

# *Kendra Kahl*

## *Statement of Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*

I have long been committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in my creative practice, scholarship, and teaching. I seek to train the leaders of youth and community theatre organizations and movements, school theatre teachers and drama specialists, freelance teaching artists, and creative teams that produce work with, by, and for young people. This requires a commitment to actively question accessibility of programming; identify (and empower my students to identify) oppression and power in classrooms, structures of hierarchy in education and other organizations, and greater society; and value diversity in classrooms, workplaces, lesson materials, and plays performed.

As I work to train artists, I must acknowledge the systems, structures, and policies that my students will face; require my students to recognize their positionality within these systems of power (past and present); and prepare my students to engage with inequities, accessibility, consent, and other ethical considerations as it relates to material selection, teaching methodologies, leadership and hiring practices, and reciprocity in community and organizational partnerships. Identifying their own positionality equips students to engage with diverse backgrounds and ideas, actively work to create inclusive and equitable environments for students and others they work alongside, and seek out ways to implement and enact change within their communities in ethical ways. Specifically, I work with a diverse representation of literature and other materials as lesson models, ask students to reflect upon the ways their lesson demonstrations link to inclusion and diversity in theory/practice/pedagogy, seek out a diverse set of authors and playwrights, and design class discussion around the ways that certain wording and pedagogical practices should be altered to care for students and communities.

In my teaching practice of theatre history (theatre for youth or otherwise), I commit to a historiographical approach. Using a model of the 'individuality' of history writers, and those whom history is written about, prompts discussion of why work was written the way it was and what may have been omitted during a specific time period. My students and I can then interrogate these theatre histories, questioning their perpetuation and identifying strengths and moments for improvement within the field. Rather than solely teach facts and methods, I want to foster student questioning of the methodologies, literature, and historical moments so that they might continue their investigations in their practice moving forward. The success of a historiographical approach requires engaged thinkers rather than passive exam-takers; the success of my pedagogical approach requires engaged practitioners rooted in ethical concerns which result from rigorous looks into various methodologies, practices, and histories.

In addition to my pedagogical commitment to actively addressing DEI in my undergraduate classrooms, my creative scholarship reflects my antiracist and inclusive approaches to creative work. I center dimensionality, which treats audience members and students as dimensional human beings

worthy of individualized instruction, consent, and care; we all live in dimensions of identity and place, and our unique experiences and perspectives affect how we engage with others, walk through the world, and learn most effectively. I also actively research the 'bad is black' effect, which leans into humans' tendency to place the colors black and white along a binary of evil and good. This effect trickles into a societal over-representation of people of color in systems of discipline and criminalization. I ask, how can theatre makers, playwrights, and designers critically engage with a possible reimagining of this effect in their creative work for the stage? How might we complicate the binary of black and white as evil and good in our antiracist practices? My playwriting, designing, and directing engage with an antiracist model of questions I have created, often openly rejecting the use of certain costuming and scenic choices that play into tropes of black and white.

I have undergone training to avoid bias in the workplace at The Rose Theater as well as Childsplay Theatre Company. Both of the trainings at these children's theaters focused on equitable practices in interacting with students, selecting material for classes, and systemic privileges. I engage my students in my Theatre for Youth course, a class focused on producing TYA work within professional companies and educational spaces, with TYA/USA's *Anti-Racist and Anti-Oppressive Futures for Theatre for Young Audiences: An Interactive Guide*, utilizing the guided reflection questions. It is my responsibility to seek out new and relevant material associated with equitable practices in TYA in order to best prepare my students for their careers and best care for generations of young people and their families with which my students will interact. I am committed to continuing my personal journey toward more equitable practice and fostering spaces that encourage others to do the same.

I currently serve on the Equity and Antiracism Committee within my department. We bring forth articles to discuss, which have resulted in language and policy changes within our department. As an example, I helped shift our language away from outreach toward community engagement, considering a positive and asset-based approach to our work with various community members rather than a savior mentality. We also review intimacy and violence breakdowns for all of our casting calls, rooting ourselves in best practices when it comes to informed consent and supportive language. In the wake of recent legislation in Iowa, we have had to reimagine what it looks like for us to continue to do DEI work without using the hot button terms. I bring experience of working within legal structures and limitations and actively and openly discussing what this looks like in professional spaces with my undergraduate students.