

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY / MICHAEL NAVARRA

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Every student brings a unique perspective unlike any other in the world. This must be nurtured and respected. It is my obligation to allow room for this to grow. Although learning the crafts of acting and directing require rigorous discipline, it is important to maintain the unique spark that lies within us. Courageous actors, directors, and artists of every form know this, and it is up to me to encourage its growth in my students. This is crucial to our success as artists.

My aim as an acting teacher is to enable each student to live in the moment on stage within the given circumstances. All great actors do this at their best and it is my intention to reach for it. The immediacy of the moment is what draws the audience to engage with the story and, therefore, it becomes the actor's responsibility to live in the moment truthfully. This requires a deep understanding of the text along with an unwavering concentration. It is my goal to impart this aesthetic and to encourage my students' individuality to come through.

My methods for this aesthetic begin with the given circumstances. What is the story? What is each moment about? Whether we are working on a contemporary play or on a classic, the same rules apply. If the given circumstances are unclear, the choices become artificial and the story is lost. This focus does not cover the director and actor's entire training, but I believe it to be the first step towards building a story and characters that are fully integrated in the world of the play.

I use a similar focus for the productions I direct and urge my directing students to support their ideas within the given circumstances. The director's ideas and concept must be a personal understanding of the play. This will give the direction its unique voice. However, the foundation of the story must never be neglected or the actors and designers will flounder in an attempt to make it work. Story comes first; ideas are only there to support it.

When an actor has a full understanding of their character's given circumstances within the story, it is then possible to live in them truthfully. This is where craft meets inspiration. This inspiration allows one to listen and respond in the moment, as if for the first time. The actor strives towards the goal of winning, each and every time, knowing that there is the possibility of losing. This will make them fighters and keep them vulnerable. With the stakes high and a vulnerability that comes from not playing the end of the scene, the actor then creates magic.

Performances that have inspired me contain all these elements. These actors are fierce in their choices to win. They stay open to the possibility of losing, and at all times are courageous in their desires and fears throughout the play. This makes them exciting, dynamic, interesting, powerful, and vulnerable. They achieve this by a clear understanding of the text and the moment to moment given circumstances. With all this lined up, they are ready to breathe life and live in the moment on stage.

I encourage my directing students to promote this kind of acting in their productions. They must guide the actors in rehearsal, but eventually set them free. This holds true in working with designers, as well. Directors must articulate their vision, but eventually trust the people they are working with to create choices that will serve the production. Ideally, the director has a strong vision and is able to articulate it. Then they should allow the collaboration process to unfold. In the end, the results will be more than the director could have achieved on their own. Directors that I admire and who inspire me work this way. I attempt this approach in my own work and I promote it with my students.

Ultimately, my desire is to create an atmosphere of trust in the classroom and on stage. We are embarking on a journey that will bring us face to face with ourselves. I encourage my students to take risks. The only failure is holding back. The essential heart of my teaching is to empower students with the tools of acting and directing and with the curiosity to seek their individual truth and potential.