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Teaching Philosophy Statement: Acting and Speech

Everyone is a talented performer. They just don't know it. I love teaching acting and speech because my classes help students discover how much they can achieve just by being themselves. Acting classes empower students to explore their inner world and learn who they truly are. Speech training teaches them how to communicate the ideas and inspirations they find hidden inside. I believe the essential value of a performance-based class is to provide a safe and nurturing environment in which students are free to uncover and reveal their true selves. Theater's greatest power is to shatter the shells in which we have been encased and release the true self. Speech gives us the power to share.

Students feel safe when they feel that they belong. When we start a new class, our first priority is transforming a group of strangers into a company of players. We form a circle so that everyone can share and participate as equals. We play games that allow everyone to learn about each other, to appreciate one another's unique qualities, and to understand that everyone's participation is valuable. Each student occupies a different seat every day—thus we avoid creating territories and barriers, allowing everyone to move freely anywhere within the space. When students feel accepted by their peers, and feel physically “at home,” they can begin to shed their fear, lower their defenses, and allow their natural selves to emerge.

When students are free to express themselves, they discover their natural skills. Everyone is already an expert performer: they've developed their talent through a lifetime of human interaction. Listen to your friends' ordinary conversations as though they were performing dramatic scenes or prepared speeches, and you'll suddenly see some of the best “actors” you've ever watched. The purpose of performance-based training is to help students recognize the skills they already possess, and to provide tools that transform those unconscious behaviors into deliberate techniques. Once students realize that a “good performance” is measured against their own natural behavior, and they understand how to objectively compare the two, they take charge of their own learning. Students can critically evaluate their own work, and this releases them from the crippling fear of others' judgments. Self-guided students are no longer held back by fear of failure. They take initiative because they trust themselves to succeed.

Speech and theater 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. Because every student can accurately assess how their own work will benefit the group, they feel doubly rewarded when the group appreciates their contribution. Each company member trusts that their efforts 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 become convinced of their colleagues' expertise, and learn to rely on each other. Each member, in turn, feels valued and essential to the success of their projects. They abandon shame and self-consciousness and feel free to release their true ideas, emotions, and behavior.

Speech and theater classes help students to become fully themselves. Students learn that their unique personality and talents are valued by others, and they gain the self-confidence to realize their own potential. One of my students wrote, after her final performance: “I took this course because I'm shy, and I'm glad I really showed myself what I can be capable of.”
