

JENNA NEILSEN

509 2nd Street Alamosa, CO 81101 · 317-508-7345
neilsenjm@gmail.com · www.jennaneilsen.weebly.com

STATEMENT OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Truthful living from moment-to-moment in an imaginary world is the backbone of my work, as an actor, director, and teacher. As truth is individual, and will both appear to the audience and be experienced by the performer uniquely, I work in my classroom to build a foundation of skills that capitalizes on the individuality of my students. Each actor is inimitable. Each student will interface with various techniques in his or her own way. It is my responsibility as a teacher and director of nascent talent to engage students with many techniques, continually drawing parallels between the different methods in order for each student to build his or her own arsenal of acting skills.

My classroom is a place of trust, a place of honesty, and often a place of humor. I use my first name with my students. I work diligently to create an atmosphere in my classroom and in my rehearsals that is a balance of respect for the work and excitement in mutual creation. My students are willing to share, to be vulnerable, and to take risks because they know intuitively that I respect them as individuals and respect their journey as emerging artists.

Empathy is at the heart of acting. My students leave my classroom better equipped and, more important to me, more willing to “place themselves in someone else’s shoes.” With every passing year I work in the theatre, I believe more deeply that empathy is at the heart of our work. We are helping our audiences and ourselves to be more compassionate with the world around us.

I firmly believe in the practice of a liberal arts education for traditional undergraduate students. Few people know who they are when they are eighteen years old. They are beginning to know who they are when they leave school at twenty-two. Those four formative years are the perfect time to build a foundation on the shoulders of the Stanislavski system, which allows them to analyze a script and equips them with the most common vernacular of scoring and direction. I then expand this knowledge with the listening and moment-by-moment communing techniques of Meisner. Objective and listening are the foundational concepts of acting, which must be continually reiterated and drawn upon within the context of any further study.

I utilize a great deal of physical techniques in my classroom, notably Bogart’s physical and vocal viewpoints, Chekhov’s psychological gesture, Laban’s Efforts, clowning, mask work, and Alba Emoting. All of these are directed at moving the student actor out of the head and back into the reality of the moment, while expanding their character development and range. Physical

training allows an actor to focus their energies onto the partner and to trust their own physical impulses.

I employ improvisation in most of my classes. Improvisation, as an acting method, and not as merely a comedy technique, is a methodology which breaks down student barriers of self-censorship and self-consciousness. It reinforces crucial listening skills. It builds perfectly on Stanislavski's and Meisner's techniques, creating actors who are trained in both a rich blend of technical planning and apparent spontaneity. While sitting in on my improv troupes' rehearsal one day last semester, one student critiqued another student's scene by saying, "It didn't seem as though the character had an objective... I didn't know why he was there." A little piece of me jumped for joy. The skill sets that students are learning in my acting classes are cross-pollinating with those they learn in the comedy improv troupe I lead. Another student member of the improv troupe confided in me, ecstatic that an audience member at an improv performance approached him afterwards and couldn't believe he was the same actor she had seen earlier in the semester in my gritty production of *Getting Out*. But the skills of improvisation coupled with the training in "traditional" acting methods are what made him successful in both endeavors.

Presence is teachable. Moment-to-moment believability, confidence in one's craft, and an arsenal of acting techniques help to equip young actors to enter into the incredibly competitive world of professional theatre, or the incredibly diverse world we all live in as active and productive citizens. I love introducing them to techniques that work and love seeing the transformation of self-discovery when they intersect with a method that speaks to who they are becoming as people and as artists. Ultimately, it is my job as an acting professor to build a curriculum that deepens and expands my students' explorations as they work toward building a wholeness of self as well as a wholeness of craft.