

## **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement**

Ryan Keith Justus

Theatre classrooms inherently appeal to extroverts. However, I keep introverted students in mind as I develop activities and assignments. By incorporating opportunities for behind-the-scenes work (director, choreographer, or designer), I ensure that students are working in ways that align with their personalities. At the same time, I am encouraging all students to take risks and push beyond their comfort zones to build and enhance their skills in drama and technical theatre.

While I have never felt that my perspective was a definitive one, through workshops in *Grading for Equity*, *Working With and Across Difference*, *Elevating Racial Consciousness for Equity Transformation*, and additional research and reading, I have continued to evolve my approach to better acknowledge my privilege and ensure that all students feel valued and safe to share ideas in our classroom or rehearsals. I have always felt that the traditional dramatic canon tends to be Euro-centric, and I have made efforts to bring to my curricula works by BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ playwrights.

I find value in engaging with Shakespeare's works for students. I think using the plays as a tool to engage with complex texts while allowing students to find their own meaning and viewpoints. Providing students a space to discuss and listen to each other's ideas while considering the optics of our choices surrounding casting or acting choices allows students to contemplate how to make these works have modern relevance for them and their communities.

When staging a production, I examine the script to find opportunities for interpretation. Understanding my students' diverse backgrounds, ideas, and values ensure that I make theatre and characters that speak to them. During the production of *A Chorus Line*, with my high school students, I had to be creative in casting to meet the students needs and the enrollment of the class. I worked with a trans student who identified as male and cast him in a traditionally male character. We had a female student cast in a traditionally male role that, in turn, created a same-sex relationship. While the challenges faced by the characters in the productions did not directly align with the students, I found ways to draw on their experiences and personalities to develop their performances.

Keeping theatre programs well-rounded allows students to experience theatre from a variety of angles. By providing students with such a variety of opportunities, they become aware of the multifaceted world of theatre and performing arts as a whole. Encouraging a desire and enthusiasm for the performing arts is something that I strive to impart to students daily through a variety of instructional techniques, authentic assessments, and performance opportunities. I am not in the classroom to dictate my point of view, but rather I am there to guide them to study, develop and create art, and above all else, to listen to them.