

Mike DiSalvo
Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My teaching philosophy revolves around the belief that storytelling and performance begin with interpretation of text through investigation and observation of the world that students inhabit on a daily basis. My classes strive to enforce the idea that true and honest performance happens only when mind, body, and voice work in concert and collaboration with each other.

My approach to acting training is to start with Stanislavski-based principles, simply because so many of the other methods derive from him. Every role requires the actor to ask the questions: “Who am I? Where am I? What do I want? Why do I want it? What’s in the way? How will I get it?” The next step is to explore the emotional facets of living inside the “magic if,” and to realize the answers to the previous questions with full access to body and breath. For more advanced classes, I like to introduce Meisner’s repetition exercises, so as to stress the importance of being open, present, and truthful. To not judge yourself, but to rather be a conduit for the impulses that will lead you to a more fully realized performance. I also find that Robert Cohen’s ideas help to reinforce the importance of making active choices which will affect change in the other people on stage with you, and that his redefinition of Stanislavski’s teachings help to provide a fresh perspective for students. A newer practice that I myself enjoy is that of Michael Chekhov’s gesture exercises. I love Chekhov’s focus on physicality and movement as a way to access emotion, character, and motivation. While not certified in that or Meisner, I think there are valuable exercises that can be introduced to more advanced acting students. No matter what methodology you choose to employ as an actor, the words on the page are all you have to work with, and—particularly when working with Shakespeare—are a guide to be followed meticulously.

I tell my students on the first day of class that there is no such thing as right and wrong, or good and bad, in an acting classroom. It is not my job to judge them, or to decide who is the best actor, but rather to help them see that artists have a myriad of choices to make, and that crafting a successful performance depends on making the choice that best suits the circumstances of the play. I want my classes to be fun, engaging, safe, and brave spaces where students from all walks of life and interests can grow and learn. I especially like planting the idea that the things learned in an acting classroom will benefit them regardless of if they pursue the life of a professional actor. Learning to listen, to be truthful, to have empathy...these are qualities that will serve them and the world at large long after they leave school.

I want my classroom to be a place of diversity and exploration. I strive to expose my students to stories told by all colors, creeds, and sexual identifications. The best teachers are the ones who seek to learn from their students, and as artists we must be continually open to new experiences and ideas. There is no “correct” way to craft a performance, and one of my favorite teachers once told me that the tricks and exercises learned in a classroom are primarily for when things aren’t going well. When the actor is well-suited to the role, and has an innate understanding of the text and the circumstances, then get out of their way and let them play.