

**Diversity / Teaching Statement**  
**Laura Ann Smyth**

Inclusion, acceptance, acknowledgement, recognition, dedication and voice are just a few of the words that come to mind when I think of promoting diversity, speaking out against injustice and fighting for equality. Being an advocate for diversity and social justice is not an ideal; it is quite simply the responsibility of all decent people in society at large. As the great Barack Obama once said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

Being an agent of change is something I have been passionate about from a young age. Growing up in Canada, the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity have always been present in my world. I attended grade school where most students were first generation Canadians and my desire to understand and relate to the wealth of culture I was surrounded by was strong. I learned at a young age that most anger and hatred came from a lack of awareness and a fear of that which was different and I charged myself with the task of speaking up against ignorance.

I obtained my undergraduate degree in Sociology with an emphasis in crime, deviance and social control. I was fascinated by the unique challenges marginalized groups face on a daily basis and was horrified by how much of this injustice was systemic. As dance and the arts have always been my voice, I began to bring dance to underserved populations to show them how strength and conviction can be learned through movement. I worked with youth living in Group homes or who had been incarcerated and helped them work through some of their issues with dance.

My dedication and passion toward diversity and race education have always lived in the spirit of dance. Being an advocate for jazz dance and its relevance in dance education has forced me to examine diversity. Understanding that jazz history is in fact race history and the idea that its systematic undervaluing goes hand in hand with racial tension in this country has been a great realization. Forcing populations to look at dance through a non westernized lens and open their eyes to the idea that aesthetic appeal is much more broad than a tall and thin Balanchine body has certainly been a devotion of mine.

During my tenure in Los Angeles I had the good fortune of both teaching and performing in situations where diversity was at the forefront. My experience teaching in community colleges that catered largely to impoverished demographics taught me empathy and patience, while performing with a predominantly African-American dance company exposed me to new audiences and new ways of dancing about race. Now living in Seattle, I have worked with transgendered students and encourage my dance students to think about ways to break gender stereotypes surrounding dance. Additionally, I worked closely with a peer in graduate school who dedicated his studies to shifting the predominance of ableism in the dance world; an issue heavily untouched in dance practice and scholarly work.

As artists it is easy to get caught in a vacuum. The world brings about so many challenges for us to successfully pursue our dreams that at times, dance becomes too self-focused and artists lose sight of the power it holds. I believe dance education is about showing how the arts can bring people of all races, ethnicities and cultures closer

together. Dance gives people a common voice, it allows people to express their narrative and it generates new ways of thinking, doing and acting; we must educate the next generation of dancers to expose this as one of dance's greatest functions.