

Statement of Approach

Acting for the stage is innately physical. Therefore, to portray a character with nuance, subtlety and precision one must have a body that is finely tuned and attuned to his or her physicality. While studying neutral mask with Jacques Lecoq, I came to understand that an actor must be neutrally aligned and clear of all involuntary physical tension to be effective in multiple and diverse roles. This revelation was confirmed by my training in Alexander technique and three years intensive study with Kristin Linklater. Unfortunately, most of us have unconscious neuromuscular patterns that lock us into poor body function. This faulty movement not only creates injuries, but for the actor it creates tensions that can damage the voice and taint every character he or she plays with identical physical distortions.

The solution is to make the student aware of the unconscious habit, stretch and relax the overly tight muscles and strengthen the weak ones that are not properly recruited. Muscles should work in balance but typically one muscle is used too much and another not enough which leads to tension for one muscle and atrophy for the other. Working as a Clinical Framework Correction Specialist for the past eight years, I am nationally certified to assess each student individually and diagnose their skeletal framework deviations. I then design and prescribe biomechanically corrective movements that the students do in class, at home and in the gym. These exercises will be executed habitually and will bring their skeletal frames into neutral alignment, elevating their authentic body movement.

Curriculum: Once the students have begun their technical journey towards alignment, we dive into neutral mask. Through exercises and improvisation we explore skeletal and emotional neutrality, creating a reference point of balance and quiet receptivity to their world. I incorporate Butoh exercises which are both imaginative and physical, preparing them for their first silent performance of movement improvisation. Now we study Viewpoints as taught to me by Anne Bogart, priming them to tackle words and become physically responsive to impulse. In the highly creative state of Viewpoints improvisation, I have them write their own monologues. We craft and hone their words until they are performance level and for their second showing they stage their own stories. This experience gives them a reference point of genuinely expressing text. Now they are ready to take on a modern playwright. I ask them to find a character that physically, emotionally or in terms of backstory, closely resembles the actor (for the BA students, I will provide the role for them.) Once their characters and scenes are fully evolved, they will have their third public performance. After that, they grow larger in their physical choices as we enter the world of Commedia dell'arte as taught to me by Commedia master, Niki Woltz. I lead them in physical warm-ups and exercises tailored to Commedia training as they explore these characters' imbalances and conflicts. At this juncture, we will also find the time to explore Clown and Buffoon and will perform sketches from these genres for their fourth public showing. At this point I introduce Bertolt Brecht. We prepare for and analyze his infamous "alienation effect" while preparing sketches for their fifth presentation. And at long last, the playwright who is both naturalistic and rhetorical, we study Shakespeare. Using physical techniques from my time performing and training with Shakespeare & Company, we explore the bold bodies and exquisite words in scene studies for their sixth performance.

Beginning with a neutral body and the actor's own self as his or her primary character, my students steadily progress through theatre genres from the more physically subtle to the biggest and boldest. By starting with the actor's own skin, he or she retains a reference point of authenticity for all characters.

My cornerstone pedagogical techniques would be similar for the BA and MFA candidates, but my focus, depth of exploration and expectations would differ. A BA candidate, pursuing a more general and well-rounded degree, is not necessarily an actor looking to compete in the professional world. For the BA student, I would aim to kindle his or her universal artistry and creativity. An MFA is a premier, professional degree and one who earns it needs to demonstrate a specific skill set. I would demand physical acuity, framework neutrality, insightful characters, discipline and passion. He or she must own the acting and movement techniques presented and display substantial growth in the physical, vocal and emotional authenticity of their characters.