

EDI STATEMENT

Michael Osinski

While I may have a hands-on approach to learning, I realize theatre isn't always fun and games. After having gone through Rowan University's DEI Training and having done some of my own reading and research, I've adjusted my approach to better acknowledge my privilege, to recognize that my perspective is not the definitive one, and to make sure all students feel safe to share their ideas in my classroom and rehearsal room.

I've added more plays by BIPOC and LGBTQ+ playwrights to my curricula. I've taught classics like *Medea* and *The Tempest* from feminist and postcolonial perspectives and introduced modern adaptations like Luis Alfaro's *Mojada* and Césaire's *A Tempest*. I've made directors more aware of the semiotics of their casting and design choices. Most of all I've encouraged students to *listen* to each other, and I've spent more time *listening* to them.

No class better demonstrates my commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion than my Modern Directions class at Temple University. (Syllabus available upon request.) In the course we examine the statements contemporary theatre artists make about race and gender, as well as the myriad ways they choose to make them. The course relies heavily on student-driven discussions. Rather than deliver a lot of old pre-made lectures, I adapt and guide the conversation to reflect what students want to discuss about the plays we read.

In this class – and in all my classes – I try to overtly acknowledge my privilege by putting on the “privilege hat,” a phrase I use before I introduce something students might construe as “privileged.” It gives them the freedom to critique my statement and to practice articulating and supporting their own position for future conversations outside class.

In rehearsal I want my actors to feel like their voices are being heard, especially if they are used to being overlooked because of their backgrounds or identities. I try to make it clear to students that I'm just a “facilitator” in the process. I have ideas to get the ball rolling, but *they* take ownership of the material. When we devised a piece around *A Doll's House* and 1950's pop culture at Arcadia University, the students took charge of doing dramaturgical research, creating their characters, writing drafts of scenes, and coming up with costume ideas. If they wanted to infuse a little Beyoncé in their character, they could. If they didn't feel comfortable including something, no matter what the reason, it didn't make the cut.

In a more conventional rehearsal process, I've learned to simply listen to my actors and make adjustments. I listened when a Black student in my production of Brecht's *Arturo Ui* expressed concern over what historical references her costume and character might convey, and we made changes to the costume design and the performance to ensure that she felt comfortable moving forward. I listened when a non-binary Latinx student voiced their concerns over the way their character was written, and we consulted with the playwright about making a few changes to pronouns and other language in the script.

I know there is no such thing as a “safe space” in the real world, but I want my students to feel safe enough to play, to solve problems, and to be themselves in my classes and rehearsals. It's not my job to impose a restrictive vision, idea, or worldview on my students. I'm here to give them challenges I know they can surmount, to create art with them, and above all, to *listen* to them.