

TEACHING STATEMENT

As a Hijabi¹ actor, I discovered early on that navigating the world of performance would require reconciling my religious beliefs as a Muslim with the expectations of my craft. This journey led me to a spiritual and academic crossroads, where I sought guidance from religious leaders, academics in Religious Studies, and fellow veiled actors. Through these exchanges, I was able to develop a personalized process that honors my faith and enhances my artistic practice. I still struggle with the question of ‘is this permissible within my faith’ but through this questioning and intersectionality of faith and art I was able to discover a process that is non-traditional and individualized that works for my craft. It is with this precise level of artistic debate and discovery that I bring to each of my students. I support those who grapple with unfamiliar concepts or who feel constrained by societal expectations. My goal is to guide each student on their own path of artistic growth with empathy and encouragement.

In teaching both theoretical and practical theatre courses in the Middle East and the United States, I’ve observed that while student backgrounds and approaches vary, two common challenges persist: many students work out of fear, and most seek a personal connection with their craft. I strive to help students overcome these barriers by creating a classroom environment rooted in trust. Trust is earned through active listening, empathetic understanding, and an openness to learning together. In my classes, I cultivate a sense of community where students feel safe to take creative risks and explore new facets of themselves.

One of the first activities I assign is the Identity Illustration, where students create a stick figure and label different parts with words that represent their values, influences, and experiences. This exercise fosters self-awareness and builds rapport, encouraging students to bring their full selves to the classroom. I also have each class establish community norms that reflect our shared goals and values, and these norms guide our interactions and hold us accountable throughout the semester.

My teaching process involves challenging societal norms and encouraging students to think beyond conventional expectations. Phrases like “there’s no such thing as looking foolish” and “fail again and discover” help students embrace vulnerability and gain agency in their learning. As trust grows, students learn to critique constructively, analyze critically, and engage with our curriculum at a deeper level. These skills serve them not only in performance but in all areas of professional and personal life.

¹ *Hijabi* is a term used to describe a Muslim woman who wears the *hijab*, which is a headscarf or covering that some Muslim women choose to wear as a part of their faith. The hijab typically covers the hair, neck, and sometimes shoulders, while leaving the face clear. Wearing the hijab is a personal and religious choice often made to express modesty and identity in accordance with Islamic guidelines.

Daily physical warm-ups play a vital role in my classes, helping students release stress and focus on being fully present in the “now,” creating a state of relaxed readiness for both physical and intellectual engagement. By mid-semester, students take turns leading these warm-ups, sharing responsibility and strengthening their connection with one another.

As an educator, I aim not only to equip students with technical skills but also to train them to be citizen actors. I believe that the empathy and understanding required to embody another character and collaborate with peers ultimately benefit their roles within their personal lives and communities. This holistic approach fosters meaningful connections and insights that can lead to real change and transformation in the world around them. As the educator and actor, Dr. Anna Deavere Smith, states, “The act of creating a character is an act of understanding.” Such understanding is crucial for nurturing compassion and promoting social justice in our communities.

My grading approach emphasizes progress and accountability. After the first in-class performance or assignment, students who meet the technical requirements receive full credit, and we set new goals for their next assignment. If they show progress, they earn a similar grade; if not, their grade reflects the lack of growth. I am also interested in exploring “ungrading,” a transformative assessment method that allows students to focus on qualitative growth and self-assessment rather than numeric scores. This approach encourages students to reflect critically on their learning processes, setting personal goals that foster deeper engagement with the material. By shifting the focus from grades to individual improvement, ungrading cultivates a sense of ownership over their educational journey, promoting intrinsic motivation and personal agency. It allows for more meaningful feedback and encourages students to embrace their creative voices without the constraints of traditional grading metrics.

As the renowned educator and actor, Augusto Boal, asserted, “Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can be a means of transforming society.” This philosophy resonates deeply with my commitment to empowering students to see themselves as agents of change.

While these approaches have shaped my teaching, I believe in adapting my methods to meet the needs of each class and each student. Education, to me, is not a fixed set of strategies but a dynamic exchange of ideas, one that evolves over time. I look forward to continually learning from my students and colleagues, embracing new perspectives, and fostering mutual discovery and respect within our craft.