

Teaching Philosophy—Jane Barnette

The classroom is a sacred space where significant personal and cultural change can occur. I consider the classroom my stage and my teaching role as stage manager/director/acting coach. In treating my classroom as a stage, I embrace the paradox of discipline and joy that can be found in successful live performance: the *joy* of discovery and imagination that is made possible by the *disciplined* preparation and execution of the production team. The essence of this approach is to foster a space wherein the students and I become an honored community built on mutual respect and the desire to make the world outside (or “off-stage”) a better place for all. Because I believe that undergraduate theatre majors should approach scholarship as a form of public performance, my approach to teaching theatre history centers on building critical thinking skills through the development and delivery of oral presentations, formatted as panels with opportunities for discussion. These panels resemble those of academic conferences, and serve to embody and enliven the scholarly experience. The lively discussions that follow the presentations remind students that (theatre) history is open to interpretation and that they can (and should) be a vital part of that scholarly conversation. Every class I teach includes at least one assignment that requires students to participate in this work—what I call public scholarship.

More recently, I have embraced the tenets of Ungrading for my classes, as part of my commitment to compassionate pedagogy. Unlike the traditional emphasis on rigor, my teaching emphasizes accessibility and kindness, by building course policies and procedures alongside students, as part of my desire for transparency and buy-in for all who make up the community of teaching and learning. Rather than point values or percentages attached to assignments, then, we consider the labor required by each activity, along with how the community (of students, teaching assistants if applicable, and me) will assign value to the corresponding portion of labor

expected. The Ungrading approach continues to gain traction in higher education, because it shifts students' attention away from trying to please the teacher (as a means of earning an "A") to honoring their commitment to the classroom community and to their own creative and scholarly labor. The result is learning without fear of failure—indeed, learning from mistakes and peers in a supportive environment that allows for risk-taking and innovation. The result is that the entire community—the students and the teacher/s—enjoys the experience, and pleasure and increased freedom to be curious and to experiment are exactly the responses I hope to foster.