

Teaching Philosophy Toward Professional Actor Training

I teach because I am passionate about helping others explore themselves, each other, and the human condition. More than sharing information, my responsibility as an educator requires strong interaction and investment with each student to discover where their inspiration lies. Through integration of the subject material into student's other courses, careers, and lives, I provide relativity and the potential for long-term retention and learning. My goal is to foster perspective, understanding, appreciation, and encouragement toward the diversity of each student and their unique educational exploration.

My teaching philosophy for students devoted to making a career out of acting revolves around developing artists, craftspeople and individuals prepared for the rigor demanded from the professional world. The craft of acting is often measured by what is created by the artist, however it is the process of the artist that is vital in the creation of a superior product. Talent, desire, and ability are not enough to generate the skills necessary to foster a life long career in the performing arts. Work ethic, rigorous practice, awareness and use of the ever-evolving tools of the actor must combine with talent, desire and ability to establish and maintain the professional actor.

My teaching approach focuses heavily on fostering inspiration, student imagination, and play while maintaining efficient and transparent communication through detailed syllabi and other course assignments. As a performance teacher I use skills and techniques derived from Stanislavski, but also sampled from subsequent leaders in pedagogical approaches to the craft of acting, such as Michael Chekov, Sanford Meisner, Uta Hagen, Robert Cohen, Michael Shurtleff, and Anne Bogart to name a few. I introduce methods of character investigation both external to internal (Laban/viewpoints) as well as internal to external (sense memory), and how each approach must oscillate with the other to create a fully realized and embodied character. A key component I require of students in all my acting classes, from beginning through advanced practice, is to be "emotionally invested" as the character throughout their performance, either solo or in a group. In order to assist students avoid generalization and detachment, I utilize modified character biography and text analysis assignments, much like the ones presented in Uta Hagen's *Respect For Acting* and in Katie Mitchell's *The Director's Craft*. I combine these with physical movement exercises, like Michael Chekov's psychological gesture and viewpoints, to help students make strong choices from informed places and physically/vocally explore each moment of their work.

In the classroom, I establish and maintain a strong sense of supportive collaboration to ensure a safe, risk-taking environment, where inquiry, inspiration, fearlessness, and humor enable practical discovery and personal revelation. I challenge students to reach beyond their known limits in an effort to achieve an instinctually authentic character rooted in given circumstances and objective-driven actions. One method I employ to great effect is the use of student-generated goals. Each day, students must reflect in writing on what they achieve, learn and what they hope to achieve in their next class. By providing students with ownership of their learning process I am able to guide their natural inspirations and challenge them to achieve individual potential. Students frequently exceed highly challenging course expectations because of their intense personal investment.

In assessing my students, I provide detailed rubrics geared toward making evaluation more transparent. I create rubrics from careful reflection on course development to ensure that expectations encompass the use of techniques explored through course exercises as well as ensure the potential for successful achievement of the course objectives. While there must always be an element of subjectivity in the assessment of an art form or craft, establishing goals and expectations with students allow the students to also be equipped to assess themselves, first through guided efforts and ultimately on their own. I view success not based on a student's ability to learn and practice what I teach, but rather to utilize the methods of investigation and personal exploration developed in class toward their continuing education, experience of the craft and application throughout their lives.