

Kendra Kahl

Teaching Philosophy

May we always strive to push ourselves to the limits of creativity and test the boundaries of our imaginations.

The best teachers are those who are committed to growth and curiosity. In my practice as an educator, I continuously search for pedagogical moments which offer students avenues to challenge their perceptions of content covered in class; hone their artistic craft; and explore the intersections of their coursework, practice, and positionality to their work and communities. True curiosity begins in questions, and growth occurs in those moments that students are invited to bring their authentic selves to the investigations of the answers. My role as a teacher is to cultivate a space of invitation—a place where students are welcomed and encouraged to bring their own expertise of their experience, craft, research, and interests into our shared learning together. I value my students as individuals in the classroom, offering them the necessary tools, support, and challenges to grow and pursue their curiosities.

I follow a relational pedagogy model and understand knowledge and sustained curiosity and growth as attached to the relationships built between myself and my students. Learning is a journey, and my commitment to building trust and mentorship within my classes offers students a personal connection to the skills, knowledge domains, and ethical concerns acquired and considered through my courses. I mentor my students in their own practice, offering avenues for their creativity and individuality to be expressed in various forms of assignments, projects, and formative assessments during class.

Relational pedagogy relies not only on building relationships between students and teachers, but also on a feedback loop between these parties. As knowledge is constructed in the classroom, students learn from the teacher and the teacher learns from the students. Because of this model, I offer students a pathway for providing feedback as it relates to my instruction and their learning goals in the course. I often offer an optional midterm evaluation for students to voice any concerns about my class and/or types of activities that work well for their mastery of content. Additionally, this form includes a space for students to voice hardships they are experiencing to complete coursework. I use this midterm as a reflexive exercise for my pedagogy as well as a way students can begin a conversation with me about their success. In the past, this midterm evaluation has allowed me to pinpoint the most successful activities for particular groups of students (i.e. smaller group creative assignments, large group discussions, collaborative writing exercises, etc.) as well as an 'in' for me to begin talking with a particular student struggling to complete their work due to external pressures and employment deadlines. Any time a student provides feedback for my instruction or alerts me to challenges regarding their success in my course, I welcome further conversation and/or a close look at how I can improve my instructional design moving forward.

As a practitioner in my field of Theatre for Youth, my higher education classrooms pull double duty of relaying content to undergraduate students as well as modeling varying and successful teaching strategies, assessment, and classroom management. I root my pedagogical practice and instructional design in arts-based methods, specifically drama-based pedagogy. This allows me to model best education and rehearsal practices for my students entering the field as educators or practitioners otherwise working with and for youth. As a teacher of drama education, I engage my students in the very methodologies we learn about in the classroom. My university teaching incorporates varying styles of lesson organization relating to anticipatory sets, content exploration, and reflection as well as varying modes of formative and summative assessment. Additionally, all education-centered courses that I teach provide space for students to practice their own pedagogy and facilitation; I design these courses so that student facilitation is scaffolded throughout the semester, allowing students to practice reflection in their teaching artistry and identify moments of success and possible improvement for their future assignments.

In addition to work in my classroom, I realize the impact and importance of fieldwork in certain studio and education courses. I build partnerships with communities (schools, libraries, after-school programs, education programs in local theatres) in order to facilitate my students' practical application of their learning goals. These community partnerships not only provide students with hands-on experience working with different populations, but they also model reciprocity in artistic relationships and an avenue to pursue future work within these organizations. Much of theatre and drama happens in the 'doing' of the work. As an educator, I offer pathways for my students to gain practical experience in their field of study and encourage further involvement with organizations should their long-term trajectory benefit from such a relationship.

Not only do I wish to personally listen to, welcome, and mentor my students to pursue their individual journeys of growth and curiosities, but I also embolden my students to listen to one another. Theater education is stationed so well to instill confidence, empathy, different perspectives, and all other categories within the hidden curriculum, and Theatre for Youth practitioners must be ethically-engaged listeners. I attempt to create a student-driven and inclusive environment in which my university students have an opportunity to share and listen to their own and others' ideas and opinions and practice incorporating their listening and shared knowledge into their work moving forward. I am preparing today's listener to shape tomorrow's world.



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