

Teaching Statement

I consider teaching at its core to be a reciprocal relationship between one who has a special insight or knowledge born from experience, scholarship, self-reflection, practice, etc. (Teacher), and one or more to whom that insight is shared (Student(s)).

Teaching is a give and take, a speaking and listening, a sharing and receiving. Teaching is an exchange, a conversation. It requires the agility to adjust the course of action that is planned in order to address the questions that arise in the learning process. This conversational, reciprocal relationship in which knowledge is shared and utilized develops and is possible through simple trust: trust that the teacher is honest, humane, passionate, and interested, not only in the subject, but more importantly in students learning something regarding.

Part and parcel to this Teacher/Student dynamic exchange is that by adopting such openness in the classroom, a teacher empowers the student to learn how to learn, and therefore effects a sort of disappearance or back-grounding of the teacher's predominance as knowledge bearer. I try to enable my students to be self-sufficient and self-motivated in the field in order to gain pure knowledge, the knowledge how to use that which is learned, and the means and confidence to stand independently from me

I am passionate about performing and about teaching various modalities of it.

My goal as a teacher of performance, be it acting, musical theater, performance art, adding embodied components to visual arts practice, etc., is to enable students to discover and claim their artistry. By doing so, I seek to facilitate a student's subjective understanding and way of working as a performer, or in whatever field their life "practice" turns out to be. My classroom is a space of facilitated conversation. I utilize several modes and strategies to teach performance but am a firm believer in a secure foundational place to start - a baseline approach. This in turn establishes a reference point for the student to return to. With basics established, an introduction and exploration of eclectic approaches then broadens the developing performer's repertoire of work strategies. However, foundational to any approach, in any of my teaching, is structure, organization, transparency, and communication established and pursued from the outset. That said, the structure (syllabus) must be flexible enough to adjust to the needs of the individual student and the classroom in general.

I bring my own experiences as teacher and as student to my approach to teaching. For example:

- Emphasizing freedom to have fun and create (trajectory for claiming artistry) in the classroom enables student's discernment, not judgment, about her own work. This includes creating a personally positive approach focused on training my future colleagues based on a disciplined work ethic and respect for me and the other classmates. My experience teaching young actors has revealed a near universal limited mindset about what acting really is. This stifles them, leading to cautious and safe choices that flatten the material. I find students today are scared to be "wrong" or "bad." My classroom mantra is "In here (acting training) there is no right and only one wrong: NOT trying something. Have the courage to fail." To have that mantra, creating a support and safe

space is critical. This safe space to risk serves to counteract many students' propensity to be safe in aesthetic choices. They realize that they are safe to risk failure and to explore the urgency of stories and begin to recognize that life is lived more intensely in the day to day than they consciously experience it. It is that "extra-daily" dimension they must embrace and are encouraged to explore.

- Giving feedback must be about building up the young artist, not the old thought of tearing them down to recreate them. An interesting benefit of going back to school later in life (MFA Performance + Performance Studies, Pratt institute, May 2018) is that I bore witness to the change in student responsiveness to methods of teaching. Today's young people, for better or worse, require a teacher that understands the nuance of leading with a supportive mindset, while instilling the discipline, focus, and courage the student performers will require in the business or in whatever career path they choose. It is the difference between developing the student to self-assess, respond and adjust to how their work is going at a particular moment versus developing the student to look to the teacher for approval. One breeds confidence, the other reliance.
- I do not shy away from lecture and discussion of assigned readings or newly introduced concepts to establish foundational concepts from which a student can draw as they forge their own artistic processes. Performance classes are primarily about "getting up, " everybody works," "get it on its feet." This is for good reason; however, sometimes before meeting the challenges of interpreting a scene or song, or in the case of non-traditional performance or performance art, devising the performance score, it is effective to lay out the theoretical groundwork, or a strategy or structure so that conceptually all are on the same page, so to speak. As an example, when speaking about the importance of relationships in an acting, many actors conceptualize person to person relationships, rather than considering the larger concept of circumstances: environment, social forces, economic situation, sensory activations of the scene, relationship to place, etc. A discussion can broaden the students' thinking about the depth of the work from the outset, as well as laying out a strategy of working toward that depth incrementally. In performance, a lecture on the social/cultural critique at play can help anchor the student in understanding the conceptual connotations that might possibly drive the work.
- Using a Socratic approach in lectures and in feedback sessions assures not only preparation, but engagement in the classroom. Answering is embodied involvement that contains risk. This is a strategy for keeping a class moving and thinking during both lecture-weighted subjects and performance work sessions when the bulk of the class is observing, yet still requiring engagement. At the same time, a Socratic approach allows me to evaluate where students are as far as being able to articulate understanding in their own words. This is further to a conversational approach where listening, asking questions, and urging exploration rather than impose "how I would do it."
- An emphasis on the experiences of what professional artistic practice would look like and require of them rather than a stern "schoolteacher with a ruler" approach, is an effective strategy with students you are asking to be vulnerable in the process of performance training. This is not about abandoning discipline, but rather about providing

transparency as to what behaviors are unacceptable in my classroom as well as what behaviors are expected, from the start, in the professional theatre or on set. Sometimes, however, one has to lay down the law, and the teacher has to decide how to best communicate (usually re-emphasize and remind) students of expected behavior (e.g., pre-class use of space, level of preparation, chatting, cell-phones, water only...)

- Professional experience/Personal Artistic Practice is a legitimizing tool, when it comes to teaching an artistic practice to artists in training. I always try to relate points of theory or technique back to my real experiences, observations, and real life stories/behaviors as illustrative.

In conclusion, it is often said that the teacher is also a student. In my experience, by maintaining the openness to learn and be challenged by the student, I continually renew my strength, stamina, openness to acquiring knowledge, and a passion for sharing it. The sharing itself affects students and the one doing the sharing. The students affect me as they respond to the instruction and their own growth. This also develops the teacher over time, which in turn enriches future students. It is a self-perpetuating cycle, and one aimed at enabling students to embrace their unique artistry or abilities, no matter if they should be on the theatre stage, the gallery stage, the sound studio, on location, on in a board room, on a conference call. It serves no student, no matter their level of talent, to limit their outlook to a limited view that a student of performance or art is only able to pursue a fruitful and contributing career in the arts.

Performance training contains within its potential outcomes for those that pursue it that of becoming more fully human. This is a personally held philosophy that drives my passion for performance practices and for teaching them.

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