

MATTHEW SHAFFER

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TEACHING STATEMENT

Without a doubt, my career as an artist was possible because of the educators and mentors who took a chance on me. What I may have lacked in my natural ability or facility, was nurtured and cultivated through education and application. Those teachers quickly witnessed my determination and passion--and had the experience, knowledge, and dedication to foster my journey--through pragmatic lessons and innovative studio projects. As an educator, I believe it's essential to recognize that each of our students is unique, thus quickly ascertaining what method of communication they are capable of and eager to receive information.

A product of an interdisciplinary MFA program, I am an advocate for higher education and the power of diversity in information. That said, I was an apprentice with Giordano Dance Chicago when I was nineteen years old. During that time, I studied alongside Gus Giordano and observed the practical application of his syllabus through studio workshops and community performances; reinforcing the value of experiential learning.

Drawing on the tools, insight, and devotion of my mentors, my classroom approach is fluid and constantly evolving. Of course, there is structure--any influential educator knows that the container holds the contents. Just as I believe every artist--human--is a work in progress, so too, are our students. Sharing information and establishing a firm foundation from those artists and educators who developed or refined the techniques, genres, and vocabularies for dance and theater, I excel at creating fresh new ways to incorporate the past with the present.

I am a collaborative educator. I don't think I know everything; I know I don't. I rely on the twenty-five years I've spent as a performer, choreographer, and educator to assess where my strengths are, and call upon my peers to fill in those gaps.

You can read about Bob Fosse. You can share his work on film. Until you bring in a protégé, like my colleague and friend, Kim Morgan Greene, you won't grasp the full scope of Fosse's movement, motive, and material.

This shouldn't suggest that I'm not a well-rounded facilitator. In the sixteen years that I've worked as an educator in afterschool enrichment programs in under-serviced communities; regional dance studios; professional schools like Broadway Dance Center, NYC and Giordano Dance Center, Chicago; residencies in England, Germany, and the US; on conventions like Fluid Dance; and in higher education, I have established a solid method of igniting the passion in a room while communicating the history of the work and the power of sharing a story through dance and theater.