separate the performative aspects of theatre from the intellectual. Therefore, my rehearsal process is an extension of my classroom where I seek to engage all actors in an intellectual journey, as well as physical engagement. I often use exercises and research assignments as ways to deepen the actors understanding of the text. While I believe that we should hold our students to professional expectations, I also recognize that they are developing their skills and need different mentoring. At the end of a production, I hope students discover ways to use the tools they are cultivating in class, foster a sense of self-discipline, tell stories that reflect who they are, journey into stories that take them across cultural, socio-economical, and social boundaries to discover the fun of putting in hard work on a production.

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Each production offers a chance for students to engage in stories that both expose them to new ideas and allow them to see themselves represented onstage. I have found both of these principles guiding me. In choosing productions for our department, I seek to tell stories that challenge our students both in performance and subject matter. I have challenged stereotypes of body image, race, LGBTQ+, and gender in my casting. The work has highlighted community connections teaming with local organizations, the Arkansas Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and other departments on campus. Recently, as social tensions mounted, I wanted to help my students use their artistic voices in response to the world around them. To take advantage of the Covid parameters, we used this time to tell a different story in a new medium. I was able to work with students to devise a piece that addressed their responses to Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+, and women's rights in a filmed production. The student written and performed piece spoke to the issues in a thoughtful manner, considering different perspectives, and highlighting the student's voices. The production was recognized by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival with awards and invited scenes to the festival. In my teaching journey, I continue to stand on the shoulders of those before me but strive to represent the larger human story.

“I believe that theatre’s function is to remind us of the big human issues, to remind us of our terror and humanity. In our quotidian lives, we live in constant repetition of habitual patterns. Many of us sleep through our lives. Art should offer experiences that alter these patterns, awaken what is sleep, and remind us of our original terror. Human beings first created theatre in response to the everyday terror of life.” – Anne Bogart