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Diversity Plan

It is important to teach our subject matter, but more important than methods, facts, and theories is empathy. Having a plan for diversity in place helps to not only create a welcoming and safe classroom environment but to establish and nurture empathy and compassion.

Every new class will contain similarities and differences. It is important to address diversity in the classroom by working with the students to establish observable norms and expectations. By including the students in the creation of these parameters, their ideas and their voices are heard. The instructor should lead the conversation to address the following items: an agreement upon appropriate and preferred language when discussing people made; and races; an attitude that encourages students to share traditions and rituals to promote a better understanding of various religions; guidelines and protocols for honoring genders and pronouns including an honest conversation about how to address when mistakes are made; and a step by step plan for sharing concerns with peers, professors and administrators. Establishing a strong and collaborative foundation will help to maintain a learning environment that is inviting and safe for everyone.

When conflicts arise, it is important that the teacher holds conversations so that students can express their concerns. The teacher should provide a variety of lines of communication to address each student's communication preference. By combining established methods like email and in-person office hours with daily check-ins, both in person and individually online, students have a variety of ways to communicate their concerns. Students should know who their advocates are within the department and the order in which to contact them.

In addition to cultivating an accepting environment, it is important to bring diverse methodologies into the classroom. For an Introduction to Theatre Education class, it is critical to not just focus on the Western styles of acting, playwrights, and history but explore the demographics of your class. The teacher can provide texts and plays that celebrate and educate everyone. Students will not only see themselves represented but learn about the heritage of their fellow classmates. Knowledge is power and a student population that feels seen while learning is powerful. *Black Acting Methods* by Sharrel D Luckett and Tia M. Shaffer is a valuable resource in teaching contributions of Black Culture in theatre arts. *Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality in Latin/o America* by Diana Taylor and Juan Villegas provides insight to the history and inclusion of all varieties of Latin/o theatre. It is also important to remember that diversity also includes neurodivergent students. *Teaching Strategies for Neurodiversity and Dyslexia in Actor Training: Sensing Shakespeare* by Petronilla Whitfield provides investigations of students, definitions of dyslexia and neurodiversity, exploration of social labels, and a discussion of the stress experienced by acting students with dyslexia. These texts address the needs of a diverse population and are valuable reference materials for beginning teachers.

Throughout my career as a Texas public educator, I had the opportunity to attend valuable seminars and workshops. Two of the most influential speakers I heard were a representative from Boy's Town Training and Ruby Payne, author of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Both provided wisdom and practical applications to employ when interacting with struggling students. The Boy's Town fundamental philosophy of positivity and consistency is the foundation for a successful and positive classroom. Ruby Payne opened my eyes to the American class system and equipped us with knowledge and skills to help navigate the unwritten rules that apply and

trickle down into classroom behaviors. Even though I attended these lectures years ago, the lessons I learned are still valid today and can be applied to navigating a diverse community.

With every new class, teachers are often afraid of making a mistake. There are variables when working to create a protected space to learn and grow. That is why it is most important to establish that everyone is entering the classroom with a “beginner’s mind.” That means that grace needs to be at the forefront of our minds and hearts. Every student is at a different stage of their growth, and we cannot assume everyone is fluent in all the levels of diversity. By establishing that we are all starting at the beginning and setting the norms for our own class and its participants, we level the field and allow learning and grace to lead the way. We are there to learn about each other, with each other and from each other. We are a community, a community committed to being the best versions of ourselves.