

Teaching Philosophy

Practical Passion

When I speak about teaching, I use the term “Practical Passion.” This means two things. First, it is my duty to inspire my students to reach for excellence. I strive to create an environment where students are excited to take risks, be creative, and make art! But passion and courage do not make an actor by themselves. It is also my responsibility to equip my students with the tools and craft to shape their passion into compelling performance.

My Influences

At the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, I worked many times under the leadership of **Kent Thompson**. His approach to directing was foundational for my own work. The way Kent created stage composition to reveal classical text was revelatory to me. For Directing texts, I am particularly fond of William Ball’s *A Sense of Direction*. Though the book is dated, it’s approach to foundational work is excellent.

At the Universities of Washington and Milwaukee, and then in conservatory at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, I was fortunate to study an array of methodologies under the guidance of magnificent teachers. In **Alan Rust**, I found a true mentor. His teachings, especially in the areas of **script analysis** and **dramatic action**, have stayed with me throughout my career.

Finally, **Victor Abravaya** is the department chair at Nassau Community College where I started my academic career, and I consider him an invaluable mentor. Victor was a model of leadership. With a thousand responsibilities on his plate, he always found a way to return focus back to the students and the art.

Specialties

It has been my good fortune to teach myriad theatre courses from Theatre 101 to the most advanced acting and directing courses. My most sophisticated skills are **Audition Technique**, **Stage Combat**, and **Shakespeare**.

Teaching Acting: Three Cornerstones

1) **Action:** “Change your partner.”

Action has its roots in Stanislavski’s system and is the bedrock for dynamic acting. A student actor must learn to pursue objectives, utilize tactics, and play actions. They must take the focus off themselves and learn to use the author’s words to demand what they need from their scene partners.

2) **Personalization:** “Bring YOURSELF to the stage.”

Young actors often believe their character is someone different from themselves, like a jacket they put on to hide their real selves. This is an understandable but ultimately limiting mindset. Actors must learn to put themselves on stage. Only then can they realize a living, breathing performance.

3) **Stakes:** “Find the biggest truth.”

Once a young actor has learned to play action and to play it truthfully, I guide them toward the most important truth available. There is a creeping trend in modern acting to create feeling by coming off voice, being imprecise with speech, and clouding action with behavior. This is very attractive to young actors and has its place, but it will never carry a performer through the plays of August Wilson or Caryl Churchill or Shakespeare! Great plays require the actor to find heroic truth.

Fortunately, this is actually the easiest of the three to teach. Students already have energy and excitement. The key is to help them direct this passion into urgency, and clarity of action.

Passion

But method, skill, and pedagogy still require student investment, which brings me back to ‘practical passion’. I believe this is my greatest gift. I have a fierce belief in both teaching and the theatre. I carry enormous passion into the classroom, and I use that passion to ignite the passions of my students. My students want to create their best work, and I eagerly accept the responsibility of equipping them with the skills to reach for excellence.