

Jane Jerardi
Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher, I aim to remain a constant student, creating an environment where I learn as much from my students as they do from me. Through learning by doing, I put into action the methods of my artistic practice, as a way to facilitate students' development of their own creative process. Modeling some of my most valued mentors, I aim to teach students to become their own teachers by guiding them to develop their own research, questions, problems, and practice.

How does this happen? It begins with creating a strong container in order to encourage students to let go and experiment. It means creating a culture where students' voices and opinions are valued and they are pushed to articulate them and to listen to one another closely. This can happen in a range of ways, dependent on the area I teach – from dance improvisation and composition, to reading and writing about performance and contemporary art, to technical skills in video editing, or designing a space for an audience to inhabit. I aim to instill a sense of rigor, pushing students to hold themselves up to their highest standards, while also always encouraging generosity, with one another and themselves.

I teach from my creative process in which I connect textual and media discourses with the bodily. In the classroom, I use many of the methods of my own practice. An outside source or instruction – such as an interesting article in the newspaper, a series of observations noted from the 'deep listening' over a short walk, or a directive to video or improvise in a limited space or time – might begin an inquiry into developing movements, actions, images, or texts.

I often use time constraints to push students to generate on the spot, and then slowly encourage them to continue to hone, build, edit, and develop their material. This could happen by employing repetition, looking for a certain continuity, changing the space, expanding or shortening the time, or any host of manipulations. By looking at one another's brainstorming, we begin to respond. What do students find attractive? What seems boring? Why? Could the boring become interesting? This begins an effort to teach students to shut down their 'inner-critic' and editorial voice to allow themselves to generate material freely, while learning how to later edit from what they see. From the material itself, we begin to develop a structure that forms something more concrete.

Students use this process in assignments between class sessions. I use writing, recording, and documenting to teach the importance of developing a discipline to one's practice. Such outside work creates a sense of accountability. I might ask students to improvise each day, or video for a minute each day over the course of the week and then record their observations. They then might use these observations as a score or script for their next work – or it might become a script for a classmate's response. I teach how to make from seemingly very little, so that instead of obsessing over ideas, students discover and uncover ideas from working at regular intervals. In this way, students don't wait for 'good' ideas but learn that crafting and honing proves just as important as the initial impulse to make an artwork, performance, writing, or video.

One's ideas become fuel for others' production and vice versa. When critiquing one another's work, we learn about our own tastes, and the complexity of audience response. During critiques of student work, the artist who presents their work doesn't speak at first. This encourages listening, and removes the need to defend one's choices. Instead, the artist can distill the comments s/he hears. Instead of offering suggestions or prescriptions for an artwork, I require the viewers to articulate something specific that they did or did not find compelling as witnesses. This allows the artist to make their own decisions and forces the viewers to get more specific about *what* we saw, *how* we experienced, and the emotions/sensations/thoughts we *felt*. We learn to connect language and critical thinking to the abstract and bodily.

Another strategy includes not critiquing in the traditional sense at all. When a student shows a piece of work, writing or video, I ask one or two students to instead make a creative response to the work to show at the next class. This encourages a sense of generative practice – that we learn not by judging necessarily, but by using what at first we may deem a ‘success’ or a ‘failure’ and view it instead as simply another invitation to create. By experiencing a creative response, the initial artist sees the way an audience viewed their work and generates new ideas that s/he might have never considered before. This also creates a community of makers that acknowledges the importance of viewership to creation.

I often rely on my body-knowledge, my intuition, and my experience as an improviser.

Forms and structures in a given class session always allow for improvisation around and through them – I often deviate from the script. I respond in the moment to students and shift course during a class session when needed. I demonstrate to students the importance of improvisation. By directing in a thoughtful, sometimes participatory manner, I teach how to lead others and collaborate in a way that honors one another’s strengths and weaknesses. I help students develop ‘rules’ and then guide them to creatively break them too.

I consider often the ways we all bring our unique selves into a classroom space. When teaching more technical material – whether a movement exercise or the way to use a computer program, I consider that some of us are more visual, aural, or kinesthetic learners. I aim to show and re-show, lead, and encourage students to experience key concepts so that everyone gets a chance to understand in a way that makes the most sense to them – by watching, listening, *and* feeling/experiencing.

I aim to integrate mind and body in the classroom, starting often with listening to the body and warming-up so that we can arrive, and become more present. By maintaining a constant sense of ‘clock time’ – I allow students to drop into ‘body time’ – a different space, outside of the internet, the day-to-day, which privileges an amorphous, open, uncertain space – a gap –from which to generate.

I integrate theory and practice. The technical and the practical become informed by readings, discussion, and viewing other artists’ work. Theory becomes grounded in our specific explorations, so we never learn about technical concepts divorced from the discourse around them. I often ask students to present their own questions about readings, and to present them to facilitate discussion. I encourage students to become life-long learners by requiring them to go and see performances, exhibitions, screenings, and lectures and write in response to them. They again learn that we become strong editors and directors by becoming attuned viewers. In this way, I show how we occupy multiple roles as artists – audience members, creators, scholars/writers – and that these roles can work to support one another, to create artwork that speaks compellingly of the world, its dilemmas, and in ways that can offer meaningful insights into the socio-political and cultural conversations of our moment.