

# Reflections on Teaching Everyone Else's Students

Joe Deer, Wright State University - Main Campus

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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:06,020

Joe is Professor of Musical Theater in the Department of Theater, Dance, and Motion Pictures,

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00:00:06,020 --> 00:00:12,719

head of the Musical Theater Initiative and winner of the 2013 Wright State

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00:00:12,719 --> 00:00:18,550

Trustees Award for Faculty Excellence. His accomplishments include creating and

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00:00:18,550 --> 00:00:23,990

managing the celebrated musical theater program, involvement with students and

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00:00:24,000 --> 00:00:29,390

audiences of all ages through the Muse Machine, Human Race, and Victoria Theater,

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00:00:29,390 --> 00:00:34,900

serving as founding president of the National Musical Theater Educators

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00:00:34,920 --> 00:00:40,399

Alliance, writing books and articles on teaching and performing musical theater,

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00:00:40,399 --> 00:00:45,590

serving as a guest director, choreographer, and master teacher, and

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00:00:45,590 --> 00:00:54,520

performing on Broadway. His talk is called reactions on teaching everyone else's students. Joe.

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00:00:54,520 --> 00:00:58,200

Alright great so thank you so much for having me here.

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00:00:58,200 --> 00:01:04,500

Thanks to my colleagues for coming. So yes, I was lucky to be the recipient of two semesters of

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00:01:04,500 --> 00:01:12,010

Professional Development Leave in the 2013-14 academic year and that's a pretty rare

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00:01:12,010 --> 00:01:16,790

gift and I have to say I looked at it as though it was probably the last

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00:01:16,790 --> 00:01:20,580

professional development leave I'll ever have in my career until I retire.

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00:01:20,580 --> 00:01:31,440

So I thought I should make the most of it. I wanted to.. So I'll talk a lot.. the Dean has asked me to sort of share a little about what I did during that time.

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00:01:31,440 --> 00:01:36,280

So I'll talk about that, but I'll say that I looked at it as an

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00:01:36,290 --> 00:01:41,680

opportunity to do things I haven't done otherwise or to put myself in

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00:01:41,680 --> 00:01:44,450

circumstance that's different than the one that I have here at Wright State

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00:01:44,450 --> 00:01:49,810

University. As an eighteen-year veteran of this of this university and in my

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00:01:49,810 --> 00:01:54,909

department and I know for all of you who are longstanding teachers as well. We're

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00:01:54,909 --> 00:02:01,149

used to being in a fairly stable environment. We have fairly steady

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00:02:01,149 --> 00:02:05,700

teaching schedule frequently. Often we'll go year after year teaching many of

23

00:02:05,700 --> 00:02:07,170

the same courses if not exactly

24

00:02:07,170 --> 00:02:12,330

the same courses. Certainly to new students and for those of us who work in

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00:02:12,330 --> 00:02:16,260

the performing arts of course there's new material always coming in. But we're

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00:02:16,260 --> 00:02:22,209

often in a very stable situation and I thought I wanted to put myself in a much

27

00:02:22,209 --> 00:02:27,610

less stable circumstance or at least put myself outside of my comfort zone. So

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00:02:27,610 --> 00:02:32,660

that's a big part of what I did. My work during that year off really fell into

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00:02:32,660 --> 00:02:37,160

five areas. One is created scholarship which for me is directing and

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00:02:37,160 --> 00:02:42,670

choreographing. The other is in publication, meaning writing books and

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00:02:42,670 --> 00:02:46,360

articles and all the attendant stuff that goes with that.

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00:02:46,360 --> 00:02:51,750

Doing workshops and working as a consultant with organizations all over,

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00:02:51,750 --> 00:02:57,560

outside of Wright State University and  
around the world lately. I was lucky

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00:02:57,560 --> 00:03:01,489

enough to be invited to London to the  
Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

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00:03:01,489 --> 00:03:06,810

to direct and choreograph the capstone  
production for the Master of Arts in

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00:03:06,810 --> 00:03:13,489

musical theater program there and then  
also I became the director of the

37

00:03:13,489 --> 00:03:17,680

Musical Theater Initiative right at the  
time where that really became a reality,

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00:03:17,680 --> 00:03:24,720

right at the time that my sabbatical  
began or professional development leave. Let me use the right term.

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00:03:24,720 --> 00:03:27,859

So I worked on those five things during  
that time and I'll talk a little bit

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00:03:27,859 --> 00:03:33,209

about what was involved in that. I  
directed I'm just gonna... I want to skip

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00:03:33,209 --> 00:03:38,450

through some of the minutiae of this and  
kind of get to the heart of it.

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00:03:38,450 --> 00:03:42,920

I directed six productions during  
that year:

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00:03:42,920 --> 00:03:47,870

Avenue Q for the Human Race Theatre  
Company, Seussical for the Muse Machine

44  
00:03:47,870 --> 00:03:53,430  
-and I'll talk a bit about Muse machine in a  
moment, It's a Wonderful Life, the live radio

45  
00:03:53,430 --> 00:03:56,470  
show, which was an incredible amount of  
fun for the Victory Theater

46  
00:03:56,470 --> 00:04:02,359  
Association's Broadway series. Then I went  
to London and directed and choreographed

47  
00:04:02,359 --> 00:04:08,459  
the Baker's Wife, went to West Virginia  
and did the Fantastics and finally ended

48  
00:04:08,459 --> 00:04:14,470  
up coming back to Dayton to be in for  
the first time, to end up on stage as

49  
00:04:14,470 --> 00:04:15,770  
an actor in

50  
00:04:15,770 --> 00:04:22,550  
a workshop of a new musical called  
Molly Sweeney, which was... if you want to

51  
00:04:22,550 --> 00:04:26,320  
talk about stepping out of your comfort  
zone, that was pretty much terrifying to

52  
00:04:26,320 --> 00:04:31,820  
go back on stage again after about  
twenty years. So I'm glad I did that.

53  
00:04:31,820 --> 00:04:41,480  
I choreograph three of those productions. I  
went out and did 77 workshops master

54  
00:04:41,490 --> 00:04:46,560  
classes or presentations for twenty  
different groups. So I'll tell you

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00:04:46,560 --> 00:04:49,140

sitting and doing the math on that this weekend

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00:04:49,140 --> 00:04:53,360

made me tired to look at that schedule. So I'm glad that part of the year is over

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00:04:53,360 --> 00:05:00,000

and I published a book, Directing in Musical Theater: An Essential Guide and

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00:05:00,000 --> 00:05:04,070

created the website content that goes with that. For any of you who are

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00:05:04,070 --> 00:05:11,270

publishers of textbooks or considering writing textbooks, I invite you to really good at

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00:05:11,270 --> 00:05:17,750

creating web content, because that's become as big a part of the job as

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00:05:17,750 --> 00:05:24,600

writing the book in essence and I have another book in Press a revision of or a

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00:05:24,600 --> 00:05:28,520

second edition of my first book, Acting and Musical Theater that I wrote with

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00:05:28,520 --> 00:05:33,990

Rocco Dal Vara. So that's in the process of being... We're revising it now and

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00:05:33,990 --> 00:05:39,430

expanding it and so forth and I am now published in Korea and Portugal, so.

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00:05:39,430 --> 00:05:44,810

That book has been translated into other... I

have seen the cover of the Portuguese

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00:05:44,810 --> 00:05:50,750

edition and it looks lovely. I don't speak Portuguese, so I have yet to get a copy

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00:05:50,750 --> 00:05:54,370

of that and I have no idea what the Korean edition looks like that I want to

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00:05:54,370 --> 00:06:01,530

copy of that as well. But the title of this is reflections on teaching everyone else

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00:06:01,530 --> 00:06:06,160

students and that really is the heart of what I did for the year. I loved the

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00:06:06,160 --> 00:06:09,470

experience of working with the Human Race Theater Company which is an

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00:06:09,470 --> 00:06:12,910

artistic home for me and a place that I get to work with some terrific people,

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00:06:12,910 --> 00:06:18,640

often graduates of our programs and occasionally current students and that

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00:06:18,640 --> 00:06:22,529

was the case with both Avenue Q and It's A Wonderful Life.

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00:06:22,529 --> 00:06:30,219

I had former students, several former students in Avenue Q and a handful of both

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00:06:30,219 --> 00:06:33,799

former and current students in It's A Wonderful Life. So that was that was a

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00:06:33,799 --> 00:06:39,589

great pleasure. But for the majority of the time I was away from here. I worked

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00:06:39,589 --> 00:06:45,109

with everyone else's students and everyone else's students means this. So I

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00:06:45,109 --> 00:06:48,589

said I did 77 workshops and masterclasses and so forth,

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00:06:48,589 --> 00:06:54,409

21 of those were in Dayton here working for - the Muse Machine contracted

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00:06:54,409 --> 00:06:58,959

me to do a series of workshops called So You Think You Can't Dance, which is not a

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00:06:58,959 --> 00:07:02,689

title unnecessarily chosen, but that's what they thought was gonna help book

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00:07:02,689 --> 00:07:08,079

the workshop, so we did it and I did that with Lula Elsey, who was the

83

00:07:08,079 --> 00:07:11,469

choreographer for a lot of the Muse Machine shows she's an award-winning

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00:07:11,469 --> 00:07:16,219

modern and modern dance choreographer, but primarily an educator from New Orleans.

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00:07:16,219 --> 00:07:21,929

And we went to 21 different schools throughout Dayton. Everything - these were

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00:07:21,929 --> 00:07:27,669

middle and high schools and this was everything from the most inner city

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00:07:27,669 --> 00:07:32,479



school like Ponitz Career Center  
to schools that are pretty much

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00:07:32,479 --> 00:07:38,459  
rural to suburban schools to private  
schools and parochial schools, every kind

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00:07:38,459 --> 00:07:42,769  
of school in the Dayton area and thought  
that there was really only one school I

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00:07:42,769 --> 00:07:48,509  
went to where the students were, had  
professed an interest in doing theater

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00:07:48,509 --> 00:07:54,849  
or dance or music as their primary goal  
in college. That's at Stivers School for

92

00:07:54,849 --> 00:07:58,669  
the Arts. Every other student was there  
exclusively for the enrichment

93

00:07:58,669 --> 00:08:04,449  
experience and it's an interesting thing  
to walk into a... that's the opposite of our students.

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00:08:04,449 --> 00:08:08,919  
The students that we teach at Wright  
State, that I teach dominantly are students who've

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00:08:08,919 --> 00:08:14,139  
come here, often fought very hard to get  
into the program from all over the

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00:08:14,139 --> 00:08:19,760  
country. We will have seen about  
500 students this year audition

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00:08:19,760 --> 00:08:25,600  
for about 24 positions in the acting and  
musical theater BFAs. I worked with the

98

00:08:25,600 --> 00:08:30,270  
other kind of student, the kind of  
student who is either not been exposed

99  
00:08:30,270 --> 00:08:33,770  
to the Performing Arts, never been  
exposed to dance,

100  
00:08:33,770 --> 00:08:39,890  
probably has been encumbered by a lot of  
insecurities and peer pressure and all

101  
00:08:39,890 --> 00:08:43,370  
the garbage that are high school  
students get heaped on them and middle

102  
00:08:43,370 --> 00:08:47,120  
school, although the middle school students tend to be a little bit freer, but the

103  
00:08:47,120 --> 00:08:51,930  
big thing I had to do was walk into a,  
sometimes a gymnasium full of 400

104  
00:08:51,930 --> 00:08:59,140  
students and get them - yeah it was.. we would do two a day. So in the morning I might have

105  
00:08:59,140 --> 00:09:04,250  
twenty-five students, very lovely well  
behaved little Catholic school, middle

106  
00:09:04,250 --> 00:09:08,910  
school students and then in the  
afternoon walk into a gymnasium where

107  
00:09:08,910 --> 00:09:14,730  
there were 400 students and that  
takes a little bit of work to get them

108  
00:09:14,730 --> 00:09:19,260  
focused on on your side. But the thing  
that I discovered about those students

109  
00:09:19,260 --> 00:09:24,570

is two factors profoundly impacted what kind of experience they had in the

110  
00:09:24,570 --> 00:09:28,610  
workshop. It was a fun workshop, there was nothing formal about it. The whole

111  
00:09:28,610 --> 00:09:33,350  
intention was to get up, get dancing, express yourself, learn a small piece of

112  
00:09:33,350 --> 00:09:36,530  
choreography. So they had a lot of freedom and then they had some

113  
00:09:36,530 --> 00:09:43,990  
choreography they needed to master and the two things are profoundly influenced

114  
00:09:43,990 --> 00:09:50,080  
that were, really that the most important thing was what was the culture

115  
00:09:50,080 --> 00:09:56,350  
of the school as defined by the principal and the teachers. And I got so

116  
00:09:56,350 --> 00:10:01,140  
that I could walk into a school and by meeting the people in the office, we knew

117  
00:10:01,140 --> 00:10:05,180  
what the experience was gonna be like. Not that we were, we want biased toward

118  
00:10:05,180 --> 00:10:10,190  
presuming one thing or another, but we could see very clearly that was there a

119  
00:10:10,190 --> 00:10:13,520  
lightness about the experience of education, was there a kind of the

120  
00:10:13,520 --> 00:10:18,480  
joyous atmosphere in the school or

was it a beleaguered, burdened

121

00:10:18,480 --> 00:10:23,260

experience. And I can tell you that students  
pick up on that culture immediately

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00:10:23,260 --> 00:10:27,200

and when we walked into the schools  
where there was a sense of play involved,

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00:10:27,200 --> 00:10:34,720

the principal, the teachers, the security  
guard on campus would come in and do the

124

00:10:34,720 --> 00:10:41,190

workshop with the students and when that  
was the case, those students went, I mean

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00:10:41,190 --> 00:10:45,810

they were just so free and so engaged  
and in other schools, we would go in the

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00:10:45,810 --> 00:10:49,360

teachers would drop off the students and  
leave them like they were leaving them

127

00:10:49,360 --> 00:10:53,110

at a daycare center and then they would  
go off and probably do things they

128

00:10:53,110 --> 00:10:57,290

absolutely needed to do and needed the time to do, but there

129

00:10:57,290 --> 00:11:00,700

was a profound difference in the schools  
and it was not tied to the economic

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00:11:00,700 --> 00:11:05,890

support that the school had. Not  
necessarily, on some occasions was, but it

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00:11:05,890 --> 00:11:11,440

was not necessarily at all that case. So

that was an interesting experience, a very

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00:11:11,440 --> 00:11:16,820

interesting experience. What I discovered  
in that process was not only

133

00:11:16,820 --> 00:11:21,340

does that impact how the students get  
their education or experience the arts,

134

00:11:21,340 --> 00:11:30,110

but that all of those students wanted an  
invitation to be free in their work, to

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00:11:30,110 --> 00:11:35,900

have some outside the box free  
expression. What we think of as kids

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00:11:35,900 --> 00:11:40,540

wanting to do, is often the  
last thing that they get to do in an

137

00:11:40,540 --> 00:11:44,530

educational environment. They're often... I  
could see the burden of the

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00:11:44,530 --> 00:11:49,340

testing, I could see the burden of not  
having free time. I'll tell you, we went to a

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00:11:49,340 --> 00:11:54,810

school up in Huber Heights. It was a brand  
new middle school and an absolutely - well

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00:11:54,810 --> 00:11:55,970

middle and high school -

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00:11:55,970 --> 00:12:01,760

gorgeous facility and they had about a  
third of the class rooms locked, because

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00:12:01,760 --> 00:12:07,360

though the school was built, they had not passed a levy to pay for teachers. So we had

143  
00:12:07,360 --> 00:12:11,520  
students - we are working in a gymnasium  
and we had students who were only in PE

144  
00:12:11,520 --> 00:12:16,460  
one semester a year, because they  
couldn't afford teachers to put them in

145  
00:12:16,460 --> 00:12:21,190  
there. So they had facilities, they had  
the students, but they didn't have the

146  
00:12:21,190 --> 00:12:25,540  
teacher to do it. So this is what our students are encountering.

147  
00:12:25,540 --> 00:12:31,580  
So the last thing that they had room for,  
that they had financial support for was arts education

148  
00:12:31,580 --> 00:12:35,420  
and that was the thing that was siphoned  
away and that was very disappointing to

149  
00:12:35,430 --> 00:12:41,010  
experience. I did a lot of workshops  
around the country at performing arts

150  
00:12:41,010 --> 00:12:44,280  
high schools. A lot of that was  
recruitment efforts try to bring

151  
00:12:44,280 --> 00:12:50,330  
students to our program, so the acting  
and musical theater programs and those

152  
00:12:50,330 --> 00:12:53,530  
students tend to be very focused and  
they're more like the kind of students

153  
00:12:53,530 --> 00:12:58,690  
that I encountered, these things very  
focused conservatory oriented students

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00:12:58,690 --> 00:13:03,090

and that was a lot of fun and a great pleasure to work with them and

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00:13:03,090 --> 00:13:08,100

like some of my colleagues in the summer, I go and do extended teaching

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00:13:08,100 --> 00:13:14,250

residencies. I work down at CCM, at University of Cincinnati CCM in their summer

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00:13:14,250 --> 00:13:18,520

intensive as one of their resident faculty members. I do a week of intensive

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00:13:18,520 --> 00:13:24,960

workshops for them. They're bowling upstairs I think. And those students are

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00:13:24,960 --> 00:13:30,850

exactly the students that I encounter. But the other major teaching experience

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00:13:30,850 --> 00:13:35,490

than I had was going to England. I went to London for five weeks and that was

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00:13:35,490 --> 00:13:42,010

thanks to the support of the Dean's Office and the Office of Research and

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00:13:42,010 --> 00:13:46,240

Sponsored Programs here on campus. I was able to go to London for five weeks and

163

00:13:46,240 --> 00:13:49,230

work at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, which is one of the

164

00:13:49,230 --> 00:13:54,280

great theater programs of the world. I was invited to, as I said to direct and

165

00:13:54,280 --> 00:13:58,950

choreograph the capstone production for the Master of Arts and Music Theatre and

166

00:13:58,950 --> 00:14:02,190

I expected and I would encounter students very much like the kind of

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00:14:02,190 --> 00:14:06,570

people that I teach here, but it turned out to be quite different actually.

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00:14:06,570 --> 00:14:13,420

I worked with students from nine different countries: China, Argentina, Chile, Trinidad.

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00:14:13,430 --> 00:14:21,690

the US, Ireland all through the UK, and Australia. So I think that's nine from

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00:14:21,690 --> 00:14:23,460

all across the country,

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00:14:23,460 --> 00:14:28,300

all over the world rather, ages about twenty to thirty eight and those

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00:14:28,300 --> 00:14:31,960

students, some of them did come from conservatory programs very similar to

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00:14:31,960 --> 00:14:35,640

what we have here at Wright State University and some of those students

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00:14:35,640 --> 00:14:37,490

came from very different

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00:14:37,490 --> 00:14:40,250

backgrounds. Some of them were vocal performance majors, some of them were

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00:14:40,250 --> 00:14:45,529  
instrumentalists, some of them, one of  
them had designs on being a journalist

177  
00:14:45,529 --> 00:14:49,279  
in the arts, another came from a  
background in religious studies and they

178  
00:14:49,279 --> 00:14:52,800  
all seem to pass the proficiencies that  
were required to get into this program.

179  
00:14:52,800 --> 00:15:02,070  
So if one of my goals was to put myself  
in unfamiliar situations, this absolutely

180  
00:15:02,070 --> 00:15:07,779  
met the mark for that. There's nothing  
like walking into a rehearsal room in a

181  
00:15:07,779 --> 00:15:09,100  
foreign country

182  
00:15:09,100 --> 00:15:14,779  
knowing no one. Not the stage manager, not the music director, not a single actor in

183  
00:15:14,779 --> 00:15:18,640  
the room and I was slightly familiar  
with the person who was the head of the

184  
00:15:18,640 --> 00:15:22,440  
program. So I walked in and and that  
really becomes a test for you in many

185  
00:15:22,440 --> 00:15:29,320  
ways of what you as a teacher and as a  
as an artist, what you know and how do

186  
00:15:29,320 --> 00:15:34,160  
you find common ground among nine  
cultures. Well, what I decided was I was

187  
00:15:34,160 --> 00:15:37,990

going to treat it very much like any  
production that I would do at any theater,

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00:15:37,990 --> 00:15:43,610

whether it's a professional and academic  
theater and and really because there was a

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00:15:43,610 --> 00:15:47,970

degree of time pressure which  
always helps. Too much time allows you to

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00:15:47,970 --> 00:15:52,790

waste time and there I had really  
four weeks to get this pulled all together

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00:15:52,790 --> 00:15:56,899

with a group I knew nothing about. So we  
just began right off working. They had

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00:15:56,899 --> 00:16:01,930

learned the music prior my arrival we  
began right in staging and pretty

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00:16:01,930 --> 00:16:05,589

quickly I think they realized oh this is  
what we're doing, this is the way this

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00:16:05,589 --> 00:16:10,810

works and while none of them shared much  
of a common background prior to arrival

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00:16:10,810 --> 00:16:16,670

at that time, they had been together for  
about eight months when I arrived. So I

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00:16:16,670 --> 00:16:21,029

found that really diving in and just  
pushing forward with the work that we needed

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00:16:21,029 --> 00:16:25,520

to get done, they very quickly got on  
the same page with me and I did discover

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00:16:25,520 --> 00:16:29,600  
that I was asking different things of  
them. I don't know that it was harder

199  
00:16:29,600 --> 00:16:33,290  
than that what they were used to, but I  
did ask different things of them and I

200  
00:16:33,290 --> 00:16:35,230  
treated it much more like a

201  
00:16:35,230 --> 00:16:40,290  
commercial production in which we really  
had to work to a deadline and had to get

202  
00:16:40,290 --> 00:16:46,260  
a product on the stage that was gonna be,  
in a sense commercially viable, because

203  
00:16:46,260 --> 00:16:50,130  
for many of them that was the goal. It's  
an interesting thing to have students -

204  
00:16:50,130 --> 00:16:54,380  
there was a young lady in that production  
from Ireland who came to me and said

205  
00:16:54,380 --> 00:17:00,060  
"Joe, my agent's after having me go to an audition for the Phantom of the Opera".

206  
00:17:00,060 --> 00:17:04,580  
And I said "oh the Phantom of the  
Opera?" She goes Yeah you know, the show on the west end here".

207  
00:17:04,580 --> 00:17:08,240  
So she was asking to  
get out of rehearsal to go and audition for

208  
00:17:08,240 --> 00:17:13,500  
the lead for... Christine, the main  
woman in Phantom of the Opera. So that

209  
00:17:13,500 --> 00:17:18,220

was a little different than I have here.  
And that would be a great story if she

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00:17:18,220 --> 00:17:23,930

had gotten it, but she's a very talented gal.  
But for the most part these are kids

211

00:17:23,930 --> 00:17:28,830

who are not yet used to working toward  
commercial expectations, professional

212

00:17:28,830 --> 00:17:34,890

expectations and I think they grew a lot  
out of that process and what I gathered

213

00:17:34,890 --> 00:17:39,210

from them is that and this is an interesting  
observation, is that our students

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00:17:39,210 --> 00:17:44,360

generally, regardless of their background,  
will rise to meet whatever the highest

215

00:17:44,360 --> 00:17:51,640

challenge you place before them and that  
we may or I'll say that I know that I have in the past,

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00:17:51,650 --> 00:17:55,570

assumed limitations that just don't  
exist or that we can at least work

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00:17:55,570 --> 00:18:02,310

toward and passed. So there was a great  
deal of pleasure to be had from that experience.

218

00:18:02,310 --> 00:18:07,680

While I was there, because I had a  
number of students in that project who

219

00:18:07,680 --> 00:18:12,810

really were an ensemble roles and did not  
get to work one-on-one with me on sort of

220

00:18:12,810 --> 00:18:17,160  
their own development artistically, I did  
a series of workshops there for the

221  
00:18:17,160 --> 00:18:21,010  
students not in the principal roles,  
really focusing on the kind of work that

222  
00:18:21,010 --> 00:18:24,920  
I do here and the book that I told you  
about, Acting and Musical Theater, they

223  
00:18:24,920 --> 00:18:29,440  
use that as their standard text there. So  
that the fellow who played them the

224  
00:18:29,440 --> 00:18:32,560  
Baker in the Baker's wife, he came up to  
me one day and he goes

225  
00:18:32,560 --> 00:18:39,840  
"Joe, in this chapter you said such and such and such" and i said that sounds good, that sounds right".

226  
00:18:39,840 --> 00:18:43,820  
I didn't remember writing it. He  
quoted something very specifically, had

227  
00:18:43,820 --> 00:18:48,429  
a kind of a tenant that he was attached  
to very strongly and I thought I

228  
00:18:48,429 --> 00:18:53,549  
haven't read that chapter for a few  
years. Maybe a better back to it.

229  
00:18:53,549 --> 00:18:58,760  
But I did work closely with those, with the other students in that and ended up also going to

230  
00:18:58,760 --> 00:19:03,000  
Birmingham to the Birmingham School of  
Acting and did a day-long intensive with

231  
00:19:03,000 --> 00:19:06,539

those students, again an international group and I discovered in England that

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00:19:06,539 --> 00:19:10,470

very often the universities and conservatories have students from all

233

00:19:10,470 --> 00:19:16,289

over the world. We don't, I mean I'll say at Wright State, we don't tend to be as international in my program, we tend

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00:19:16,289 --> 00:19:22,179

to be more national or even Midwestern. But that was a great experience.

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00:19:22,179 --> 00:19:28,740

The other significant thing that I worked on while I was on leave was

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00:19:28,740 --> 00:19:36,179

developing the Musical Theater Initiative at the Dean's suggestion and it was a good one. To develop the Musical Theater

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00:19:36,179 --> 00:19:40,419

Initiative and try to create some kind of a structure for this thing that

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00:19:40,419 --> 00:19:47,270

was really an idea that I happily was green lighted, but it was essentially an idea

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00:19:47,270 --> 00:19:52,220

and so what I did was to set about a handful of things. First to develop a

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00:19:52,220 --> 00:19:56,580

clear mission for the Musical Theater Initiative, which is to explore and

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00:19:56,580 --> 00:20:02,110

celebrate the culture, craft, and history of the musical theater, which means we'll

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00:20:02,110 --> 00:20:05,700

do everything except produce new

musicals, because the Human Race Theater

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00:20:05,700 --> 00:20:09,740

Company here in Dayton already does that extremely well and I don't think Dayton

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00:20:09,740 --> 00:20:15,880

needs two new musical development centers. But to develop that mission and I think

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00:20:15,880 --> 00:20:20,529

it's clear and I think its guided us thus far in it. I recruited a

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00:20:20,529 --> 00:20:26,130

professional and academic Advisory Board of about, I think it's about 20 people

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00:20:26,130 --> 00:20:32,220

now, everything from Broadway producers to very well-known directors and

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00:20:32,220 --> 00:20:36,490

choreographers and music directors, to people who are my colleagues who I teach

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00:20:36,490 --> 00:20:41,620

with here, to the heads of arts organizations in this area and even

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00:20:41,620 --> 00:20:46,510

people like there's a fellow called Thomas Z. Sheppard for those you who collect

251

00:20:46,510 --> 00:20:47,440

Broadway casts

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00:20:47,440 --> 00:20:53,759

albums you know his name as the producer of every one of Stephen Sondheim's cast albums and

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00:20:53,759 --> 00:20:57,600

really so many of your albums from the 70's and 80's are produced by

254  
00:20:57,600 --> 00:21:03,500  
this guy and so he's on our advisory board also. And then I created a series

255  
00:21:03,500 --> 00:21:07,590  
of community partnerships with  
organizations like the human race

256  
00:21:07,590 --> 00:21:13,840  
theater company, the Muse Machine, Dayton  
Art Institute, ThinkTV, Cultural Works,

257  
00:21:13,840 --> 00:21:18,009  
and handful of other organizations here  
where we've agreed that if there's an

258  
00:21:18,009 --> 00:21:23,299  
opportunity for some sort of  
collaboration, that we will definitely

259  
00:21:23,299 --> 00:21:26,600  
look for that and what I told all of  
them and the people on the advisory

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00:21:26,600 --> 00:21:32,269  
board is A) I promise I'll never ask you  
for money and B) I will only call you when I

261  
00:21:32,269 --> 00:21:38,409  
have something I need, as apposed to burdening you with a lot of obligation to other things. And I'll tell you

262  
00:21:38,409 --> 00:21:42,330  
if your ever trying to put an advisory board  
together, those are the two magic things

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00:21:42,330 --> 00:21:48,559  
to say, because almost everybody says yes.  
And then another part of getting the musical

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00:21:48,559 --> 00:21:53,690  
Theater Initiative on its feet was to  
create an identity and logos and

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00:21:53,690 --> 00:21:56,690  
stationery and all the stuff that goes  
with that and I had a very good experience

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00:21:56,690 --> 00:22:02,039  
working with our marketing folks here on  
campus. And then creating a strategy for our

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00:22:02,039 --> 00:22:06,809  
first year and some of you were at the  
Victoria Theater couple of weeks ago

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00:22:06,809 --> 00:22:11,610  
when we had Leslie Uggams here in  
concert doing her concert, doing a day

269  
00:22:11,610 --> 00:22:16,529  
of workshops with our students, doing  
interviews - all of which was taped for

270  
00:22:16,529 --> 00:22:20,940  
think TV - and then presenting some of our  
students that she had coached on stage

271  
00:22:20,940 --> 00:22:24,870  
with her. It was a pretty great launch  
for the Musical Theater Initiative and I

272  
00:22:24,870 --> 00:22:29,840  
look forward to what that'll hold for us  
as we go forward and the plan right now

273  
00:22:29,840 --> 00:22:37,430  
is for next year to be a kind of a celebration of Kander and Ebb, John Kander and Fred Ebb,

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00:22:37,430 --> 00:22:41,920  
who are the people who wrote Chicago and  
Cabaret and New York New York, and lots of

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00:22:41,920 --> 00:22:46,840  
those things. And John Kander is still  
very much alive and at it. Mr. Ebb has

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00:22:46,840 --> 00:22:52,590

passed away unfortunately, but Mr. Kander is very very much still at it and going strong

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00:22:52,590 --> 00:22:58,000

and employing some of our alumni doing his work, so we want him to keep doing

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00:22:58,000 --> 00:23:03,290

that and hopefully he'll be able to here to campus and work with our students and be

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00:23:03,290 --> 00:23:12,410

able to sort of share what he does. So that's what I did on my professional development leave. Thank you.

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00:23:12,410 --> 00:23:17,340

[Applause]

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00:23:17,340 --> 00:23:20,540

I don't know if there are any questions or anything..? Yeah.

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00:23:20,540 --> 00:23:24,720

So can you tell us about, what's the mission for the Musical Theater Initiative?

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00:23:24,720 --> 00:23:34,980

Well so the mission is to explore and celebrate the craft, culture, and history of the musical theater in every way that really presents

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00:23:34,980 --> 00:23:38,480

opportunities for our students here and the community at large.

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00:23:38,480 --> 00:23:41,680

Is that like for [inaudible] education?

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00:23:41,690 --> 00:23:46,960

Yeah well so for instance, one of the things we have in the pipeline for the future

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00:23:46,970 --> 00:23:51,840

is to do an international conference, focus on the idea of revivals since most

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00:23:51,840 --> 00:23:56,720

of the musicals that we all see, both  
here on campus and regionally and even

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00:23:56,720 --> 00:24:01,630

in New Yorker tours are revivals. What  
goes into the idea of re-conceiving a

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00:24:01,630 --> 00:24:06,880

musical or not re-conceiving it, but really  
remounting it and so hopefully we'll be

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00:24:06,880 --> 00:24:10,980

able to bring a lot of folks in from  
all over the world who deal with that idea and

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00:24:10,990 --> 00:24:21,410

have our students and faculty and artists and educators from all over the country engage in that. Yeah it will be fun I  
hope. Yes.

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00:24:21,410 --> 00:24:30,530

So you've had experience all around the world and of course what's happening in Dayton right now is not dissimilar to  
nationwide

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00:24:30,530 --> 00:24:36,120

and that is the kind of lack of funding or a de-funding of culture.

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00:24:36,130 --> 00:24:36,690

Yeah.

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00:24:36,690 --> 00:24:45,080

What would you suggest for the Dayton Region? What's the most thing that we can do moving forward to [inaudible]  
so many people as possible?

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00:24:45,080 --> 00:24:53,520

Okay, that's a great question and I think this goes well beyond the idea of musical theater. It goes to our conception of  
what education is

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00:24:53,520 --> 00:24:58,260

and I think that we have for reasons of observing what...

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00:24:58,260 --> 00:25:04,600

there's a received wisdom that I disagree with, that following pure business skills or

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00:25:04,609 --> 00:25:09,299

skills that are technological skills and  
I'm a fan of STEM education, a big

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00:25:09,299 --> 00:25:13,799

fan of it, but I think it's a bit like  
trying to make a cake by only using

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00:25:13,799 --> 00:25:20,869

flour and sugar and leavening, but not  
putting eggs or milk or butter in it. If we're

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00:25:20,869 --> 00:25:25,249

trying to make a really wonderful cake,  
we have to embed in the education,

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00:25:25,249 --> 00:25:30,429

creativity, because otherwise I'm a  
carpenter who knows how to use all the

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00:25:30,429 --> 00:25:35,320

saws and all the chisels and everything  
in my workshop, but I can't imagine what

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00:25:35,320 --> 00:25:41,059

kind of cabinet I want to build. And so  
for me the most important part of

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00:25:41,059 --> 00:25:48,889

expanding... So we believe that education  
is gonna be the pathway to innovation

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00:25:48,889 --> 00:25:53,769

and opportunity, but innovation requires  
us to be able to be creative and to

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00:25:53,769 --> 00:25:59,429

imagine the new thing. If our students  
aren't trained in imagination; in

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00:25:59,429 --> 00:26:03,720

imagining themselves and other given  
circumstances and imagining what it is

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00:26:03,720 --> 00:26:09,509

like to be in the mind of the person who  
wrote you know, Beethoven's mind or in the

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00:26:09,509 --> 00:26:15,279

mind of a person who created that  
exquisite painting or to be able to leap as we do,

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00:26:15,279 --> 00:26:19,549

into the world of a movie or a play or a  
novel. If our students had not been

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00:26:19,549 --> 00:26:24,200

trained in that, at least as much as they  
have in technical skills, we will have

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00:26:24,200 --> 00:26:29,929

no innovation, because we will not have imaginers and I think the critical thing we need to do is

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00:26:29,929 --> 00:26:35,989

reintegrate education. And I think that will lead us to I don't

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00:26:35,989 --> 00:26:40,280

know what, but I will say I think that  
the idea that we had a

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00:26:40,280 --> 00:26:46,500

broken education system was overstated and I think people were hyper reactionary

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00:26:46,500 --> 00:26:51,130

in it, but you can hear what my point of view on that question is. [laughing]

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00:26:51,130 --> 00:26:54,690

But to me, that's the most important  
thing we can do, reintegrate education so that

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00:26:54,690 --> 00:27:05,600

arts, humanities, and imagination are  
embedded deeply in it, even in STEM education. So yeah, there you go.

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00:27:05,600 --> 00:27:08,600

Anyway, thank you very much. It's been a  
pleasure to be here.

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00:27:08,600 --> 00:27:10,600

[Appluase]