

ROB ROZNOWSKI: TEACHING PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

My approach to *teaching* acting and directing is as focused and as disparate as my personal approach to *working* as an actor and director. Subscribing to any one methodology is convenient yet dangerous. Forcing students into one approach is unfair to anyone who does not happen to be reached by that technique. My personal technique as actor and director was culled from numerous teachers over my years as a student and though I may have been moved or awakened by certain exercises, I never have been a devotee of only one acting philosophy.

My approach is similar in the classroom. I announce in my introduction to each class that not every exercise will work for each student. I ask them to explore the exercise to its fullest and only when the exercise is completed decide if they want to add this exercise to their personal technique. When using a Cohen exercise for vulnerability, I tell my students about the teacher who designed the exercise in case they want to explore this teacher more fully. I believe that is my job as teacher. Not to be a guru of one type of acting but to expose my students to as many types of exercises as I reasonably can. I then allow *them* to take their successes and failures and decide what they will take with them to the next scene and their next teacher. Although I personally connect most to psychology-based Uta Hagen, I owe it to my students to introduce them to Meisner to take them out of their head and react spontaneously.

While this may sound like a hodgepodge of acting's greatest hits, I make sure that my classes address the individual problems of my students. While Meisner might work best for a scene that has stagnated, changing Hagen's conditioning forces might make a self-conscious performer forget his or her fears. My disparate approach is focused on the student's needs.

My approach to directing is similar—a disciplined freedom. Both my acting and directing classes spend many hours on script analysis. Both my acting and directing students find a premise for each show, based on Lajos Egri's *Art of Dramatic Writing*. From there, we decipher super-objectives and scene objectives. Once they understand this process, my work as a teacher of directing mirrors my work as a teacher of acting. I again expose them to the many influences that have allowed me to direct productions from *Cyrano de Bergerac* to *The Rocky Horror Show*. Work as an actor and director must be influenced in different ways or else the actor or director has the possibility to be caught in a rut.

I sincerely applaud any teacher who focuses on the philosophy of one methodologist, but I believe even they would not say that one technique works best for all students. I appreciate these specialists depth of knowledge and hope their enthusiasm inspires a student to further study-- anything in the pursuit of a student finding his or her personal approach to acting.

Determining the effectiveness of assisting a student in the acting classroom is a much more difficult task than normal learning outcomes. The intangible success of what makes an actor successful is intangible and certainly not universal. While I may think a student has succeeded, another may find the actor's work unsuccessful. The only true test of successful teaching of acting comes from moments of truth defined by a student's commitment, student's growth and understanding of the concepts and exercises used. Successful teaching of acting comes later when a student continues to work in the very difficult and tenuous world of professional theatre. This is when a larger community recognizes the combination of training and talent honed in the classroom.

I am constantly modifying my teaching to reach each student. While there are certainly group dynamics that may be solved through specified ensemble exercises, the individual's growth is impossible to chart on any syllabus. The individual attention demanded by any acting course, is what sets great teaching apart. The quest for breakthroughs in a student's training is a constant and ongoing goal for me that affect my teaching and mentoring—in the classroom, the hallways, the rehearsal room and beyond graduation.