

## Statement on Philosophy of Teaching

At its core, the voice provision within a professional actor training programme should have the principal aim of developing the dynamic use of the performer's voice, in service of their art. I feel this distinction is of paramount importance: we should not seek from the outset to change the actor's own personal voice (an intrinsic part their identity) based on abstract principles that their voice is somehow trapped, not free, or innately restricted by their socio-psychological development through life; as is the common view of a variety of well-known vocal methods.

Instead, I start with the premise that each voice is unique: that its beauty is formed by a journey of social development, and demonstrated in no small part by its survival under any of the negative external influences and/or power structures in life we may wish to consider as pertinent (these may also be specifically different for the individual). Certainly, some of these learned habits which make up the voice and self may be counter-productive to building credible character choices, healthy voicing, articulation, or projection. Therefore, whilst highlighting or offering solutions to such vocal problems takes precedent in the teaching moment; it does so based on enabling the student to take command of their own vocal use both in the theatrical moment and elsewhere, rather than seeking to find a "true" voice; the very notion of which is not only absurd (for whose truth is that defined as?), but which is also dynamically and dramatically limiting. Furthermore, the methodologies underpinning these vocal 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 Berry, Houseman, Rodenburg, Linklater, Fitzmaurice, Alexander, Feldenkrais, Roy Hart, Lessac and Grotowskian techniques I have learnt much as a voice coach. However, I believe that the synthesis of the technical aspects of these techniques (combined with my own developed vocal and actor training model from my physical and experimental theatre work), has the capacity not only to deliver a robust and sustainable vocal 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.

A key part of my work 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 with impulses from themselves, the space, and other actors. This enables cognitive understanding of the vocal instrument combined with artistic dexterity, and increased technical ability/range. I have found this to be a roundly more accessible means of training the voice than through similar image based work, and thus remains an inclusive practice across physical ability ranges.

Essentially, aside from all the facets of voice training you may expect, I also teach the science (using current understanding of quantum mechanics in relation to defining impulse) of how to be fully alive, alert, and present in the moment; alongside how to enable the voice to respond authentically to this without observation or self-editing of the process. My work seeks to pragmatically ensure the practical application of this to the student's acting technique, where given space to do so in line with programme and faculty aims.

Alongside some of the historic issues of vocal practices 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, and 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 also to my teaching philosophy is a weave of applied sociology, based upon rules of mutual respect, safe spaces, and healthy working environments. This not only covers somatic responses to claimed and created spaces, but also reaches into constructive cognitive 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. Equally, 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. Through the past thirty years vocal practitioners have illuminated so much for us; the right to speak, the need for words, finding your voice - these book titles and many others by great authors in our field have beautifully and passionately demonstrated the way forward for us as vocal practitioners. I now think it is time for us to take the next step, to understand that owning one’s right to speak in a society is meaningless if nobody is willing to listen. 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, movement, text, and the voice.

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