Julia Cuppy
November 5, 2015
Teaching Philosophy

Imagine walking into your classroom on the first day of a new school year. You enter the room with more questions than you have answers: What does the year hold? Will I succeed? Who will I meet?. In the middle of the room is a circle of chairs, one chair for each student. The arrangement seems untraditional and allows everyone to see each other and be seen. No one knows each other in the room, but the circle seems to provide everyone in the room a sense of equal opportunity. On the board, you see the professor's name, along with one question: "As a community of learners, what agreements can you make that will maintain a safe space for yourself and for other learners?" Seeing that there are a few minutes left before class officially begins, you start to answer the question in your head and write your thoughts on some paper. The professor interrupts your writing by announcing, "Welcome to your new community!" You look up, and-for some reason-you feel respected. You feel reassured. You feel you are in the right place at the right time.

This is the environment or "climate" that I create for my students. The first day of class is the most important day to establish a solid foundation on which to build the semester. This foundation includes creating a community of mutual respect and compassion, setting clear student expectations, and maintaining a safe environment where students feel empowered to trust themselves and others to make bold, vulnerable choices.

Creating a positive and safe climate is one half of my personal teaching philosophy. The second half is establishing a culture that reflects the core values of the teacher, the department's curriculum and of the school's mission. My core values focus on practicing empathy to help understand the human condition, cultivating a natural curiosity about all subject areas, especially history, science, and other fine art, and empowering a sense of ownership that comes from creating ensemble-driven or self-produced work.

I design my curriculum with these core values in mind. In my acting classes, I refer to experts in the fields of neuroscience, anatomy and physiology, psychology, acting training (Stanislavski, Meisner, Uta Hagen, Alexander, Viewpoints, Laban), history and

anthropology. This liberal arts approach creates a culture of informed acting students who are equipped to develop honest, comprehensive, and multi-dimensional characters. In addition, this approach invites discussions about living our best life into class discussion. I do not shirk away from this opportunity to talk about how the study of acting informs healthy and positive life habits. These life habits include punctuality, teamwork, responsibility, problem solving, critical thinking, accountability, stress management - the list goes on. These transferrable skills aid in preparing the student for any occupation, which validates why I believe an acting class should be required for all students.

My teaching philosophy distills down to these two main foci: climate and culture. When the classroom climate is respectful, compassionate, and safe then a positive culture can grow. And like with any new seedling, the culture can only blossom if the right nutrients are available. These nutrients include mutual respect, trust, compassion, and the permission to fail. With these combined, students develop into mature artists ready to endure the demands of the profession.

Many of my previous students are now theatre professionals, work in social institutions or have found other careers, however, many of them comment that the habits learned in acting class have helped them be more successful. This is because effective acting training is really life training. One student even commented on a recent evaluation that "the exercises and techniques learned were very applicable to life". Finding those teachable moments that transcend the classroom and help us all live a better life is one of the many gifts I enjoy as an acting teacher.