

Teaching Philosophy Statement

Libby Anne Bullinger

Teacher. Choreographer. Advocate. Artist.

As the world becomes more complex and information becomes increasingly accessible, the role we assume as teachers has evolved into a multidisciplinary practice of presenting information, nurturing creativity, balancing independence and collaboration, and shifting our perspectives every day.

I graduated from Mercyhurst University with a BFA in Dance and a BA in Dance Education in Theory and Practice. Through the pursuit of these degrees, I engaged in coursework from an expansive range of departments including psychology, early childhood and special education, sports medicine, anatomy, business management and administration, and of course dance technique, theory, and choreography. Although each of these subject areas individually impacted my personal teaching philosophy, it is the combination of information from various sources that cumulates to the work I practice and advocate for in the classroom.

In my teaching, I set out to disrupt the hierarchical framework of teacher-oriented instruction that is common in most educational practices but is rampant in the ballet world. Much of traditional education is beginning to steer away from authoritarian instruction, but the dance world is rooted in pedagogical methods that lack in student encouragement, independent thinking, and development of holistic goals. I am eager to learn from my students and the experiences that we share together. When teaching, I make it clear that I am not the one with all the knowledge in the room. The nature of dance education often involves learning movement through mimicking, but this does not mean that students should expect themselves to look, act, or dance like anyone else, including myself as the teacher.

In developing my personal teaching goals, one of the concepts that has been most important for me is teaching through learning. If we are not learning while teaching, we are continuing to support the outdated idea that the teacher is the most knowing in the classroom. We as instructors have no right to assume what our students know; therefore, we must teach with vulnerability and grace and acknowledge our own faults in addition to the attributes we bring to the learning environment. I feel that education specialist Edward J. Brantmeier, Ph.D., describes this approach to teaching clearly and in a way that inspires my work in the classroom: “Pedagogy of vulnerability is an approach to education that invites vulnerability and deepened learning through process of self and mutual disclosure on the part of co-learners in the classroom. The premise is simple – share, co-learn, and admit you don’t know.”

When applied to a dance setting, I strongly believe this ideology means cultivating a healthy environment where every individual in the room feels a strong sense of ownership over their own thoughts, actions, and body, and we can all reach common ground through dance. Every person in the classroom, regardless of age, role, or other factors, is engaging in exchange of information. This exchange can be demonstrated in various relationships including teacher to student, student to teacher, and student to student interactions. Class settings I instruct in acknowledge the various backgrounds and experiences of individuals in the room, and how this history impacts our work and pursuit of knowledge together.

This philosophy also spills into my creative process as a dancemaker as I strive to create a collaborative environment that acknowledges unique perspectives and welcomes artist feedback and partnership. It is important to me that artists I work with are acknowledged as humans first, not just bodies to be manipulated in space for a personal choreographic vision or to fit the outdated and unrealistic standards of dance.

It is my goal that each student leaves my class with increased knowledge and tools that they can use to aid their work and exploration in the future. As an analytical person, I am very attentive to evaluating the details and mechanics behind dance technique. I advocate for taking an objective anatomical approach to movement to provide feedback to students that they can use to develop their personal training goals. Students deserve opportunity to discover the “why” behind what they are learning and practicing, so I strive to provide tangible information that can serve as a catalyst for future growth and learning for those I work with.

Dance is an art form that stems from drive and passion, and I want my students to feel that joy when they are exposed to the movement. Whether they are aspiring professionals, recreational dancers, college students, or creative dance children,

I aim to demonstrate the love I have for dancing and teaching to them. My biggest goal is that they feel supported, creative, and passionate, and that dance can fit into their lives in a healthy and welcoming manner.

Dancing comes with a spectrum of emotions. My goal as a dance educator is to assist students in acknowledging these feelings without allowing them to inadvertently dictate the environment of the classroom or the work we are doing. I strive to model skills such as setting boundaries, practicing intentional self-care, and existing as both a dancer and as a human outside of the dance world bubble.

With my teaching practice comes a commitment, both to myself and those I work with, to continue a constant pursuit of education. Complacency breeds comfort, and, especially in a field as impactful as teaching, is dangerous.

Like my teaching and creative practices, this document is growing and evolving constantly. Updates to my philosophy will be made with intention when appropriate based on new information and experiences.