

Teaching Philosophy

Telling stories is in our DNA. My role as educator is to unlock the potential in students that comes from our shared storytelling roots. Today's students are inundated with stimulus through a variety of media. It is easy for them to lose a sense of self and self-worth, so I guide students to discover their voice, embrace their identity, and to engage those powerful aspects of themselves through the use of Michael Chekhov's tools. Curiosity, community, and transformation drive my teaching. Engaging these three pillars of artistry allows for a free flow of thought to action, regardless of the mode of expression. With a focus on developing the connection between the mind and the body, I seek to train the artist naturally, embracing beauty and ease.

My approach to teaching begins with fostering communal awareness, so my classes start with games adapted freely from Augusto Boal's Games for Actors and Non-Actors. As Boal devised his methods working with communities of actors and non-actors, his exercises are ideal for the novice and challenging for the expert. Pairing this with Michael Chekhov's psycho-physical exercises, my students collaborate to create improvised stories that vary from realistic scenes pulled from life to myth and legend. Using psycho-physical gesture as a means of idea creation or applying it to a text, my students find the universal core of a character and express it freely. Pairing these two theorists, students of all ages and backgrounds can integrate themselves into the practice of empathizing with characters and investing in their position within a production because the nature of this work is collaborative at every level. Over the course of the semester, students learn to imagine and enact a strong through-line as well as explore each moment of their work using their whole self. Students will also devise various solo and group projects, including interactive Theatre of the Oppressed scenes and poetic interpretations inspired by the celebration of the Day of the Dead. Each of these assignments foster student transformation by connecting them to the self, to each other, and to the world.

As a director, I find that research images and storyboarding are a crucial skill in enacting the vision in my head. In Joseph Campbell's Hero with a Thousand Faces, he states "it has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward." With every production I direct, I find the heart of the story and express it through a motivating metaphor or image. An example of this is my motivating image in Phantom of the Opera; the Phantom is an innovator, and he is a man way ahead of his time. So, the image I chose was a modified mask that I built using Steampunk elements. This led to our production emphasizing the technical aspects of Steampunk, as though the entire show were produced inside a Victorian music box. Using these motivating images, I reimagine recognizable stories and tell them through a new lens. This has proven, time and again, to be a process that actors find refreshing and rigorous. Through using images and storyboards, actors and designers are unified through a clear picture that also leaves room for collaboration.

One of my former students said that the best part about my teaching is that I teach students to embrace themselves to enliven their work and lives. I see teaching and directing as guiding students through the forest of trees and showing them both the path and the beauty of the world around them. I realize that not every student will be a professional artist, but I choose to teach life-long artistic learners.