

## **Maurice Chinnery**

### **Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Statement**

At the end of the day, I want my students to be good, kind, decent human beings. I believe the answer is to ensure that our classrooms remain on level grounds so that all students of all creeds can thrive. The classroom should be a place in which topics of race, sexual orientation, physical sex, and religion can and should be explored. Respectfully of course. One can never truly know the trials of someone else, but they can still see and hear it. Empathize with it. This level ground I'm speaking of can manifest itself in structuring classes to be truly inclusive.

Dr. Marian Higgins College of Ed, UGA defines inclusivity as "providing a welcoming, respectful, supportive, valued environment for all". It's by this definition that I run my classes by. Although we all know how much diversity and true equity come into play especially in higher education, it wasn't until coming across this that a lightbulb went off for me. If the focus of class is to uplift all voices and include everyone at the table then the next step would be to get everyone to empathize with different lived experiences.

Seeing as my area of expertise is in that of the theater I feel as if I have the upper hand in succeeding in this goal of inclusion. Truly thrilling, exciting, and great theater is one that can touch everyone's heart no matter who may be portraying the narrative. There are many different plays and methods that can be drawn upon that cater to all backgrounds. My teaching style would take bits and pieces from all the great acting teachers who have come before us, but as well as recent methods that could maybe speak to a broader range of aspiring actors. One of those methods integral to reaching this goal is Doctor Tawnya Pettiford-Wates Ritual Poetic Drama methodology.

This specific methodology was made of the necessity for her to reconnect with her cultural roots that she lost along the way in her extensive actor training. The notion of losing one's culture and identity is something I've even come to terms with myself while researching more about it. It's a notion I wish I had known more about and was encouraged to embrace in my formative years. One of the biggest items to check off in this method is by creating a safe space in the entire ensemble where every single person not only takes responsibility for their experiences, but that of everyone's experience in the group. Through this I find there is a way to form that common ground that we can all stand on. We all have fears, assumptions, and worries about race, sexuality, and religion. Using this method, I hope to give everyone the chance to share theirs while also respecting and not invalidating others.

Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity isn't about just sharing a paragraph about the topics in my syllabus. Rather it remains an ongoing conversation in the classroom with my students leading where it may go. For instance, in my last class I taught at UGA, there were two unfortunate tragic incidents on campus. Instead of attempting to power through our schedule I decided to take the entire class time and allow the students a space to speak. A space, I learned after, that wasn't given in many of their other classes. Checking in with them is important. Opening the space to foster an engaging dialogue between all your students where you let them share things that may be uncomfortable for others to hear is ok. It invites the necessary questions that come along with accepting someone's walk in life. My number one goal is allowing all students in my classroom the opportunity to be seen.