

## Ta'Varis Wilson, MFA

### Teaching Philosophy

As a Black theatre artist, my teaching philosophy is rooted in the belief that theatre is one of the most powerful mediums for cultural expression, social reflection, and personal transformation. Through my commitment to nurturing artistic excellence and fostering cultural fluency, I aim to empower students to become thoughtful, skilled, and socially conscious theatre practitioners. I have accomplished these goals through inclusive pedagogy, activism through performance, and mentorship and holistic development.

Theatre is a mirror reflecting the diverse narratives of humanity and having a thorough understanding of the intersectionality of identity is a crucial aspect of the theatre experience. In the classroom, I am dedicated to curating a curriculum that celebrates the contributions of Black playwrights, actors, and directors. By examining a wide array of theatrical works rooted in the African diaspora, I aim to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the diverse narratives that have shaped and continue to shape Black theatre. By integrating works from African American playwrights, directors, and performers, I provide students with a comprehensive understanding of the cultural, historical, and social contexts that shape African American theatre. Representation matters, both on and off the stage, and I actively work to amplify voices that have historically been marginalized.

It is important to recognize that every artist has a unique and creative voice. In educational theatre, I find it essential to create a safe space for students as their creative voice is being developed and ever evolving. I strive to create an environment where students feel encouraged to explore their individual artistic identities. One way that I have accomplished that at our institution is an annual variety show titled ***This Is Us*** which encourages students to have time to showcase all facets of their artistry through poetry, songs, rap, dance and scene work. This showcase gives every student the opportunity to express their creative voice in a safe space free from judgment.

In the theatre classroom, I create an environment where students from all backgrounds feel seen, heard, and valued. By embracing diverse perspectives and experiences, I aim to foster a collaborative space where each student contributes to the collective artistic dialogue. This inclusivity extends not only to the content of our productions but also to the collaborative process and the varied voices within the theatre community. I have fostered a culture where all are welcome to participate in theatre. The campus witnessed this with our highest grossing production in the history of the university, of ***The Color Purple*** which included theatre majors, non-majors, faculty, staff and alumni.

Theatre has the power to be a force for social change. Whether through thought-provoking productions, socially conscious performances, or community engagement, I aim to instill a sense of responsibility for using theatre as a means to challenge inequities and advocate for justice. In 2018 I produced ***Ruined*** by Lynn Nottage and we partnered with **URGE**(*Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity*) by bringing awareness to not only the women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also bringing awareness to reproductive and gender inequities in the United States of America.

Theatre, at its essence, is a form of activism. I encourage students to view their craft as a form of activism. In 2021, theatre majors selected ***The Colored Museum*** by George C. Wolfe to raise

awareness to racial stereotypes that still plague the black community more than 30 years since its original premiere.

Mentorship is at the core of my teaching philosophy. I view each student as a unique artist on a personal journey of growth with untapped potential. Beyond honing acting and directing skills, I emphasize the development of the whole artist. Students are encouraged to cultivate resilience, adaptability, and a lifelong love for learning. By instilling a strong work ethic, critical thinking, and an entrepreneurial spirit, I prepare students for success in the professional theatre world and beyond.

In addition to artistic expression, I prioritize the development of technical skills. I equip students with the tools necessary for successful careers in the ever-evolving field of theatre. Embracing both traditional and innovative approaches, I encourage students to experiment, take risks, and push the boundaries of theatrical expression. My aim is to prepare students for the multifaceted demands of the theatre industry and to instill a lifelong love for learning, artistic exploration and unlock that potential. I have seen students forge many paths in the theatre industry from working professionally in the theatre, television and film industry, pursuing graduate studies in acting or theatre education and recruitment for Disney.

Lynn Nottage stated, ***“I love my people's history. I feel a huge responsibility to tell the stories of my past and my ancestors' past.”*** Lynn Nottage's aforementioned quote has also informed how I approach dialogue with students and other theatre artists. How does my people's history inform my present and our future? We discover those answers through inclusive pedagogy, through activism through performance, and through mentorship and holistic development. We discover this answer through the art that is called-Theatre.