

Kristina Friedgen
K-6 Educational Philosophy

As K-6 students begin their learning journeys, they naturally start with an individualized understanding of the world around them and grow to see their world and learning as increasingly interconnected. Drama provides students opportunities to harness their innate gift of imagination and curiosity. By developing experience with imaginative inquiry, creative problem solving, embodied practice, and collaboration, I believe drama has a unique ability to connect students to themselves, their peers, and their world, and ultimately to prepare them for life in the 21st-Century.

Drama fosters the individual student's understanding and appreciation for their bodies, voices, minds, and hearts through activities that encourage students to develop motor control, body awareness, and voice production. Each child has their own set of assets, which I am responsible for acknowledging and strengthening through differentiation strategies in both lesson development and assessment. As a teacher, I adapt curriculum goals to meet everyone's needs and abilities, while scaffolding in challenges to encourage improvement in areas of weakness. To accomplish this I integrate formative assessment strategies through my lessons to monitor student progress, design multiple forms of summative assessment, and incorporate student choice whenever possible. Drama successfully promotes students' understanding of themselves when the classroom can support some measure of student-led work—either through inquiry, practice, or reflection. As students mature in their learning, drama empowers them to become upstanders for their own learning and can inspire the confidence to express themselves physically, verbally, emotionally, as well as socially.

Drama strongly supports social-emotional learning through empathy development, collaboration, and embodied practice. Incorporating rituals and ensemble techniques into daily

Kristina Friedgen
K-6 Educational Philosophy

classroom procedures builds community and promotes belonging, while also organically implementing classroom management structures. As 21st-century learners grow up with increasingly more technology, they are at risk for underdeveloped interpersonal skills. Through drama, students practice the responsibilities of different roles in society including performer/spectator, leader/follower, teacher/learner, among others. Activities such as group work, critical feedback, and character analysis, provide opportunities for students to learn in compassionate, inclusive groups where they practice listening to, supporting and challenging each other to be their best selves. My drama classroom fosters community in a world that is increasingly more isolated through a structured, yet creative, environment. By implementing Creative Youth Development practices, I increase intrinsic motivation, empathy, and respect amongst all students. This is accomplished through co-creating (with my students) a safe space where people can be open and honest while being intellectually challenged. I model positive relationships for my students by supporting my community of learners, encouraging their hopes and goals, and building meaningful, professional relationships with each. I see my students through an asset-based lens, which appreciates students for the strengths and experiences they bring to the group. I believe in learning as much from them as they do from me. Valuing my students as contributors to our learning environment connects students to each other as well as their environment, culture, and context.

Drama prepares students for life through games, role-play, and explorations that allow students to identify real-world problems and rehearse strategies for overcoming these problems. Through play and exploration, they gain deeper understanding of the complexities of their world. As students grow in their drama experience, they gain the ability to extrapolate the skills honed

Kristina Friedgen
K-6 Educational Philosophy

in drama to various contexts such as effective communication, collaborative partnerships, active listening, conflict resolution, and creative ideation. Such skills prepare students to thrive in the 21st-Century, not just survive. Through drama, they imagine the worlds they wish they could inhabit and learn skills to make those imaginings reality. Drama activities that immerse students in another's life experience through role-games, engage them in relevant problem solving through process drama, or provide them chances to hypothesize and rehearse solutions to conflict situations through Theatre of the Oppressed expand their understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them and prepare them to become impassioned and compassionate citizens.

My experience as a theatre artist has taught me that none of my work is static. I continually reflect on my methods and approaches through evaluation, student feedback, formal and informal observations, and continuing education. Through such reflection, iteration, and implementation of new or revised practice, I model for my students a passion for lifelong learning grown from a place of intrinsic motivation. While I hold myself and my students to high standards that encourage them to not just meet but exceed expectations, I understand the necessity of scaffolding in support and assistance to each challenge and gradually building to student-led experiences. This is particularly important in K-6 education when skills vary from burgeoning to increased mastery. A student in my drama classroom from Kindergarten through sixth grade should be expected to communicate and advocate for themselves, practice empathy and respect for others, and question, wonder, and engage in the world around them.

Kristina Friedgen
7-12 Educational Philosophy

As an educator, I am most passionate about shaping theatre artists. From designers to actors, playwrights to directors, I love to see students fostering their creativity and discovering the many ways they can express themselves through theatre. I believe strongly that developing theatrical skills builds compassion, innovation, and collaboration among students—essential qualities for the 21st Century learner. I strive to provide an academic and artistic environment for my students that will not only encourage their interest in theatre and the arts, but make them more creative, motivated, and compassionate global citizens.

I believe our society should value the individual and their learning needs to better mould future adults with a mastery of essential skills. The 21st century learner must possess the ability to create, innovate, and collaborate in the workforce. Therefore, I subscribe to the philosophy that within my high learning standards for my students I must have the freedom to adapt the curriculum to their students' needs and abilities, especially with the push toward greater inclusion in the classroom. I believe wholeheartedly in differentiating lessons to reach every student in a personal and meaningful way. Students learn best when they are able to confidently demonstrate their learning or mastery while being challenged. They must have the experience of manipulating or experimenting with new concepts to further cement their understanding. And finally, if possible, students need an opportunity to teach that concept or skill to a peer. This “Learn, Do, Teach” approach allows students to access and apply content, concepts and skills to strengthen their mastery over any lesson.

In accordance with this “Learn, Do, Teach” approach, I continuously strive to improve myself through evaluation, student feedback, formal and informal observations, and continuing

Kristina Friedgen
7-12 Educational Philosophy

education. By continuously reflecting and re-working my curriculum and teaching methods after every year, I find that I am able to refine my skills and better stimulate my students.

An excellent teacher is a model, a guide, and a provider of experiences. I strive to model not only a lifelong love of learning and passion for my content area, but also a respect for my peers as well as my students. In such a creative subject, there are times for play and exploration, and times for students to behave as a captive, mature audience. Modeling appropriate behavior for each scenario is vitally important. As a guide, I want to stimulate my students' interest and curiosity while providing them with the ability and resources to find their own answers and develop their own conclusions. In order to best achieve this, I must provide them with opportunities for experience.

Creating a safe space where students can be open and honest provides students with not only an effective learning environment, but a place to grow and be challenged. I believe in supporting my students and encouraging their hopes and goals, especially artistically. Being able to relate to students about the projects and experiences that are most meaningful to them can have an incredibly powerful effect and hopefully inspire them to be generous members of their own communities some day.

Teaching Philosophy
Kristina Friedgen, MFA

Care and community are at the heart of my creative practice and pedagogy. I strive to foster meaningful, supportive relationships with my students in order to ensure that the classroom can be a rigorous, yet nurturing, space of exploration, experimentation, and growth. I incorporate opportunities for students to interact with one another to build ensemble, from community-devised and student-led rituals to peer mentoring and feedback. Ensuring that my classroom is a supportive learning community helps students develop their network of resources, utilize their assets for the good of the group, and practice accountability to themselves and their peers – important skills for theatre courses that often involve project-based learning. By centering relationality in the classroom, students and I can co-create a brave space, as defined by Arao and Clemens (2013), in which students feel supported to take risks and try out their ideas.

By grounding my pedagogy in care-filled practices, I create meaningful learning experiences for my students that meet them where they are and challenge them to grow further. After introducing new material, I scaffold lessons to encourage students to discuss and debate ideas with each other and me. In my Socially Engaged Practice course, for example, I ask students to engage with concepts based on personal experiences by mapping them, analyzing how these experiences achieved the concepts, and reflecting on the tactics used by the facilitator of those experiences. This grounds concepts more firmly in meaningful realities. Following discussion, my lessons move into a practice application to encourage students to experiment with and manipulate the concepts at hand. In my studio acting or directing classes, this means working through exercises or rehearsals through the lens of the relevant topic and then challenging students to bend the exercise to their creative needs. As students work independently, I observe and side coach using the tenets of Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process (CRP). Integrating CRP as a method of reflection and assessment, I can prioritize the student's vision for their work rather than imposing my own artistic impulses in feedback. In addition, using CRP as a tool for full class feedback helps sharpen the students' own reflective practice based on what they find meaningful about the work. By incorporating hands-on practice or a creative application in each lesson, students engage multiple intelligences to process concepts and in turn, gain a deeper connection to the material. This critical engagement encourages them to grapple with the material's relevancy and meaning in their own lives.

Whether teaching a studio course in performance, leading a lecture section, or working with majors or non-majors, I craft my lessons to provide space for students to actively engage

with the topics in order to better transfer or apply their knowledge outside of a course's context. I model this through lectures and discussion by inviting students to consider the impact of historical or theoretical practices on today's culture. As a guest lecturer in Theatre History and Literature, I juxtaposed historiography with contemporary media in my presentations, "As American as Jim Crow: Minstrelsy and its Legacy in Modern America" and "Reactionary Theatre: Revolutions of the Body and the Bot at the Turn of the Century," to emphasize the connections that past cultures have on shaping our present realities in entertainment and society. Students must have a robust understanding of the historical practices that have shaped our current popular culture and challenge it as future theatre makers, industry leaders, or theatregoers. Furthermore, as colleges and universities work to decolonize the canon, students must gain experience and practice engaging in sometimes uncomfortable, but necessary, conversations about diversity and inclusive representation on the stage as well as the role of the entertainment industry in systems of injustice and oppression. By modeling these conversations and scaffolding in opportunities for students to discuss, reflect, and experiment in a supportive learning community, I prepare my students for the work ahead of them in the professional world.

Within the professional theatre, accessibility and cultural competency are becoming standard practice, therefore I model these standards across my work. Meeting students' accessibility needs continually refines my pedagogy. I strive to provide an artistic and academic environment for my students that will not only hone their skills in theatre making, but encourage them to become more collaborative, motivated, and compassionate people. By prioritizing relationship building in the classroom I best understand how to tailor instruction through multi-modal learning. This iterative adaptation models cultural responsiveness to students and improves their understanding of cultural competency. Through rehearsals and classes, I encourage students to actively contribute to a rigorous examination of how our work as theatre artists and scholars truly represents the diverse perspectives and experiences of humanity while striving for equitable examination of the canon. Engaging in critical examination, my students grapple with more expansive definitions of inclusion by challenging assumed norms, further refining their cultural competency. With an emphasis on critical thinking and embodied practice, my students gain knowledge through experiential learning which they can apply beyond the bounds of the class in professional settings, through socially engaged work, or in pedagogical settings.