Teaching Portfolio

Cheryl Turski

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My ultimate goal in teaching performance is for students to grow into well-rounded, expressive beings with profound senses of self. I strive to meet students where they are: intellectually, physically, and emotionally. Through years of personal discovery as well as teaching, I have found the more doing, the more practice, the more work actors put in – the more freedom they find, both on and off stage.

Because movement, acting, and voice are all physical disciplines, I believe students learn best through mindful repetition of active exercises, followed by discussion involving questions and observations. For example, throughout the movement class progression, I always begin class with meditation, followed by a short yoga warm-up. While the level of difficulty builds as course levels rise, the intent is the same: to become grounded, supported and aligned movers. I stress that there is nuance in each pose only discovered through consistent practice, and every pose informs a greater movement pattern in life. After each session, I ask for questions, which usually deal with the logistics or overall goal of a pose. Discussion follows, during which I model the pose, then invite students to join and voice their observations. As students learn through varying means, I find combining verbal explanation, visual modelling, and a kinesthetic experience proves the most effective.

I believe the role of a teacher is to provide a safe, structured environment that challenges, motivates, and supports self-exploration. For example, in acting classes, I use a combination of discipline and humor to push students out of comfort, and into growth. I often use an exercise from Practical Aesthetics in which students need to implement varying tactics to achieve a goal. Provided they are physically safe, I will not let students back out of the exercise just because something is unfamiliar or uncomfortable. I playfully encourage them, much like a sports coach, to keep going after their goal until they succeed, and to expand their tactical choices beyond the polite, or every day. Because I set strict rules for the exercise, such as no laughing while someone is working, and no side comments, the students feel safe enough to take risks in front of the group. And it is precisely this risk-taking that leads to profound self-exploration.

Inclusivity is at the heart of all my classes. Students arrive with varying personal backgrounds, physical abilities and experience with the subject matter. I believe that by allowing students to take ownership of their experience, and treating every experience as valuable and valid, the classroom can be a fertile space for all students.
example, when I teach oral placement for consonants in speech class, I always ask if any students speak other languages. As we learn the tongue placement for American English, I invite students to chime in with the tongue placements in other languages. Then, as a class we try all the different placements to see how sound shifts. This inclusion promotes a sense of respect and community in the classroom. Also, I provide several avenues for students to present questions or make observations. I urge them to find a manner of communicating that works for them, whether that is expressing it in the moment during class, in a journal, or in a one on one meeting with me. I find that providing different avenues allows extroverts and introverts the opportunity to be heard.

In terms of assessment, I always assess a student's growth, as opposed to their inherent talent in any given discipline. And since I strive for fairness in performance classes, I use a grading rubric based on how well a student implements course material in class presentation. For example, in movement classes, I grade students based on their understanding of their own form, despite what modifications they may need based on their body's limitations.

The study of performance is a unique combination requiring the student to trust themselves and the instructor. I believe that my emphasis on work ethic, assessment of progress, and inclusivity promotes a healthy approach to acting.

Teaching Objectives and Outcomes

As I continually develop my performance courses, I adhere to the following trajectory: self-awareness of habitual patterns, to creation of new patterns that promote freedom of expression. While I plan my courses with this linear trajectory, both phases work together simultaneously, each supporting the other on the student's journey to living truthfully in the given circumstances of the play. To help students self-assess where they are in the process, I encourage them to use four stages of learning: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence, and finally unconscious competence. Conscious competence with moments of unconscious competence is my goal for all students achieving degrees in acting.

Early classes in movement, acting, or voice all focus on the first phase: self-awareness of habitual patterns, utilizing different techniques for each discipline. In all three areas, I encourage students to discover their habitual patterns (be it physical, emotional, or vocal) and learn to assess whether or not these patterns are supporting their needs on and off stage. This is the step from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence. Or in other words, a student might be unaware they are utilizing unhealthy habits, but by the end of an introductory class a student should be acutely aware of the unhealthy habits and in process to change them.
Specifically, in early movement classes, I pull from my Laban/Bartenieff training which promotes efficient, integrated movement as the foundation for expression. Through investigation on how the body grounds, supports, and aligns itself, students learn to use foundational support as a means to physical freedom. In addition, Laban work provides a vocabulary through which students can identify their patterns, and objectively work to increase physical variety. At the end of these courses, students are able to move healthily from their center, and fully embody text with greater diversity.

In acting classes, I use Practical Aesthetics as a structure within which students can objectively assess whether they are truly responding to their partner in the moment, or if they are playing out their preconceived idea of the scene. In exercises such as repetition, students work to dissolve judgement, and freely react to what is truly happening in front of them. In their final scenes, they are able to let go of their idea of what a moment should look like, and truthfully exist in the moment with another person on stage.

In voice, I use Linklater Voice Technique to promote a free connection of breath to thought and increased vocal clarity. Through technical exercises as well as image based work, students gain a thorough understanding of their voice physically and emotionally. In their final monologues, students should be able to breathe three dimensionally, properly support, and clearly articulate poetic text.

While I currently teach beginning classes in all the movement, acting, and voice progressions, my concentration is in advanced movement classes. Once students demonstrate an advanced level of body awareness, and the ability to consistently use healthy physical patterns, they move to expressive and character work. This learning step is from conscious incompetence to conscious competence, with occasional moments of unconscious competence.

Later movement classes focus on students' ability to physically portray character. Using Laban Movement Analysis, students construct movement profiles that differ greatly from their own, and are then required to embody them in a monologue or scene. By the end of these courses, students should be able to authentically play characters of different genders, time periods or styles. In addition, coursework deals with the importance of ensemble and composition. Using Viewpoints, students learn to move as a cohesive unit with intense awareness of their surroundings. Once they establish this ensemble connection, they use the principles of Viewpoints to create original compositions that further story telling either with or without text. By the end of these courses, students should be able to generate original work in a structured manner.
The best measure of student success is to examine their accomplishments as they transition into the profession. I have had a number of students, both graduate and undergraduate, with notable professional productions. One undergraduate student in particular has gone on to a vibrant New York career, performing regularly Off-Broadway and at major regional theatres such as Geva Theatre Center and Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey. And most impressively, he was in the cast of The Visit, a Broadway production starring Chita Rivera which received several Tony nominations. In addition, I have had several undergraduate students win competitive apprenticeships at local theatres such as Tipping Point Theatre, and Meadow Brook Theatre. At the graduate level, I have had students receive company member contracts from highly regarded regional theatres, including Utah Shakespeare Festival, Montana Shakespeare in the Parks, Cincinnati Shakespeare, American Shakespeare Center, and Michigan Shakespeare Festival as well as New York theatre company, Titan Theatre Company. Also, I have had three graduate students go on to have substantial film and television careers, appearing in films such as the highly acclaimed It Follows, and blockbuster Batman v. Superman, television shows such as The Detectors, as well as numerous commercials. The majority of my students work regularly in smaller professional markets, such as Seattle, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Atlanta; in this highly competitive industry, success can be measured more by consistent work, rather than prestigious institutions.
THR 6225: Movement for the Stage II - Introduction to Movement Analysis

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Winter 2016  
Phone: 312-213-9670
Office Hours: M: 2-4, W: 2-4

COURSE PURPOSE:
The purpose of this course is to expand upon the previous stage movement courses and provide a detailed analytical approach to stage movement housed in the technique of Laban Movement Analysis in order to further the student’s ability to move with expression, variety, and ease. In addition, Bartenieff Fundamentals and Yoga will be used in order to continue to build the students’ strength, flexibility and balance.

They will further develop personal body wisdom to increase coordination, connectivity, and freedom thus allowing for more physical expressivity.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:
At the end of this course, the student will be able to:
• Use a common vocabulary for describing how the body moves.
• Define body’s relationship to self and others.
• Identify behavioral habits, and replace them with physical freedom.
• Understand the relation of the movement to the thought/action.
• Gain strength, balance, and flexibility.

METHODOLOGY:
The class consists of exercises, class discussions, and games.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
• Students need to wear loose-fitting clothing that allows for movement.
• Occasional handouts and required video clips.

GRADING:
15% - Class participation
30% - Journals
20% - Video Quizzes
15% - Yoga Midterm
20% - Final Project

JOURNAL:
Once a month, I will give you a list of questions for you to reflect upon regarding the previous month’s work. Please reflect on the exercises done in class and respond in whatever way is useful to you. However, please be clear, specific, and speak to the process as opposed to just recording the exercises or relating how you are feeling that day. The purpose of journaling is to articulate your experience in a way that promotes conscious reflection, not simply a recitation of daily activity. There will be three total journals, each comprising 10% of your grade.
VIDEO QUIZZES:
As we cover each component of Laban Movement Analysis, you will be required to watch a short video and accurately analyze the movement you observe. Using LMA is as much about non-judgmental observation as it is about non-judgmental experience. There will be four quizzes, each comprising 5% of your grade.

YOGA MIDTERM:
Halfway through the semester, you will present a yoga midterm. You will show a Sun Salutation A, a Sun Salutation B, and one standing posture per my request. You will be graded on the order of the flow, your form in the posture, and your use of breath. Your grade will be based on whatever modification you need for your body at this stage. The Midterm is worth 15% of your grade 5% each for Sun Salutation A, Sun Salutation B, and standing posture.

FINAL PROJECT:
The final project consists of four parts, each worth 5% of your final grade:
1. A written copy of your LMA scored monologue.
2. Presentation of expressive movement version of the monologue.
3. Presentation of literal interpretation based on the expressive version of the monologue.
4. Accurate presentation of Diagonal Scale, including correct Spatial and Effort life.

CLASS PARTICIPATION:
As a studio course, participation is expected of all students. This is a factor that indicates the effort one is willing to put forth toward one’s own improvement.

MOBILE PHONE POLICY:
Mobile phone usage is not allowed in class. Phones need to be turned off before class begins.

ATTENDANCE:
In keeping with the objectives of the program, the Department of Theater has a clearly defined policy on attendance and punctuality. Chronic absences and lateness will not be tolerated. Phone calls to the department do not constitute an excuse for lateness or absences. Communication regarding absences or lateness shall be made in person or directly to the instructor by phone or e-mail, never through a second party. Unavoidable University-approved event or religious holiday, the instructor determines whether or not an absence or late attendance is for an acceptable reason and whether or not students will be allowed to make up the missed work.

A daily attendance record will be kept. Students are allowed two absences. Every absence thereafter, will effectively lower the student's final grade one letter value (10%). Three late-arrivals equals one missed class. It is the responsibility of the student to give the instructor notice one week prior to any anticipated absence for which the student seeks to avoid penalty. The student must contact the instructor within one class period after any unanticipated absence.
SAMPLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE:

WEEK 1 - Introduction to Yoga
WEEK 2 – Introduction to Yoga and Body: Bartenieff Fundamentals
WEEK 3 – Introduction to Effort: Weight, Time, Space and Flow
WEEK 4 – Introduction to Space: Directions, Dimensions, Kinesphere
WEEK 5 – Introduction to Shape: Modes of Shape Change
WEEK 6 – Super Yoga Week
WEEK 7 – Effort Continued: Drives
WEEK 8 – Yoga Midterm
WEEK 9 – Synthesize: Body, Effort, Space and Shape (BESS)
WEEK 10 – SPRING BREAK
WEEK 11 – BESS and Voice- Increasing Vocal Variety
WEEK 12 – Space: Scales, One-dimensional and Three-Dimensional
WEEK 13 – Observation: How to use LMA and BF in observation
WEEK 14 – Applying LMA: BESS and Monologue- Expressive Version
WEEK 15 – Applying LMA: BESS and Monologue- Literal Version
WEEK 16 – FINAL
Effort

- How we move
- The quality of movement
- Inner attitude toward the physical requirements of movement
- Description of the manner in which a person expends his/her kinetic energy
- How one copes with his/her inner tensions and the demands of the outer environment

Four Effort Factors

- **Flow** – progression or control
  - baseline “goingness”
  - continuity of movement
  - mover’s attitude toward control
- **Weight** – intention or force
  - active or passive attitude toward using the weight of your body
  - the sensation of force or pressure exerted in a movement
- **Time** – decision, urgency
  - inner attitude toward the time you do have. NOT tempo
  - “I have a whole two minutes!” “I only have two minutes?!”
- **Space** – attention, focus, thinking
  - the manner in which energy is focused in an action
  - how you give attention, not place in space

LABAN

EFFORT GRAPH

weight

light

flow

free

time

sustained

space

indirect

direct

bound

quick

strong
OBSERVATION DAY! Walk around campus and find...

Body:

Pay attention to INITIATION. Find someone who is initiating with:
  a. distal parts (hands, feet, head)
  b. mid-limb (elbow, knee)
  c. core (center of the body)

Recognize PATTERNS OF TOTAL BODY CONNECTIVITY:
  a. breath support
  b. core-distal
  c. head/tail
  d. upper/lower
  e. body half
  f. cross lateral

Effort:

Find examples of each of these EFFORTS:
  a. light
  b. strong
  c. direct
  d. indirect
  e. quick
  f. sustained
  g. bound
  h. free

Space:

Find examples of KINESPHERE:
  a. large- far reach
  b. medium- mid reach
  c. small- near reach

Find examples of people who live in different DIMENSIONS:
  a. vertical (up/down)
  b. horizontal (side/side)
  c. sagittal (front/back)

Shape:

How is the person dealing with the world around them? Find examples of:
  a. shape flow (self relating to self)
  b. bridging/direction movement (relating to the world without affecting it/being affected)
  c. carving/molding (relating to the world while being affected and affecting it)
FOLLOW SOMEONE!

Using the previous page, write down a description of this person using the components of BODY, EFFORT, SPACE and SHAPE.

Now, move with them. Walk a few feet behind them and try to imitate their walk, or gesture. What did you find? How do you feel? What emotions does it evoke for you?

Now, write a brief description of who you IMAGINE this person to be. It will not be correct, but use the description you have and your movement experience to determine the character of this person. Write it below. Write a poem, create a story, use descriptive words, free flow this part!