

Statement on Philosophy of Teaching

At its core, whether professional or as elective practice, an actor training program should have the principal aim of developing the dynamic use of the performer's voice, body, and emotions in service of their craft. I feel this distinction is of paramount importance: we should not seek from the outset to change the actor's own personal identity based on abstract principles that their voice, body, or being is somehow trapped, not free, or innately restricted by their socio-psychological development through life.

Instead, I start with the premise that each individual is unique. That their beauty is formed by a journey of social development, and demonstrated in no small part by their survival under any of the negative external influences and/or power structures in life we may wish to consider as pertinent. Certainly, some of these learned habits which make up the voice, body, and self may be counter-productive to building credible character choices, or healthy choices in production of acting technique or related skills. Therefore, whilst highlighting or offering solutions to such problems takes precedent in the teaching moment, it does so based on enabling the student to take command of their skills and artistry both in the theatrical moment and elsewhere, rather than seeking to find a "true" voice, body, or self; the very notion of which is not only absurd (whose truth?), but also dynamically and dramatically limiting. Furthermore, such ideologies underpinning these systems ensure that many practitioners fail to deal with the complex internal workings of the individual at the expense of belief in the practice itself: the results of which can be damaging or destructive to the student emotionally, physically, and/or psychologically.

Through the work of Grotowski, Gardzienice, Stanislavski, Boleslavsky, Hagen, Meisner, Practical Aesthetics, Viewpoints, and Playback Theatre techniques I have learned much as an acting pedagogue, and more still through the work of Berry, Houseman, Rodenburg, Linklater, Fitzmaurice, Alexander, Feldenkrais, Roy Hart, and Lessac, as a voice coach. However, I believe that the synthesis of the technical aspects of these techniques, combined with my own developed vocal and acting training model, has the capacity not only to deliver a robust and sustainable training for the actor, but also to provide a unique and progressive pedagogy; the end results of which are arguably already borne out in the positive feedback and output from students in my most recent full-time positions of the past several years.

My work largely stems from physical elements of my working with Bred in the Bone Theatre Company at the Grotowski Institute in Wroclaw (Poland), combined with my voice work at The Freedom Theatre (Palestine). A central tenet of the training increases the actor's listening capabilities through Full Body Listening, a skill which enables the actor to be entirely in-tune with their environment, and able to play to the minutest of sensitivities on impulses from themselves, the space, and other actors. This enables cognitive understanding of the actors' instrument, combined with artistic dexterity, and increased technical ability/range. All of this build towards and through a fuller synthesis of understanding impulse in space and within themselves, and is supported both by kinesthetic and experiential learning, in addition to a theoretical framework rooted in aspects of quantum physics and quantum biology.

Essentially, aside from all the facets of training you may expect, I also teach the science of how to be fully alive, alert, and present in the moment; alongside how to enable the actor to respond authentically to this without observation or self-editing of the process. I work pragmatically to ensure the practical application of this in the student's performative output, where given space to do so in line with program and faculty aims.

Alongside some of the historic issues in actor training which assume the lived identity of the individual, for too long acting students have been told that it is their job alone to join together the disparate nature of their skills training. For many reasons, often built in the historic power structures of theatre making, students have rarely been guided in how to apply skills work to their acting technique. It is key to my teaching philosophy to address this issue head on – as colleagues we can be open about divergence of practice and taste, yet trust that all tutors in an institution are steering students towards the same goal. For the sake of small, specific amounts of work given over to guided exploration of skills technique to acting craft, I feel there is an onus on us to facilitate this as fully as possible where skill, conversation, and remit align within the faculty.

Key to my teaching philosophy is a weave of applied sociology, based upon rules of mutual respect and safe working environments. This not only covers somatic responses to claimed and created spaces, but also reaches into constructive space building which enables the capacity for free-thought and critical thinking. Thus far this teaching methodology has consistently delivered the most effective learning in my students; but it also continues to help me

develop as a practitioner. Through active awareness of the power dynamics at play when creating a learning environment, a learning contract is made which ensures that I reassess and re-evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of any practices which I share with students. I much prefer to share my practice, or facilitate learning, than I do to “teach” my students from a top-down perspective, where possible.

I am confident that my teaching philosophy is a well formed and valuable asset to my pedagogy. By developing a full socio-physical listening skill within our actors, we not only enable them to listen to themselves and their surroundings in this often confused digital age, but we also start to retrain society: that we may look beyond soundbites and gimmicks to the depths of our own artistic expression through acting, art, text, body, and voice.

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