

## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Inquiry. Trust. Discovery

The goal of any teacher is to equip students with knowledge and skills they can use to serve their own professional, artistic, or personal goals. This goes beyond detailed analysis of the content at hand and calls for the educator to not only “teach the rules” but foster the desire to break them. For the art of acting is as diverse as those who pursue it, empowering students to take ownership of their learning and craft is fundamental. In accordance with this belief, my pedagogy is built around three main principles:

### INQUIRY COMES FROM EXPERIENCE

While I believe curriculum should be dictated by what theatre requires of future professionals rather than students’ expectations, my classes are designed to let students be the driving force of our exploration. In practice, this means introducing them to ideas or concepts in a practical way, embodying them before we intellectualize them. After they have experienced the material, I guide their exploration so that it leads to the right theoretical questions. If we can craft this initial experience successfully, students’ curiosity will naturally lead to a deeper exploration of the content. For example, if a student can experience what Michael Chekhov describes as expansion and contraction of energy in a practical, relatable way, they will naturally wonder about its applications in scene work. With the correct framing, their inquiry may lead them to the idea of psychological gesture, for example. And so, their own curiosity becomes the driving force of the class.

Additionally, I don’t hide my pedagogy from my students. I will repeatedly ask them why they think I used a certain warm-up on a certain session, or why do I set some specific requirements for a devised exercise, for example. In my experience, being transparent in my methodology allows students to connect much more with the material and the learning experience.

### SUCCESS COMES FROM TRUST

We know it to be a universal truth that acting is rooted in empathy. I believe our classes should be as well. Every class I teach starts with a check-in: a brief, collective acknowledgement of what we, the actors, are bringing to the space that day. By recognizing our individuality and our own experience, we foster empathy, allowing connection between the ensemble members. This is usually followed by targeted warm-ups, which

both prepare them for the lesson and eases the transition from individual to collective work. Similarly to why I share my reasoning for how I run my class, if students get a feel of why their classmates work in a certain way, the experience becomes much smoother.

It is only in the context of this trusted, supportive ensemble that students may reach their full potential. The same way we place trust in our scene partners on stage, students place it in their classmates. A student who trusts is a student who is willing to try things. More importantly, willing to try and fail, and willing to do so fearlessly. If I ask them how an exercise felt and the answer is along the lines of “it felt new, I want to try it again”, I have succeeded. Therefore, as an educator, it is my priority to protect and foster this sense of community among my students, both by making it a part of my classes and by setting an example and standard myself. After all, in my experience, once students trusts the ensemble they will trust themselves.

#### DISCOVERY COMES FROM SELF

Once a student has explored a technique or skill and gained the necessary knowledge, they need to incorporate it into their process. In other words, they need to make it their own. That is where the real magic takes place, once it resonates with them beyond correct practice. As an educator, then, I need to provide not only the traditional approach to the material, but also an opportunity to test its boundaries. Much like with anything else, there isn't a “one-size-fits-all” when it comes to acting. Yet students come to me not knowing how to make these tools work for them. And so, I create a playground.

My classes include opportunities to overlap techniques and see how they relate to each other, as well exercises that compare the tools with the student's habitual process. By encouraging self-awareness and experimentation, we also teach them to approach their future, individual learning and development. Open, free discussion is an important part of this process. If a student sees how others approach a technique, how they incorporate it, they are much more likely to find their own way of doing so. If nothing else, they'll have more options to try. Furthermore, listening to their experience helps me as their teacher and informs my coaching style, my exercise selection, and my own approach to teaching the material.

To further embrace students' individuality, my teaching incorporates and combines a wide range of methodologies and techniques. As an interdisciplinary artist myself, I am interested in how different understandings of what acting is or should be work in conversation with each other. Furthermore, how

acting interacts with other disciplines such as music, visual arts, or social sciences. I may ask my students to explore how Uta Hagen's emotional recall may be complemented by psychological gesture, or how can we enhance certain aspects of contemporary stage violence by using Rudolf Laban's exercises. Or perhaps use standard psychological tests to approach character analysis, or how to create a movement piece rooted in music theory. Theatre doesn't exist in a vacuum – nor should any form of art – so why teach in one?

When choosing materials and approaches, I try to work across platforms and mediums in order to cater different learning styles and provide new perspectives for students to explore. Some classes may include podcasts or ask for video assignments, while other times we may meet in a cafeteria to observe people in their everyday – invaluable to understand tactics or physical destination, for example. This diverse approach helps students see the possibilities of the material and invites them to think in terms of innovation rather than repetition.

In terms of representation and diversity, it is also important to examine the materials chosen for class. One of my main efforts as an educator is diversifying the canon of dramatic texts and techniques we teach. While the mastery of William Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams or Thornton Wilder is unquestionable and should be celebrated, there are many other names and narratives that need to make it into the curriculum. Why not teach classical styles using a Tirso de Molina piece? Or teach contemporary scene study with Terrence Alvin McRaney or Leah Nanako? I believe that the inherent universal nature of theatre allows students to resonate with narratives across cultures, time periods, etc, making the bubble of traditionally taught plays unnecessary, stale and dangerous. For how can we celebrate our students if we don't celebrate artists that represent them and their diversity?

When the class period comes to an end, my work does not. I encourage students to use me as a resource outside of the classroom, to seek me if they need coaching, additional information, or clarification. Because I demand rigor and ambition from my students, I am willing to meet those qualities with labor. It is my job to help them make the most of the incomparable opportunities being a student offers, especially in higher education. The more additional labor a student is willing to put for themselves, the more I will offer them. Because, at the end of the day, it is about them. It should always be about the students.

It is my mission to educate artists who remain curious throughout their careers, who know they have the tools to succeed, and who leave the beaten path behind to walk their own. To prepare them for the journey ahead, which should be one of inquiry, trust in the work, and discovery.