

Everyone is already an excellent actor. Once you realize this, you can't help but see it. As you proceed through your daily life, imagine that all the people who speak to you, and all the conversations you overhear, are scripted performances. Pretend that your hairdresser is rehearsing a scene with you, or that the grocery cashier is a bit part in your latest film. Listen to friends as though you were auditioning them, and you'll witness some of the best monologues you've ever seen. It quickly becomes obvious that everyone is an expert performer. They've developed their skills through a lifetime of human interaction. My training goal, therefore, is not to "teach acting" but to make students aware of the skills they already possess. My role as a teacher is to show them how to apply their expertise to the stage.

I show them that acting is backwards. The natural process of communication is reversed. In ordinary conversation, words come dead last. The words we choose to say, and the manner in which we say them, is the final embodiment of a recipe of factors— impetus, idea, intention, motivation and more. We speak because we have a reason to communicate. Acting, however, begins with a script full of words. Every element that contributed to those words' formation is missing. The first thing for students to recognize is how the words of a script are "empty" compared to normal speech. Then, through exercises and games, I help students to discover the missing pieces. As students find the absent elements, they experience how those factors influence and connect with their words and actions. They learn how to compare their behavior on stage to behavior in real life and, in doing so, they teach themselves how to act.

Everyday life becomes their teacher— as it has been all along. The coursework just helps them to see how. Students become fascinated by what they observe in the operations of their day-to-day world. They see the learning opportunity in every conversation. They uncover the motivations behind every mundane behavior. They persuade themselves that they are, indeed, experts, and they take charge of their own learning. When I began teaching, I thought of myself as the expert; students succeeded by following my instructions. But I was frustrated that they rarely dared to try anything more. Now I see that they feared doing it "wrong." After I began relying on their expertise, and empowering them to judge their own efforts, their creativity and enthusiasm overwhelmed me. Students no longer agonize over whether their work is acceptable, but conspire to improve it in every way they can manage. They no longer regard me as a boss to be obeyed as they toil for a grade, but a resource to draw from to create something awesome. They take initiative because they know they can trust themselves to succeed.

Students also learn to trust and support each other. When students share an understanding of how to achieve their goals, they become more willing to take risks. Each student can accurately predict how their contributions will benefit the group, and feels rewarded when the group appreciates their work. Everyone trusts that suggestions will not be dismissed or rejected arbitrarily, because the merits of each can be discussed and assessed according to the criteria they all share. Furthermore, as students observe each other's progress, they are convinced of their partners' expertise, and learn to rely on each other. Each member, in turn, feels valued and essential to the group's success. The lengths to which they will go to support each other is remarkable. At the end of one term, an injured football player discharged himself from the hospital a week early, successfully arguing against the advice of his doctors, the wishes of his parents, and the demands of his coach. He had to go, he insisted, because his acting classmates needed him for their final presentation. He wasn't going to let them down.

"Learning to act" challenges students to discover their natural abilities. Performing theater helps them appreciate the responsibility of being valued by others. I love teaching acting because I feel privileged and honored to guide them through this development.

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