

My **Teaching philosophy** encompasses community-based, culturally responsive learning which is at the heart of my pedagogical practices. I actively look to engage with students who have previously been or felt excluded from Dance Education. Most importantly, this population scores higher than average on the [Adverse Childhood Experiences Scale \(ACEs\)](#). Meaning there is a relationship between their childhood and environmental experiences and how it impacts their health, life expectancy, relationships, and life choices. I firmly believe that inclusive education is transformative. Education creates access to critical information and helps students imagine different modalities of existing in the world. Dance training is part of therapy since it is learning an Art. According to A.C.E. the Arts is part of data-driven therapy to heal trauma. I have seen this in my teaching years before I ever saw A.C.E.'s results. It's why I still teach, as well as the pleasure of watching any person become the Dance artist they want to be.

My priority as a dance educator is to foster curiosity and healthy risk taking while respecting the body's capabilities in the present moment. In order to train dancers to become self-reliant in their creative and technical development, I offer a vast palette of tools for tuning into the current needs and capabilities of one's own body. I view my classroom as a laboratory where specific and guided ways of moving are used for technical and artistic self-discovery. Using meta cognition and self-assessment strategies which I facilitate and teach, my goal is to have my students gradually, and/or suddenly, recognize and develop their strengths, as well as areas of weaknesses. This is invaluable since not all technique teachers will teach the way students might best individually learn movement. This self-discovery fostered through the joy of moving, and the innate, childlike love of dancing is what a well-respected colleague once called the "fun is in the discipline, and the discipline is in the fun" - (quote from Homer Bryant).

Using a somatic approach, I aspire to train strong, versatile, flexible, intelligent, clear and receptive dancers. I encourage students to creatively embody each dance phrase by exploring bold and extended use of space as well as intricate and gestural details. Use of imagery stimulated by one's imagination and what is said/shown in class is brought to the artist's awareness. Using Somatic modalities, such as my *Heller Floor Barre Method®*, based in kinesiology, I encourage understanding of how technique works in the body, development of their musicality, and creative expression that comes from a place of genuine authenticity. I also want them to explore ways to be totally engaged in the process even when they feel it's challenging to develop a strong, smart work ethic. I am interested in nurturing a dancer into being accepting of who they are in the moment, and what they are becoming in the next, during this metamorphic training experience.

Throughout all classes I teach, I emphasize economy as well as efficiency of movement, through alignment and a clear conception of weight and its relationship to gravity. I vary meter, use of phrasing, and genres of music to develop awareness of one's own natural rhythm inclinations, and how this can serve other's musicality demands. In all the technique classes I teach, emphasis is placed on dynamics. In Modern classes, silence is used as well.

The art of dance takes drive and patience. You can't skip any steps. I believe that gratification is earned by committing to the time/focus. I nurture dancers to have an open mind because they are instruments for choreographers, and they need to develop the capacity to understand what each choreographer wants. Intimately knowing the levels, directions and places of space, dancing with different energies, and choosing how to respond to music and a soundscape, are all explored when learning/selecting artistic responses as a performer or in composing dance. Levels of responding and trusting themselves, as well as in each other, are explored within the improv/contact improvisational classwork.

As an educator, I believe it is crucial to provide students with excellent real world training experiences, a good repertoire, and a great support system. I want them to focus on being ready to learn through mental and physical strategies of preparation, to love the work of dance training and rehearsing, and to have that be a transformational experience beyond the time one has on stage. I want them to have a personal commitment to better themselves as both artists and technicians. In turn I also like to bring to their awareness how dance can teach one to simply live well, smart, and healthy not just in the mind/body, but emotionally, if they pay attention and apply what they learn in training to life. I like to see dancers who are so strong they can be vulnerable. As a dancer, sometimes one works and progresses, only to hit a ceiling at some point. To move beyond to the next level, you have to be able to take a step back and allow yourself to be out of your comfort zone in order to move two or three steps forward. You have to be so secure in doing this that you're willing to question, experiment and rebalance your approach.

Embedded in my studio courses are dances allowing students to discover their power of "focus" and "time" they give to their practice as a "hack" to how anyone becomes a working dancer. A little talent is all that is needed, however the rest is years of good, consistent training facilitated for the student in their choice of focus and time. Not hard work, but inspired persistence. This approach to studio-based classes is designed to help students regulate within their parasympathetic nervous system response. Oftentimes, in dance training, it is common to experience a sympathetic, or "fight or flight" survival response. My intentions as a dance educator are to coach students into a "dance and digest" response. I want them to practice curiosity, play with that curiosity and experiment as an active participant in their own education, which increases the overall learning and retention of knowledge.

I am a social constructivist educator. Learning how to "behold" others in class as they create Art allows students to discover different approaches to the same material, or directs them in how the choreographer wants the material to be danced. "Shopping" when kinetically researching one's own work and when watching others dance is something I model for students. Buying into different ways one's own body can move, or when watching others problem solve how to dance a given movement phrase are strategies that I incorporate into the fabric of the class. Becoming aware between the differences of their own cultural knowledge system, which can dictate prejudices and pre-judgments, and witnessing another dancer's process as a way to grow in them. This approach fosters a community of learners who constantly feed off of each other's learning. It can replace the jealousy and insecure feelings so often experienced as a dancer when one mistakenly compares one's self to others in unnecessarily critical ways, instead of respecting and honoring their own process. I also take pleasure in teaching to my students motifs and combinations from many other artists from all

over the world. During these select classes they experience how to become their own best teacher in any professional class they may attend, making any material work for them as a training artist.

In technique classes, I enjoy giving students opportunities to make links between the movement they are embodying and beginning to own, and its historical lineage. This practice creates an awareness of their responsibility in the continuation of a technique by honoring its past vocabulary, while beginning to discover for themselves how to enrich and infuse the technique to serve their own as well as other's choreographic and educational endeavors. As both a dance educator and choreographer, I have always been a strong advocate of dancers and audiences both knowing the lineage of their adopted past, whether practicing in a dance form or witnessing it.

I am a passionate educator who greatly enjoys teaching, mentoring, and directing dancers. I am grateful for the opportunity to encourage expression, self-discovery and discipline through an art form that I honor so deeply and have devoted my career to.

Additional Benchmarks if needed:

I actively make space for differing perspectives and honor students' identities and cultural backgrounds through verbal and embodied modalities:

- (1) I listen to every word and movement my students are communicating to me verbally and nonverbally. I create lesson plans on ways to introduce information for all ten learning intelligences ([Howard Gardner](#)). I bring awareness to my students of the best ways they learn, how not every teacher will teach to these, and how they can learn material for themselves no matter how the teacher teaches. This makes them their own best teacher, in anything.
- (2) I encourage them to try different ways to learn to strengthen that intelligence in themselves. A choice that is theirs alone, yet very empowering. Our societies usually do not encourage this pliability in the brain/body. Solid research now proves this can happen, at any age, simply by learning anything new. I have observed adding awareness to how one's high intelligences are used to learn enables one to focus on strengthening their lower intelligences as well.
- (3) I spend time getting to know my students and build an environment that is specifically tailored to their learning.
- (4) My students feel comfortable enough to ask really interesting questions, and listen to each other for them.
- (5) I explain how to Dance a step, approach a movement, or creative compositional problem in multiple ways often to ensure I am not using language that excludes – I am committed to serving each person's learning intelligences that are already high due to the unique ability mix we each have, students where English is a second language, first-generation college students and students who are labeled "from socio-economic places" with little to no access to Dance education.
- (6) I give varying points of view in course content, teaching different perspectives from history to get a larger, more richly complex idea of the course materials in context.
- (7) I encourage and model "shopping" while beholding other Dancer's in class. Choosing what one wants to "buy" from another dancer's practice, including clarity on what they do not want. Both are equally important, and honor each other while training in public, and training together. I teach from an old proverb some scholars say is from Africa – "Go fast, go alone, go far, go together."