

## **Cole Eric Cook**

**Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Accessibility (JEDIA) Statement**  
**cole.eric.cook@gmail.com | www.colecook.com | (509) 430 0358**

---

As an educator, artist, and advocate, I am committed to creating inclusive, justice-driven classrooms that affirm each student's identity, challenge systems of oppression, and foster deep, creative exploration. My teaching is rooted in a belief that arts education—when grounded in equity and care—can be a transformative force for individuals and communities.

I bring both lived experience and professional dedication to this work. As a white, queer, cisgender man with ADHD and partial deafness, I am shaped by both privilege and marginalization. I've long recognized the importance of meeting students where they are and honoring who they are. This understanding began in my early college years when I volunteered with incarcerated youth in the juvenile detention system of my hometown. I spent hours listening to their stories—many from backgrounds of instability, poverty, and systemic neglect—and I began to understand just how critical mentorship, care, and representation are in a young person's life. That early experience planted the seed of my lifelong commitment to justice.

As a former drag performer, I also organized and participated in community shows that raised awareness and funds for children living with HIV/AIDS. The drag community was my first model of chosen family, mutual care, and radical joy. It gave me the courage to show up more fully—and that same ethic informs how I now show up for my students. I want my classroom to feel like a space where all students can bring their full selves, be seen, be challenged, and be celebrated.

### **Liberatory Practice and Expanding the Frame**

In my theatre courses, I build upon my formal training in Western performance methodologies by actively expanding the frame to include artists, texts, and traditions from the global majority. I critically examine and disrupt Eurocentric notions of “neutrality” or “standard” by integrating multilingual materials, culturally rooted performance practices, and theories grounded in Black, Indigenous, Latinx, Asian, and diasporic lineages. My curriculum incorporates Black Acting Methods, Slow Tempo Movement (via Japanese theatre artist Shogo Ohta), and queer performance theory, among others.

Rather than presenting any one tradition as a universal model, I invite students to examine the assumptions behind terms like “classical,” “neutral,” or “technique.” I encourage them to bring their full selves—their vernaculars, cultural knowledge, bodies, and lived experiences—into their artistic process. Language matters in this work: for

instance, I often use the word approach rather than technique, because “technique” can unintentionally imply rigidity and exclusion, especially for students whose creative processes may not align with traditional Euro-American norms.

These choices are not incidental—they are part of my commitment to building a classroom that affirms pluralism and questions inherited hierarchies. I believe that good teaching isn’t about transmitting a fixed method, but about facilitating a process where students are empowered to experiment, reflect, and find their own artistic voices in conversation with multiple traditions.

I approach the classroom as a co-created, relational space rooted in justice, reflection, and care. As a white, cisgender, queer male, I am conscious of the privileges and power I carry. I name this openly with students—not to center myself, but to model the kind of transparency I hope to cultivate in our shared space. I believe that if I am asking students to show up with authenticity and vulnerability, I must do so first.

To redistribute power and foster a sense of belonging, I co-create community agreements with students at the beginning of each course. These agreements shape our collective norms around participation, respect, risk-taking, and accountability. They also serve as a foundation for challenging harmful assumptions and fostering meaningful dialogue.

I intentionally question dominant language ideologies and performance hierarchies. In addition to reframing “technique” as “approach,” I actively challenge white language supremacy by validating multiple forms of expression—particularly those informed by cultural identity, lived experience, and community knowledge. This means encouraging students to use their own linguistic styles, movement vocabularies, and storytelling forms, even when these diverge from institutional expectations of “academic” or “professional” theatre.

I also pay close attention to the emotional and cultural labor many students carry with them into the classroom, especially those from historically marginalized groups. When needed, I adapt timelines or modify assignments to honor lived realities without penalizing students for them. I’ve learned that presence matters more than perfection—students thrive when they know they are valued beyond their output. The work of justice in education is as much about policy and curriculum as it is about daily, compassionate human interactions.

While grades are often required, I see them as an imperfect measure of growth. I focus instead on process, self-reflection, and revision, and I remain open to alternative or ungraded systems that encourage curiosity over perfectionism.

### **Ongoing Learning, Research & Institutional Action**

I see JEDIA not as a checklist but as an ongoing commitment. During my MFA in Performance Pedagogy at Loyola Marymount University, I deepened my research and practice around anti-oppressive performance education:

- I authored and presented a paper titled “A White Practitioner’s Reflection on Black Acting Methods” at the Comparative Drama Conference, examining the ethical inclusion of Afrocentric methodologies in predominantly white institutions.
- I directed *A Mother’s Love* by Robyn Wilkinson, a new work exploring LGBTQ+ themes in family dynamics.
- I taught Beginning Acting for Non-Majors, where I intentionally centered texts like *Everybody* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins to explore race, death, and identity.
- I served on the department’s EDIA Committee and was honored with the Arrupe Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Award, the first graduate student to receive it.

I am currently pursuing my MA in Transformative Education with a concentration in Disability and Inclusion. My coursework in trauma-informed teaching, Universal Design for Learning, and language pedagogy has broadened my capacity to support neurodivergent, disabled, and multilingual learners. As someone with ADHD and partial deafness, I bring both personal insight and academic training to this work. I view disability not as a deficit but as a site of creativity, knowledge, and reimagination.

I remain committed to pushing for institutional change as well—whether advocating for inclusive season selection, reimagining audition protocols, or partnering with colleagues to embed anti-racist frameworks into departmental culture. This is long-haul work that doesn’t end with one syllabus revision or one training session—it requires sustained listening, coalition-building, and courage.

My professional development also includes:

- Black Acting Methods Studio Intensives with Dr. Sharrell Luckett, Kashi Johnson, and Rahbi Hines
- Acting While Black and Diversifying Approaches to Acting through Black Acting Methods University
- Anti-Racism in Theatre Classrooms (ATHE & ASTR)
- Slow Tempo Movement with Pacific Performance Project/East
- Ongoing mentorship with Dr. Anna Winget, supporting my goal of developing and teaching a Queer Theatre course of my own
- I actively invite guest speakers of the global majority into my classrooms and workshops. These engagements are not just additive—they are central to decentering whiteness, diversifying perspective, and helping students imagine broader artistic futures.

## **Moving Forward**

My classroom is a space of radical listening, creative inquiry, and shared accountability. I show up every day ready to learn from my students as much as I teach them. I hold space for discomfort, laughter, growth, and transformation. I teach with joy, even when the work is heavy. Because joy, especially in marginalized communities, is a form of resistance—and in theatre, it's also a form of power.

My commitment to justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility is not a sideline—it is the foundation of my work.

And I will keep showing up for it. Always.

Cole Cook