

My lifelong pursuit of learning has drawn me to three of the four corners of the United States, across the Atlantic, and into Canada. I am ready to compile my findings into a published body of work. I want others to benefit from my discoveries as I continue to develop them in a supportive environment. I seek an opportunity to share and disseminate the knowledge I have gathered.

I have developed my acting curriculum over nearly 20 years. Its approach to acting is utterly pragmatic, providing a solid foundation of performance skill to students of any prior experience level. The material takes normally vague concepts such as *chemistry*, *energy*, *relationship*, and *character* and turns them into tangible tools with measurable results. More importantly, the curriculum reveals and explains the explicit transactions of communication and emotional response. That is, students learn exactly what their bodies do to sustain conversation or generate emotion—and how to manipulate that action. This knowledge drastically accelerates a student’s process by transforming their formerly instinctive effort into a deliberate technique. When I taught “Acting for Non-Majors,” a senior faculty member assured me he’d never seen non-actors do such good work. When I worked with acting majors, they’d often tell me they felt like they’d gained years of training in the space of an hour. The curriculum successfully provides to every student the skills and strategies (i.e., “talent”) necessary to craft a competent and entertaining performance. It’s ready to be taken further.

Teaching advanced technique has until now been ad hoc. I have exercises and strategies that work, but these have not been systemically organized. The two major areas to be developed are expressivity and storytelling. Because all communication is a physical action, and all emotion is a physical response, I use principles evident in the work of Michael Chekov, Rudolf Laban, Arthur Lessac, Kristin Linklater, and Albert Ellis (Rational-Emotive Therapy) to show how one’s body can be fully engaged in speaking and responding yet completely controlled to achieve a specific dramatic purpose. Storytelling, then, is a matter of timing and flow; I train performers how to manipulate the timings of their speech to achieve the phrasing and emotional effects they intend, and to understand how rhythm and intensity define their words and actions. I look forward to working with the same coterie of students over a longer term, building on the basic foundations, developing a complete program to achieve expert results.

I practice theater to encourage human discovery. Such discovery is the fundament of my success. I draw from manifold traditions and systems of training to illustrate the illimitable variety of approach to the universal human behavior of communion. In response, students learn that acting skill is not confined to “methods” of rules and exercises, but is restrained only by our capacity to understand natural human relations. Guided by principle, unfettered by “method,” students become empowered to access unfamiliar ideas and incorporate what wisdom they offer. Furthermore, because students learn to analyze and manage their natural emotional responses, my approach offers life skills that can be applied to handle the stresses and troubles encountered outside the theater. This, perhaps, is the most valuable learning of all.

Beyond theater, I can readily wear whatever hats need be worn, whether academic, managerial, or strategic, as my background indicates. Additionally, I bring with me new projects and unique knowledge.

Dialects and accents, I’ve found, can be easy to learn. During my MFA program, I determined that actors could learn dialects (or accents) more efficiently if I showed them how to use their vocal muscles differently. Actors can easily acquire a convincing dialect not by substituting one sound for another, but by adopting new physical habits. One of the easiest is Texan: I instruct students to imagine that they’ve shot Novocain everywhere but the back of

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their throat. I have also discovered essential similarities between certain European and American accents, and these suggest new possibilities for ethnographic comparison. I entered a Ph.D. program to formally study this phenomenon and understand why my approach worked. I learned that these physical habits of speech had a name— *articulatory settings*— but although they had been theorized as early as 1653, their existence was not objectively demonstrated until 2004. Moreover, it is still a novel assertion that these settings might be a cause of accented speech, rather than a consequence. No consensus exists on the actual role of articulatory settings in speech, which leaves the question wide open for discovery. My graduate work helps frame the problem of accented speech as a motor failure, not a perceptual deficit. Moving forward, I wish to examine the problem of accent acquisition (or reduction) as a process of overcoming motor memory and linguistic bias. Students required to learn foreign languages would receive an additional advantage: articulatory settings can help them speak those languages more naturally and fluently. I anticipate generating publishable research and, ideally, commercial training materials. A successful investigation could change our understanding of dialects and accents.

*Scansion*, or analysis of metered verse, can also be easily learned. Edgar Allan Poe created an innovative system of scansion which I have recently recovered. *Poe Studies: Dark Romanticism* has accepted my manuscript explaining how and why Poe's system was lost; now I am working to restore that system. I designed a workshop to teach Poe's principles of scansion, and I have run the workshop with participants aged anywhere between 12 and 34. Poe's system is so simple that, within a few hours, even the youngest participant is accurately scanning Shakespeare without help. With Poe's theory, novices can quickly move past basic analysis and participate in more sophisticated discussions of classical poetry. I have drafted a written version of the workshop and I am still creating new opportunities to test, refine, and clarify its instruction. A theater school and a regional Shakespeare Festival would be perfect resources to establish and maximize its value. I expect to release the system as a training DVD with supporting materials. Its effectiveness persuades me that its publication will be welcomed by faculty who teach classical analysis and the students who have struggled to learn it.

I can show students how to write well. My approach is successful because it reframes the writing task as a method of organizing ideas as opposed to a process of collocating sentences. Students learn how to build an essay directly upon the framework of an outline, and they thereby discover how to conceive their arguments at a structural level. All the material is presented by experience, not lecture— and because writing is such an abstract task, I will give one example of how this is accomplished. I organize students into groups of four and give them secret assignments: one student will talk about some true event from their life; another writes down the first sentence of that story; the third summarizes the “point”; the fourth writes the last sentence. When they are finished, I announce that they already know how to structure a paragraph, and I will prove it. I ask them to please read exactly what has been written down. Each group, to their own surprise, reads out a well-formed topic sentence, body, and conclusion. In that moment, every student learns what “paragraph structure” means to them, and it is a lesson they do not forget. I don't know whether there is space in the field of writing pedagogy to encapsulate and disseminate this curriculum beyond my immediate influence. However, the approach has been successful in helping third- and fourth-year undergraduates to fearlessly tackle writing projects larger and more complex than any they had previously tried. Whether or not this teaching becomes a textbook, I am confident students will benefit from its knowledge and training.

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There are two other major programs I have undertaken over the past nine years. These projects are unique and fascinating studies with immense potential. These include Edgar Allan Poe audiobooks and research into musical absolute pitch ability.

The complete canon of Edgar Allan Poe has never been recorded in audiobook form. Poe is, of course, well known for his tales and poems, but the greater part of Poe's work was nonfiction. Poe wrote critical reviews, observations of contemporary life, and philosophical essays. I have already published a number of never-before-recorded selections, and my work has been recognized by the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore. I infuse character and verve into the texts, representing more than their literal intent, so that Poe's insights may be shared with more than just research scholars. High school students, listening to the stories, report "the recording made them feel as if Poe himself were reading." Scholars, hearing the non-fiction selections, acknowledge that "Aruffo manages the tricky task of making dry, academic literary essays accessible to the general listener." The goal of this project is to reproduce Poe's entire publishing career, and it will be the first audio production ever to do so.

I have been working to teach and learn "absolute pitch" ability. This is the mysterious and rare ability to identify musical tones by name. According to my research, musicians who possess "AP" understand music as though it were a written language. Learning this skill enables people to engage with musical sounds and learn new ways to express themselves. Prior to entering a Ph.D. program I developed two sets of training materials for absolute pitch: one for adults, designed from my own research; the other for children, created by a Japanese scholar, which I translated from its original German and for which I secured publishing rights. I currently offer each of these systems to the public, but both are to be developed further. The program for adults has been unusually successful, but requires further research into categorization and concept formation; I have begun these studies in collaboration with specialist Robert Goldstone at Indiana University. The system for children will benefit from a controlled pilot program in which I can test and refine its principles of musical literacy, and I intend to seek and recruit a Portland music teacher to administer the materials. Anecdotal reports from the parents and teachers to whom I have sent the materials strongly indicate that the system is effective, and I am determined to formalize and expand their observations. It is widely believed that absolute pitch ability is genetically inherited and cannot be taught. If the program I offer is indeed capable of teaching absolute pitch, as its originators and now its users anecdotally claim, it will be the first and the only system of its kind in the Western Hemisphere.

I believe I have a great deal to offer. The projects and ideas mentioned here, I feel, are merely a starting point. I still have plenty of work to do.

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