

TEACHING APPROACH

My academic courses are primarily focused on the following: the practice of physical theatre and the process of devised collective creation. While these can be taught separately, my pedagogy often combines both to create a more comprehensive curriculum of technique followed by application.

Practice: Physical Theatre

I find physical theatre to be tremendously powerful - as an audience member receiving work, in the way I communicate as a director, and as a teaching tool for my students. It never ceases to astound me the level of emotion and passion that can be conveyed through the tiniest twitch of one's body, and how deeply and viscerally theatrical movement affects me. I strongly believe in the stories that are locked within our bodies. I believe in the honesty of puppetry - in the freedom of mask - in the power of circus - in the rawness of dance - in the characters found at the tips of our fingers. I also believe that not all performers can access work through words on a page, and it does our young people a disservice if they are only exposed to text analysis as a way to connect to characters and material. That is just one way of working, and my goal as a teacher is to give my students multiple sets of techniques for their theatre artist toolkit, providing them with a broader range of skills that they can draw from as they move along in their careers.

As a Physical Theatre educator, my specializations are in:

- Frantic Assembly
- Laban Technique
- Lecoq Technique
 - Movement Technique, Embodiment of the Abstract and External, Neutral Mask, Larval Mask, Expressive Mask, Melodrama, Commedia dell'Arte, Bouffon, Tragic Chorus, Clown
- Prattki Pedagogy
 - Platform, Farce, The Social Grotesque, The Fantastical World
- Viewpoints
- Puppetry

Process: Devised Collective Creation

An integral part of my practice was developed when I attended the renowned London International School of Performing Arts (*now arthaus.berlin*), where I studied under Thomas Prattki, the former pedagogical director at École Jacques Lecoq. While rooted in the Lecoq Technique, the London International School of Performing Arts was ultimately a postgraduate Masters-level training program specializing in devised theatre. There I completed their Creating Theatre and Performance course (*now Advanced Devising Practice*), where I had the opportunity to hone my skills as a theatre maker. I now primarily create work through devised collective collaboration, in a non-hierarchical and egalitarian way. I believe that what we can craft together is far more interesting than what we can craft on our own as individuals. I believe in the power of many minds, and in constructing a community of like-minded artists who inspire each other, push one another to explore places and ideas outside of comfort zones, support experimentation, and who are ready and willing to go together on an unknown artistic journey. This kind of ensemble creates work larger than one person, where what is made belongs to all members, and the heart of each artist is reflected in the pieces they produce. It is about establishing a long lasting trust where ideas can flow out of many mouths and the final product is only part of the journey. It is so important that emerging artists are introduced to the notion of creating new work in this way. Too often, the self worth of a theatre artist is wrapped up in whether large companies cast them in their productions. My offer to my students

is to let them know that making your own work and having your voice heard is just as important, if not more important, than getting an offer to work for a theatre institution.

As a Devised Collective Creation educator, my specializations are in:

- Collective Collaboration - creating theatre through artistic cooperation.
- Devised Theatre - creating theatre through improvised movement or text.
- Ensemble Theatre - creating theatre in a group.

TEACHING STRATEGY

The sequence of my courses typically follow the structure of the Lecoq pedagogy: exploring the most inward of reflection first and then building to the most outward of expression. We move from the individual to the group, from the personal to the public, from the unspoken to the spoken. In regards to content, this is dependent on a number of factors, including the age of the participants, their level of training, and whether they have taken one of my courses before. With students at the beginning of their education, we start by building a foundation on impulse and embodiment work. Projects assigned at this stage are smaller and simpler, and are focused on the transposition of abstract physical explorations into theatrical performances based in reality. As the students advance in their learning, we dive into the dramatic territories laid out by Lecoq and Prattki: Melodrama, Commedia dell'Arte, Bouffon, Tragic Chorus, Clown, Platform, Farce, The Social Grotesque, and The Fantastical World. The projects assigned at this stage are more complex, and require longer creation times, with students often working in larger ensembles.

Practically, each of my learning units generally follow this model:

1. Exploring physical theatre skills and techniques.
2. Devised theatre creation as an ensemble, within a physical theatre territory.
3. Presentation of new work.

In my courses, students are assessed on process, not product. This includes: engaged participation, positive attitude, hard work ethic, and personal growth. To me, it is much more important for a participant to push themselves and support their colleagues, than it is for them to be naturally talented. In the professional world, artists are more inclined to work with a peer who is generous and kind in the room, and that needs to be taught in our training institutions alongside skills and technique.

It is important for me to state that my pedagogy works in person, via online learning, and in a hybrid situation. I pivoted very quickly to teaching online as soon as the pandemic hit, and found my methodologies easily adaptable. Since then, I have taught courses where all participants have been online, where I have been in the room while some students video in, and where I have been on video while the class attends in person. While there is no substitute to being all together in the room, I have continually reinvented exercises and projects to fit our changing needs, and have found that there is no shortage of innovations to be made when obstructions are placed in front of you.

Speaking to The University of British Columbia Department of Theatre & Film's focus on Safety and Bravery, below are a few examples of how I would reflect these ideals in the classroom:

Safety: Support and Boundaries

Learning is most healthy when students are invited into educational spaces that are supportive and safe. Each student should feel supported by me and one another, and they should be able to say “yes” to every offer and exploration because respectful boundaries have been created. This environment must be established the very first time they walk into a classroom, and then strengthened through a daily practice that happens before any work begins. For me, this daily practice follows these steps:

- My sessions always begin in a circle. To paraphrase a sentiment from Indigenous artist Margo Kane: *“In theatre, we begin and end our days in a circle, because in a circle, everyone’s point of view holds the same weight. Imagine a tree is growing in the middle of a circle. Each person sitting around the tree sees it from a slightly different angle, but each of the points of view are equally as important.”* In a circle, every voice has the same value, and we can all learn from each other. Beginning lessons in a circle allows these values to transfer into all work done together moving forward.
- In this circle, we start with a check in, where I encourage my students to be responsible for their own physical body, mental health, and emotional states. During this time, I offer space for each person to communicate their access needs and physical boundaries to the rest of the class. Access needs include anything the group can help support the individual with, such as physical limitations (“I’ve hurt my leg and might need to sit down more often.”) or emotional states (“I’m feeling really low today and could use some understanding if I seem disconnected.”). Physical boundaries are communicated through a ‘traffic light’ system: GREEN is “I give you permission to touch that part of my body.”, YELLOW is “Please ask before you initiate touch on that part of my body.”, and RED is “Do not touch that part of my body.”. While many of these boundaries remain constant for a person, for me it’s important to check in at the top of each session just in case something feels different that day.
- Next we ground the space using a Viewpoints exercise, bringing awareness to the ground and the sky, releasing tension in the body, and breathing as a group. This ends with an invitation to work with an open heart, which means working without judgement on yourself or others.

With access needs communicated, boundaries in place, bodies grounded, and hearts open, we then begin our learning with safety and generosity.

Bravery: Adaptability and Agency

Every student has different learning needs, and it is difficult to feel brave in the room if these are not acknowledged and accounted for. Thomas Prattki’s approach to the Lecoq technique is very welcoming and flexible. His motto is: “There is no right and there is no wrong”, which is a sentiment I have adopted into my own pedagogy. For me, there is no right or wrong way for a student to take part in an exercise, as long as that student is open to pushing their growth. By encouraging my students to be responsible for and communicating their own needs and boundaries at the beginning of each class, they become empowered learners. They have the agency to modify an exploration to make it more accessible, and I am always open to working together with them to find new ways of accessing exercises. While I will always push my students to enter uncomfortable and unknown artistic territories, I will never push a participant into a space where they feel unsafe. By allowing my exercises to be fluid, and by removing any sort of pressure for my students to get things “correct”, I create a learning environment of mutual respect and trust. If my students feel as though they are able to participate at whatever level they feel comfortable on a given day, it actually becomes the brave space they need in order to dive deep into the work.

TEACHING ASPIRATIONS

As both an artist and as a teacher, I believe that you stop growing the moment you stop learning and experimenting. With new innovations in artistry and education popping up all the time, it is imperative that we continue to develop our methodologies to keep up with changing theatrical landscapes and post secondary learning. This is why continuing to have an active creative career is so important for educators - the more we practice, the better we can pass that practice along. The needs of our students will never stop evolving, and teachers must evolve along with them in order to stay relevant and connect.

Over the past five years, the main areas in which I see the most growth are in my confidence as a leader, and in my ability to take on constructive feedback from my students. I am constantly learning from them, and while before I may have felt defensive when I made a mistake or overlooked something, I can now acknowledge my shortcomings and then integrate a better approach into my teaching strategy. For example, I was in a devising rehearsal with some students, and an improvisation led one performer to touch another performer in a romantic way without asking. My students requested we lay out physical and emotional boundaries at the beginning of each day, and this daily Boundary Check is something I have carried on into all my work. That feedback taught me how to set up a safer container for my participants, and I am extremely grateful to have received it.

Over the next five years, I would like to focus on making my pedagogy more holistic in nature. In creating the curriculum for the London International School of Performing Arts, Thomas Prattki integrated the work of Carl Jung, marrying deeply transformative personal work with the Lecoq technique. I am very interested in how I can bring more of this into my own teaching and leadership, and would eventually like to study under Prattki again, this time through his Integral Movement and Performance Practice course at arthaus.berlin. This training explores the relationship between embodied identity, individuation, and self realization with advanced practitioners in the performing, healing, and educational arts.

My hope is for my students to remember me as a kind, supportive, and empowering instructor. That they leave my courses feeling like they have agency and a voice, and have the skills to be generous collaborators. I want my students to become the type of artists that I want to work with, or better yet, the type of leaders I want to work for. I am committed to contributing to the growth of these young people in a positive way, and wish for my students to be inspired and invigorated by my classes.