

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

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I believe in the power of stories. They are the most indicative feature of our collective human experience, through which we can begin to experience each other via the lens of empathy. I also believe in the power of theatre to foster empathy through story-telling in a world that is becoming increasingly disconnected. The Acting Classroom is not about creating the perfect scene study, or the perfect monologue, but rather about creating the perfect conditions for students to explore their artistic and individual potential.

Because all students are at different levels in their learning process, I strive to tailor my Acting Class for the individual needs of each student. Beginner actors are often locked inside their own bodies and are uncertain how to purposefully use their bodies while maintaining ease through the trial of putting themselves up on the stage. It is important to me to create a two-way dialogue around the work that we do in class, through which we can explore effective methods of getting them to allow themselves to become free. When we explore the basics laid by Stanislavsky, of objective, action, tactics, conflict, language and relationship, the students begin to open themselves up because they now have terms to speak about the deeper meaning behind the work. More mature students often go in the opposite direction of over-intellectualizing the work, and for these I have found Chekhov's psychological gestures and Meisner's repetition exercises a useful tool in reviving a new life for them on the stage, without losing the groundwork they already have.

In addition to Stanislavski, Chekhov and Meisner, the work of Patsy Rodenburg in *The Second Circle* is important in my teaching philosophy because it sheds a powerful light on the power of presence. It brings into sharp focus the collective human need for authentic, truthful connection, and makes a strong case for the power of being. *The Second Circle* is an excellent litmus test for presence in the classroom. I have found it a useful tool for exploring student engagement, comfortability and habitual inclinations in an un-intrusive and yet thought-provoking way. I strive to create a place where students are unafraid to explore the power of presence in their second circle, and to know what it means to be truly present both within the confines of the classroom, and in their own personal stories.

I enjoy working with students from all walks of life, and an acting classroom is the ideal place for young people to discover that the world is an enormous, amorphous, and beautiful organism. I am passionate about actively seeking plays, stories and artists who create work for voices that are often silenced. I highly value the diversity of race, gender and sexuality. It is important to me that my students know they are valuable, heard and seen no matter who they are or where they come from. I also value the importance of creating a safe space in the classroom, and therefore any work that we do will be contextualized with language that emphasizes the importance of safety and security of the student above all. Because of the nature of the craft, it is not unusual for students to interact with materials that may contain adult themes and mature situations. It is my goal to ensure that we have open, honest conversations about the subject matter, the student's comfort level, and the importance of consent for any material that may contain potentially dicey situations.

My main goal therefore is to provide students with a discourse that they can use to unpack the concept of acting; a language with which they can begin to explore what it truly means to have empathy and to be present. Throughout the course of the class, the students are encouraged to explore their work using these concepts as a place to begin, to explore and to return to. Ultimately, the students will find new ways to utilize this discourse and will amend it to fit their needs as they grow.

The world outside is known, and yet the world within remains undiscovered. Stories are the key to these discoveries; the theatre is the place to make them.