

Personal Statement

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When people ask me what I plan to do when I finish my graduate program, I say, “hopefully teaching English to children in Malaysia!” There I can immerse myself in a unique and completely different culture and education experience. Since I was a very young child, I knew I wanted to do two things; act on Broadway, and teach English to children. I spent hours as a child playing teacher to my “students” (i.e. younger brothers), and hunting around the house to find costumes for the endless one act scenes I created and performed for my family. My favorite role was JoAnn the English teacher from London or Dublin or somewhere in the British Isles, with my father patiently playing out the not always volunteer role of the School Master or Principal. My brothers complained about the amount of homework assigned, but did it, even when excused by the School Master, who overruled the teacher because it was dinner time. Fieldtrips included pretend school bus rides to the playground behind our house or to the kitchen for science lab. There were times I feared falling short of my dreams and let worry invade my ambitions. As I grew older and it became time for real auditions and real shows, nothing was going to stop the passion that was in my DNA, regardless of the challenge. “Don’t be pushed by your problems. Be led by your dreams.” Ralph Waldo Emerson said this once, and that is the philosophy I live by, pushing on into the next chapter regardless of the challenges I might face.

I have not met many people over my life that have shared the same certainty about what they wanted to do from a young age like I so clearly know. Two events sharpened my desires to teach and act, joining two genres into an interdependent career path. The first was when I was cast as Dorothy in Wizard of Oz as a first year high school student with minimal experience of children’s theater. The moment I realized I needed to be involved with theatre for the rest of my life was that moment I stepped on for the opening number on opening night in front of the blaring lights to tell the hundreds of people anxiously waiting in the audience about a world unknown to them. My second life-defining moment was my mission trip to a poor town called Santa Elena in Belize. We had two responsibilities in service to the community: construction work and teaching kids. After a few short hours the language barrier seemed to disappear and I was in full bliss while the kids and I worked through the early stages of a relationship that would take me back to Belize for several successive years. Each morning all of the children poured out of trucks with giant smiles and incontrollable hugs to greet us. This was the highlight of their year; to play and learn with us. I also grew to appreciate the limited amount of resources available when teaching to an impoverished community and still be able to be effective through a raw, genuine respect and connection. I knew I wanted to be a teacher for life when I helped a child learn English through a song. I realized how powerful education could be and how I can be a part of that. At that point I looked to theater as a way to grow myself for my true art, working with kids and impacting them in a way only a caring teacher can. The classroom is *our* stage, full of endless possibilities, with a script unfolding day by day, lesson by lesson.

An experience like Malaysia will help me understand other parts of the world and use that knowledge to shape the work I do with theater and education in the future. This will be the first time that I may incorporate my passions into one job while also feeding my curiosity and desire to learn about other people and other cultures in the process. This experience in Malaysia would be highly regarded and treasured and will certainly impact the future of my professional career. It will influence how I will respond to challenges, as well as development of my teaching strategies throughout my career for the world’s best profession... *teaching!*