

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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The path of an actor is like a walk in the dark. The creative spirit must venture into unknown and often uncomfortable territory. I guide the students through the dark, illuminating the steps on the path one at a time. From the start of the semester I know the themes and skill sets we will explore and how they will integrate with each other to help students become better actors. I create sequences of kinesthetic experiences for students that lead them to make their own conclusions. I design each unit around a crucial acting skill like playing actions, listening and responding, or vulnerability. I use techniques from my broad range of movement pedagogies to lead the actors through a viscerally lived experience of that skill. As a result, they have the physical sense memory to discern whether they are truly, for example, playing an action rather than experiencing an unspecific wash of emotion.

During this process I try to teach the way a good actor plays a scene - by listening and responding. I am constantly listening to my students by scanning and assessing their body language, eliciting in-class comments, and requiring written work. I use what I learn to nudge them continually back onto the path of growth. I won't let a unit end until I'm satisfied that all the students have made some progress toward my learning objectives. I love it when the process of a unit pays off and a student discovers a principle I've been building up to for weeks. Their excitement and delight at finally understanding where I've been leading them is like a bright illuminating light.

There are a few qualities and skills I want all actors I train to possess. I would like them to be able to play characters that transcend the actors' own personal habits. To this end I use Laban Movement Analysis to help them develop a broad range of expressive potential that is connected to an inner truth. I want them to be able to integrate bold dynamic physical choices with well integrated vocal technique. To develop actors who can both move and speak, I use three sets of tools: Bartenieff Fundamentals, good body mechanics, and yoga. The result is actors that are strong, flexible, tension-free, and functionally well organized. I want them to be open, creative, brave, and generous, so I model this behavior myself and offer them plenty of opportunities to devise new work and explore text through abstract movement. I teach acrobatics, stage combat, and aerial dance as useful skills that broaden their horizons, enhance their discipline, and prepare them to do intensely physical theater.

Student-actors depend on their faculty for, among other things, grades, casting, and future network connections. I recognize that this relationship dynamic creates an inherent power imbalance. In response I put a strong emphasis on personal empowerment and actors' right to consent to physical contact. I won't force students over a learning threshold. I prefer to make the unknown seem so appealing that they willingly jump into the deep end of creative exploration of their own accord. I don't ask them to be perfect, but I do ask them to be brave. In return for their trust in my leadership, I offer them the right to tackle challenges by choice and have autonomy over their own body and creative goals.

My number one goal as a teacher of movement for actors is for the students to leave my class empowered, inspired, and expanded. I teach with joy. I value curiosity and generosity in the creative process. I bring passion, light and laughter to the classroom. I hold space and support for tears and sweat and struggle. Ultimately I believe that the moving human body is one of our society's most untapped resources, and I'm passionate about helping my students unfold the hidden potential within themselves.