Teaching Philosophy

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Truly great theatre stems from passionate, committed collaboration between artists with well-rounded theatrical backgrounds. I have committed my professional life to lighting and sound design, and I am first and foremost a teacher of theatre. I teach in much the same way that I design: by considering how individual contributions come together to create a shared experience. My responsibility is to help students find their artistic voices and develop the language, practical skills, and confidence to bring those voices into a collaborative process. I want them to experience the joy of creating theatre and to carry that joy into their work.

I begin with observation. New design students learn to see light in new ways and pay attention to the aural world they occupy. Through daily journals, they describe how light shapes a person, object, or space and consider their emotional response to what they see. In sound journals, they use onomatopoeia to describe what they hear. I ask students to move between practical description and emotional interpretation: What is happening? How does it make you feel? These exercises connect design to their lived experience. As students translate what they notice and feel into words, they begin to recognize their own artistic perspectives.

Observation becomes useful to a collaborative team when students can communicate it. Lighting designers must convey an imagined environment before their collaborators can experience it onstage. I teach students to describe angle, color, intensity, and movement with clarity and purpose, connecting technical vocabulary to the atmosphere they hope to create. Visual research, written responses, and design presentations give them opportunities to make those connections. Learning a common language also requires listening. I ask students to understand what performers, directors, and other designers contribute, so that they can develop their own ideas in conversation with the whole production.

My courses use projects that invite students to put their ideas into practice. In lighting design, students recreate the light in a painting, interpret a classmate's lighting journal, light a moment from a play, and explore movement through a musical selection. Each project asks them to connect research and intention to choices they can test in the lighting lab. Sound projects, including collages, poem underscoring, and immersive environments, explore how design communicates narrative and emotion. These experiences bring together art history, music, script analysis, and technology while teaching students to share responsibility and solve creative problems together.

As students advance, the analysis becomes more demanding. They investigate a play's environment, historical context, emotional life, and the playwright's point of view, then consider how light can support the story the production team is telling. I evaluate their choices through the strength of that analysis, the clarity of their communication, and the relationship between their stated intentions and technical execution. A strong choice is grounded in the text and supported by a coherent artistic vision. Critique helps students identify where that relationship is clear and where further exploration will make their work stronger.

High expectations depend on a mentoring relationship built through attention and care. My students know that I will question their ideas and ask them to explain the choices they make. They also know that I care about them and their work. I demonstrate that commitment through my presence in individual meetings, design discussions, rehearsals, and the theatre itself. Each student brings different strengths, experiences, and professional goals. Understanding those differences allows me to help each artist develop a meaningful path through the curriculum and approach new challenges with growing confidence.

Production work extends this relationship beyond the classroom. At Westfield State University, I provide advanced instruction through independent studies, mainstage assistant design assignments, and closely mentored student productions. Students participate in the development and realization of my designs, then apply those experiences to work for which they take greater artistic responsibility. I help them prepare design presentations, respond to collaborators, and sustain their ideas through technical rehearsals. At the graduate level, I would build on this approach through increasingly independent inquiry and design practice, supporting each student's development of a distinctive artistic voice and professional direction.

Preparing students for professional theatre requires attention to how they work with people. I model clear communication, organization, respect for others' expertise, and the ability to remain thoughtful and adaptable under pressure. A designer must be able to advocate for an idea while responding constructively to the needs of a production. These habits develop through collaborative projects and the daily work of making theatre. They matter equally to students pursuing professional design and to those who will carry the experience of theatre into other fields. In introductory courses, I also hope to cultivate informed, curious future audiences.

To teach design and technical theatre, I must remain a practitioner and a continuous student. My professional work challenges my artistic assumptions and keeps my teaching connected to contemporary production practices. Technology is an essential tool for realizing design, and students need opportunities to explore the tools they will encounter professionally. I connect those tools to artistic purpose, encouraging students to ask how a technical choice serves a particular moment or experience. My own continued learning allows me to model the curiosity and willingness to experiment that I ask of them.

The classroom, lighting lab, and rehearsal room are connected places of discovery. I want students to leave them able to observe closely, support their choices, and contribute with confidence to the work of an ensemble. Above all, I want them to recognize the value of their own artistic voices and the responsibility and pleasure of sharing those voices with others. Helping students develop that combination of creative independence, collaborative generosity, and joy is at the center of my teaching.