

AQUILA KIKORA FRANKLIN
TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

My instructional philosophy has developed through my educational experiences, my training as a dancer, and my work as a professional artist. It derives from the core subjects I teach which include West African Dance, Hip Hop Dance, and Mojah-Fusion Dance. Each of these forms requires the individual's full commitment, one's willingness to fail and continue trying, and the openness to consider approaches to thinking and living that may be different from his/her own.

In addition, the nature of these artistic forms requires that I recognize the student's life experiences, cultural background, and personal identity. For example, in Advanced Hip Hop, students from India, Taiwan, and Columbia shared native movements and integrated them into Hip Hop choreography; and in Mojah, a dance form that blends traditional modern with West African, jazz, and Hip Hop, students are required to journal, set long and short-term goals, and consider the reasons they dance. Having the opportunity to teach these courses is personally gratifying and humbling; as they are modes of expression that are steeped in a rich socio-cultural aesthetic derived from African and African American historical and lived experiences that is deeply meaningful to me.

Providing a strong technical foundation of the subject matter is another keystone of my teaching. I believe students must have a firm understanding of what it is they are expected to learn in order to be competent in a given area. This is accomplished through disciplined physical engagement, instruction in the movement vocabulary and terminology of the forms, and choreography. I realize that many of my students will not pursue careers as dancers. This is why it is important for me to present to them, principles related to dance and culture that translate to their broader academic and social lives. I integrate lectures, group projects, guest teachers, and discussions into the curriculum and continually work to provide a holistic approach to learning that enriches students' entire college experience.

As I consider my teaching philosophy, I must acknowledge the many passionate teachers, mentors, and advisers of whom I have been a student, and whose example has provided, in part, the basis of my pedagogical and interpersonal methods as a teacher. From the earliest years of my education, to my graduate studies in law school, I remember most, those instructors who took great care in their work and their students. Perhaps as significant are the values and ideals gleaned from members of my family, community, and people in my everyday life who have greatly influenced my worldview.

There are always challenges in creating the right balance of structure, flexibility and creativity within the classroom. As such, I use feedback from students to guide me in determining which approaches are the most effective. I hope that through all my teaching, I inspire individuals to explore their humanity through the art of dance. This idea is summed up by Hip Hop artist KRS-One who said, "[Hip Hop] gives us the courage to be us... it teaches you to be yourself, be assertive, stand up, and believe in your ability to overcome any obstacle."