

Gabriel Mata
phonetic pronunciation: (gah-bryehl mah-tah) - pronouns: he/him/his
Teaching Statement

Teaching is constantly evolving and active endeavor. I engage a teaching practice that falls within the canon of classical western concert dance while also questioning and thinking critically about our present modern identity and conversations. My research looks into dance history, pedagogy, choreography, and embodiment. There are expectations and notions on subject matter, I bring attention to deconstructing, inclusion, and reassessing. In relation to students, forms of observation and engagement that stem from the student's experience is prioritized. For the students, the negotiation between their individual form of access and the course content is of critical importance. I work to understand where and how each student's identity is able to engage and access. As a class collective, I do not limit the relationship to students as receptive bodies and minds in the classroom. Engagement with students has promote their contributions as researchers, historians, thinkers, and movers.

Discussing the research methodology and tools for the course in relation to their experience needs critical attention. Students various levels of access creates a dialogue in awareness to how they will engage within the course; with consent, elaborating on how systems of oppression in academic institutions places some at a disadvantage while privileged others at an advantage. Offering students an opportunity for personal identification creates a space that will acknowledge their presence. This also takes form as identification with pronouns, pronunciation of their name, or varying forms of identify. Lastly, varying approaches should be accessible. Each student interprets and learns in their own way, in being receptive to students' form of access or methodology, the course can work to also develop engaged practices from the student. This constitutes an active conversation between "instructor" and "student," being able to hear how the student may find alternate forms of access. Negotiating with the class and pace is of importance.

An intermediate-advanced ballet course that I taught at the University of Maryland - College Park expanded from the notions of teaching. The course introduced modern approaches supported by contemporary educators and research. Engaging on discussion on themes of the genre, such as how contentious use of the French terminology, navigating class without the barre, offering various forms of musicality, and how to observe at classical choreographies and challenge of inclusive engagement within western concert dance. The loaded 400-year old genre was known and respected by the students. I was met with reservation, I reflected on my approach and developed various methods of approach. The responses generated practices that would challenge them within the development of the semester and their own identity. Individual meetings during the pre-midterm timeframe through end of semester articulated how they were working with the newly introduced ideas and how they are accessing class. At the end of the semester, the ballet movers submitted their final personal review and development analysis, they expressed how the themes they were researching and embodied were pertinent throughout their own personal narrative, in conversation with ballet, and were concise with how the semester developed.

Recognizing how institutions and academia favors western concert dance forms, I attend to how this limits the value of unrecognized dance forms and the educational experience that is

unattended. My research in Disco dance and culture has been able to offer information that is not offered in academic institutions. Teaching masterclasses in Disco has recognized the collective notions of inclusion in Disco and introducing the historical context and how it relates to present themes. The genre expands on identity, politics, sexuality, and social movements. It is not just about dancing, but a critical investigation of socio-political themes that created the movement. I question that in looking at the development of Disco, can history repeat itself? I ask the movers to express themselves in the moving space. Examining Disco historically but incorporating participants identity and experience, is how masterclasses are navigated. This brings into the space, not just a reenactment, but a present embodiment and environment that offers values within the academia.

Approaching dance education through the codified classical notions from institutions is not enough, taking into consideration our present awareness, conversations, and politics. Developing a teaching practice that incorporates individuality while also interrogating constructs is an approach that needs to be supported. I continue to seek and generate an environment that engages with each individual student while also challenging and heightening their own knowledge and how they students navigate course content and ideas, prioritizing their forms of access. Allowing for a conversation and varying notions of teaching rather than the traditional forms of expectation. It is a tireless effort, however, I hold myself accountable in invigorating classical western concert dance with the incorporation of various bodies that make up the environment we teach.