HOLDING ON TO THE BASICS: USING THE 3-D PERFORMANCE PYRAMID TO IMPROVE SKILL RETENTION IN THE INTRODUCTION TO ACTING CLASSROOM.

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ABSTRACT

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In this study, I combine my background in actor training with the athletics training methods of Scott Sonnon to consider ways to introduce psychophysical stress into the training of beginning acting students. I contend that the incremental introduction of stress into the learning process allows beginning acting students to better retain newly learned skills.

To examine this contention I taught a section of the Acting Principles course in the Theatre department at Bowling Green State University in the fall of 2013. This course was designed using Sonnon’s Three Dimensional Performance Pyramid, which is a pedagogical model for learning new skills and training attributes while stress testing those skills and attributes. I taught introductory elements of Stanislavskian acting, but combined it with specific stress management tools, and with regular stress testing throughout the semester.

I then analyze the practical work through a mix of personal observation and data analysis. Students completed tests at three points during the semester. Some of these tests checked their understanding of the course content and their personal experience of the acting process. The other tests were personality tests. Each of these personality tests was intended to measure one of sport psychologist Roland Carlstedt’s three Primary Higher Order factors for performance under stress: Absorption, Neuroticism, and Repressive Coping.

I found much to recommend this approach. I discuss ways in which student’s understanding and acting work improved over the course of the semester. I reflect on the range of student responses in detail. Further, I learned many lessons about this type of research and the application of scientific research in the acting classroom. I also spend significant time reflecting
on this process and considering ways to best approach research that bridges the performing arts and the humanities.
I dedicate this dissertation to Coach Scott Sonnon.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Steps</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nature of My Training in the 3DPP</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections Between the 3DPP and Actor Training</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Influence of Context on Training and the Context of this Study</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Exploration of the Nature of Skill Development</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Methodology</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods of Assessment</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the Training Progressed</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER II. A DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF THE PROCESS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Class Structure</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Graded Assignments</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Class Work</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basics of Fear and the Warm-up as a Fear Management Tool</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Three Core Skills of the Course</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Connection</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing of Actions</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Character Rhythm.......................................................... 57
Adding Pressure .......................................................... 59
Conclusion...................................................................... 65

CHAPTER III. ANALYSIS .................................................................. 67

Introduction ........................................................................ 67
Data Analysis ....................................................................... 69
  Introduction ...................................................................... 69
  The Tellegen Absorption Scale ........................................ 69
  The Eysenck Neuroticism/Extroversion Profile ................. 71
  The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale .................. 72
  General Reflections .......................................................... 73

Analysis of Student Commentary ........................................ 75
  Successes ........................................................................ 75
  Failures ........................................................................... 79
  Ambiguities ..................................................................... 81

Thoughts for Future Work .................................................... 82
  Introduction ...................................................................... 82
  The Work is Too Advanced ............................................ 83
  Physical Expectations ..................................................... 85
  The Role of Improvisation .............................................. 87
  Approaching the Research Differently .............................. 95

Conclusion ......................................................................... 98
CHAPTER IV. TWELVE THINGS I LEARNED FROM THIS PROCESS............ 100

Introduction................................................................................................................ 100

Twelve Things............................................................................................................. 101

(1) Trapped by the Structure...................................................................................... 101

(2) Clarity of Purpose ................................................................................................. 102

(3) Conditioning is Hard............................................................................................. 103

(4) Motivation............................................................................................................... 105

(5) The Scenes Got Better........................................................................................... 108

(6) Ignition.................................................................................................................... 109

(7) Embracing the Suck ............................................................................................... 111

(8) The Value of Forms ............................................................................................... 114

(9) To Interrupt or Not to Interrupt........................................................................... 117

(10) Testing and Growth.............................................................................................. 119

(11) Knowing What vs. Knowing How ....................................................................... 121

(12) The Value of Advanced Students....................................................................... 125

Distilling and Looking Forward .................................................................................. 129

Semester One............................................................................................................... 130

Semester Two............................................................................................................... 133

Summative Thoughts.................................................................................................. 135

Conclusion.................................................................................................................... 136

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION......................................................................................... 137

Introduction................................................................................................................ 137

Methods....................................................................................................................... 138
## Results

- Contribution ........................................................................................................... 142
- Conclusion ............................................................................................................... 144

## Bibliography

- APPENDIX A. ACTING KNOWLEDGE TESTS .............................................. 150
- APPENDIX B. PRESSURES OF PERFORMANCE REFLECTION ............. 152
- APPENDIX C. PERSONALITY TESTS ................................................................. 155
- APPENDIX D. THE ACTOR’S WORKBOOK .................................................. 163
- APPENDIX E. COURSE SYLLABUS ................................................................. 169
- APPENDIX F. DATA ANALYSIS ................................................................. 177
- APPENDIX G. HSRB APPROVAL ................................................................. 179
### LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Training Side of the 3DPP</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Practice Side of the 3DPP</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Performance Side of the 3DPP</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Awareness Diamond</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

First Steps

The question of what makes a good actor has been a central inquiry for me since I first encountered a clearly framed actor training system (in my case the Meisner Method)\(^1\) when I was in middle school. Acting was difficult and I often experienced a gap between what I learned and could do in the classroom and what happened on stage. When I got to college, I began to train actors in the theatre company I started. We worked together closely for a few years. At first, I had no idea what I was doing, but I noticed the issue that had cropped up in my training reappeared in the work of the other company members. We would train together on a weekly basis, and the actors would progress in training the skills I emphasized, partner response for example; but, when we got into performance the fluidity with which they were able to work together in training diminished significantly. As I continued my teaching career into adulthood this issue recurred. For example, I once taught a group of high school age actors the basics of Laban’s eight efforts\(^2\) as a tool for building characters. We worked three hours per day for a

\(^1\) I trained in Meisner once a week about an hour at a time for two years. Based on my subsequent reading about Meisner’s work we covered the whole system from basic repetition to full scene work. For those unfamiliar with Meisner’s approach, the system begins with a series of repetition exercises designed to build listening and responsiveness. Training then progresses to improvised scene work. Finally, the skills developed in the earlier training are applied to scene work.

\(^2\) Laban’s system of movement analysis includes an assessment of movement and training in creating movement based on four continua: weight (strong-light), space (direct-indirect), time
week focusing only on using the eight efforts individually and in combination to create physical characterization. During that time the students seemed to connect to the work and understand it. They were able to use the eight efforts both in their creative work, and in analyzing the work of others. This skill diminished as we moved into a rehearsal process, but did not entirely go away, largely I think because I continued to refer to it. However, as we moved closer to performance, and into performance itself, these skills disappeared from the work of all but a few of the actors. They reverted to their preexisting performance techniques under the pressure of performance. It seemed that the pressure of performance was the limiting factor on skill development.

This problem troubled me: in an effort to find a solution, I read all of the literature on acting and acting theory I could get my hands on, but could not find anyone writing about this gap between training and performance. Also, as I began to have contact with other acting teachers, both in my job teaching acting at primary and secondary schools and community centers, and with colleagues at Virginia Commonwealth University and the Southeastern Theatre Conference, if I raised the question, they expressed the same concerns about their students. I began to see this as a larger issue. The prominent books on actor training from the main teachers (Stanislavsky, Meisner, Adler, Suzuki, Grotowski, etc…) focus on conveying the principles of the system in question rather than focusing on pedagogy. Admittedly, a few of them, Stanislavsky and Meisner specifically, structure the writing around a classroom (fictional in Stanislavsky’s case and real in Meisner’s). Despite this educational frame, they give little guidance to the underlying pedagogical ideas that inform their methods or teaching approach.

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(sudden-sustained), and flow (bound-free). These elements are combined into a series of efforts or effort-shapes. Combinations of these efforts can be used both to assess a performer’s current movement and to create ideas for movement and characterization.
Further, these authors and even the various successful New York and Los Angeles acting coaches who have achieved a level of repute that leads to book publishing have a quite different audience in mind. These books focus on professional or would be professional actors in conservatory or private training programs. Moreover, I believe many acting teachers feel students either have it or they do not. As such their training approaches seem to center around adding additional tools to performers who already have some ability rather than building foundational skills in minimally skilled actors.

For reasons unrelated to theatre, in 2001 I began working with fitness coach and martial arts teacher, Scott Sonnon. It was in working with Sonnon that I began to discover tools specifically geared to managing the gap between training and performance all be it in a martial arts rather than theatrical setting. Sonnon studied with Olympic trainers and special forces operators in Russia and is a world champion athlete. However, these accomplishments had not come easily to him. He was born with an array of physiological and learning issues, and in recent years has become an outspoken advocate for people with learning disabilities speaking internationally on the topic. Because of the struggles he went through to attain his success, Sonnon developed a system called Circular Strength Training (CST) that blends constantly evolving physical training with a continuing exploration of sports psychology. This research led to the development of an approach I draw on in this study. My methods are grounded in the CST

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system as a whole, but I draw primarily on a pedagogical tool Sonnon developed referred to as the Three Dimensional Performance Pyramid or 3DPP.

I have been a head coach in this system and involved in the training of new instructors, coaches, and athletes. What I found in the sports and combat psychology methods I learned from Sonnon was an answer to the dilemma I struggled with in the acting classroom. Sports psychologists, not surprisingly, concern themselves with training athletes so that the skills they learn in practice appear under the pressure of competition. I believe that bringing their insights filtered through my experience with Sonnon to the training of actors enhances the ability of actors to transfer skills from the studio to the stage.

Building primarily from my experience with Sonnon and the 3DPP with some recourse to other research in psychology and sports psychology, I conceived a way to address my central question for this study: How can I train beginning actors in a BA program in such a way that they better retain their newly acquired skills under pressure? With this question in mind I constructed a semester long course derived from the 3DPP and taught it to students in a section of the Acting Principles course (the introductory acting class) at Bowling Green State University. In addition, I used a battery of personality tests with the students in an attempt to track the changes in three personality traits: absorption, neuroticism, and repressive coping. In the chapters that follow, I will detail the process I used to apply these tools in the classroom, and the results of that experience.

However, first, in the remainder of this chapter, I explore the nature of the training that I underwent with Sonnon. This exploration is intended to give a sense of a mode of training that is distinct from what generally occurs in acting classes, and gives a flavor of the perspective I bring to the acting studio. Then I examine the connections I see between Sonnon’s work and the
beliefs of many of the founders of contemporary acting theory. From there I discuss the nature of training (acting and athletic), such as I understand it. In particular I consider the underlying psychophysiology of the training process, and address some of the relationship between talent and training. This is followed by a look at the specific methods I used for the study that forms the basis of this dissertation. Lastly, I briefly outline the contents of the rest of the study.

The Nature of My Training in the 3DPP

My training in the 3DPP was not focused on the academic in the traditional sense. Rather learning was achieved through intense practice followed by research-based explanations of the practice. Taking some time to explore what led me to train with Sonnon and the nature of that training will provide useful context for the larger study.

I began martial arts training when I was about eight years old. The desire to study fighting came initially from an obsession with Japanese culture, but I eventually realized a need to learn to manage fear lay at the core of my interest. I grew up an anxious child in an even more anxious household, and I came to realize over the years since then that it was this underlying anxiety that competed with my acting skills in performance. Looking back on it, I now believe that until I discovered Sonnon’s Russian Martial Arts methods my training had guided me to managing fear by controlling everything around me. Over the course of my training with Sonnon, I realized that this struggle for control gave me an illusion of power while actually feeding my anxiety. While I experienced less fear when I felt I could control everything, the reality was that my acting suffered from a lack of emotional openness and responsiveness. As I learned to manage my anxiety in a more effective way through my work with Sonnon, my acting
improved as well, and I began to consider the connection between my experience of fear, and the
difficulties that face beginning actors. These insights formed the seed of this study.

Perhaps surprisingly the route to managing the pressures of performance was not one of
calm meditation. Rather it was a path through the surgical application of pressure in order to
overcome it. Before I discovered Sonnon my martial arts training generally took place in
beautiful, temperature controlled, well-lit spaces with comfortable mats on the floor. Falling,
rolling, and being thrown to the ground in these circumstances could often be rather pleasant. I
particularly recall a period when I trained Koryu Bujutsu (Samurai Battlefield arts) on the floor
exercise space of a gymnastics school. The floor had so much bounce to it that I was often able
to spring from the ground back to my feet after being thrown. It was easy to control my self and
my environment because the environment was safe.

My initial training with Sonnon, on the other hand, happened in a partially flooded,
glorified drainage ditch behind a run-down motel in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in a freezing
February. The majority of my early training occurred in this cold, damp field and the asphalt
parking lot up the hill from it. Unlike the comfortable mats of my previous training, these
environments would not yield to me. I had to learn to adapt to the environments. Cognitive
scientist Andy Clark in his book *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive
Extension* argues that, “We do not just self-engineer better worlds to think in. We self-engineer
ourselves to think and perform better in the worlds we find ourselves in” (59). In the traditional
martial arts schools I found a world engineered to encourage my desire to feel safe and in
control. In that ditch and parking lot, I found a world that I could not control, and a training that
asked me to adjust myself to the realities of the space rather than adjusting the space to my
internal fears. This approach echoed through my acting work. I tried to control everything I
could. What I learned and what I now teach is a method that embraces the occasional chaos of theatrical performance.

Beyond the differences between the traditional martial art’s and Sonnon’s training environments, there are notable disparities in the systems taught in terms of approach. Most martial arts teach combative techniques in an “if a then b” manner. Students learn a specific set of responses to a specific stimulus. For example, if an opponent throws a punch the defender replies with the appropriate sequence of pre-programmed movements based on which type of punch the opponent has thrown. Eventually through years of training a student learns to transcend these rote techniques and apply the principles that underpin them. Unlike this more familiar model Sonnon’s system has no techniques. Rather it has a collection of biomechanical combative concepts and fundamental movement principles. For example, the twisting movement of the shoulders referred to as screwing arms or skrutka ruk can be applied as a forwards, backwards, or sideways roll; a way of deflecting an opponents punch or kick; a strike to the head, neck or chest; a take down to the hips, knee, or ankle; and many other applications. In sum, whereas traditional martial arts training emphasizes programming rote responses, Sonnon’s training is all about adaptation. Rather than practicing each of these potential applications, students of Sonnon learn, a particular biomechanic, and then are put in combative drills where improvised applications for the movement are practiced.

To explore this process of adaptation in detail I offer the example of rolling and falling. In the beginning of learning to fall and roll students of Sonnon would learn a specific movement like the shoulder screw described above, and then be encouraged to explore ways to engage the ground from various heights using that biomechanic before incorporating a new mechanic. The best way to learn this kind of movement is to try it with a variety of surfaces and circumstances,
and learn to adapt until it doesn’t hurt. Initially, it hurts quite a bit. But as one continues to work
the ability to adjust to the ground is slowly developed. As Sonnon would say on the rare
occasions we trained on soft indoor floors “you can listen to what I am saying and try to do it or
you can go try it in the parking lot and you will learn very quickly.”

One of the scarier ways of learning to adapt was an exercise called “the third spare”.
When I was introduced to this exercise, I was asked to lie down on my back in the ditch with my
arms and legs extended towards the sky. Two partners standing on either side of me then grabbed
an arm and a leg. They lifted me slightly off the ground and began swinging me back and forth.
At some point on the forward swing they tossed me through the air, and I had to rotate 180
degrees so that my chest was facing the ground and then land safely. The first half dozen tries
were incredibly disorienting, frightening, and often painful. But as I continued to train and adapt,
I gradually found relaxation in this exercise, and an ability to orient myself successfully in space
even as I was tumbling through the air. Once again, Clark’s research offers some clarity on what
occurs in this learning process.

Clark argues that the environment not only influences cognition, but actually becomes a
part of our cognition. The simplest contemporary example of this is the iPhone. We offload parts
of the brain’s memory functions to these devices, and the phones also serve as multiplatform
ways to engage with the larger world extending our cognition in space and time. According to
Clark, “the canny cognizer often recruits on the spot, whatever mix of problem-solving resources
will yield an acceptable result with a minimum of effort. This recruitment process … may
include just about any mix of calls to neural resources (including biological memory), external
resources (including external encodings), and real world actions and operations” (81-82).
blending of body, mind, and environment allows for a permeation of each by the other. Therefore as skill develops the environment that skill engages becomes part of the skill itself.

As I was flying through the air the sky and ground became part of my cognition as I used each to orient myself for a safe landing. I learned to manage the fear of these experiences not only by mastering the physical mechanics of the skills in question, but also by changing my relationship to the environment in which I was learning. This environmental engagement also creates certain boundaries on the learning. The first time I transferred this falling skill to a matted floor or to concrete there was a period of reorientation, but that reorientation was made more efficient by learning the skill under the pressure of being thrown rather than simply practicing the skill in isolation. This is the goal of applying the principles behind this training to the training of actors. By having them test their skills under pressure, they will be better able to manage those skills in different environments, but with equivalent pressure.

It was the individual interaction with the wet ground or the hard asphalt that taught me how to move efficiently and effectively. Even more importantly these experiences taught me to manage fear not by controlling it, but by interacting with it under pressure. It is worth noting that in most martial arts these practices of safe landing are called breakfalls, whereas in my Russian training they are called ground engagements. This phraseology linguistically reframes the experience of falling to be one not of stopping something from happening, but rather one of connecting to the space. Thus, through practice I internally shifted from trying to control my fall and the surface on which I was landing to developing a relationship with the ground. In much the same way, the pedagogy that underpins this dissertation seeks to reframe the relationship of the student actor to the environment of performance by adding in the element often missing from the classroom environment: performance pressure.
Actor training is almost always a process of learning by doing, but rarely is the pressure of performance thought of as something a student can practice. Philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone in her article “Thinking in Movement” argues that the experience of embodied movement through an environment shapes all human experience. Further she calls movement itself a form of thought saying, “In such thinking, movement is not a medium by which thoughts emerge but rather, the thoughts themselves, significations in the flesh, so to speak” (Thinking 400). By moving with these unyielding spaces and finding that my desire to control and dominate affected them not at all, I began to move and therefore think differently. This thinking was initially just about movement, but gradually as my relationship to the ground changed my relationship to performance pressure changed.

It is this change I sought to help actors make in the work of this study. Falling is a frightening experience for most people. Being thrown is even worse. When people consider moving across the ground they generally consider a small range of available actions, such as, walking, running, skipping, or jumping. Through the practice of falling, rolling, and more sophisticated biomechanical exercises in a relationship of engagement with the ground, the available options I now see are much wider. This changing relationship to space also impacts the available actions I see in the larger world around me and in interaction with other people. As training developed, exercises began to involve more work with the ground and other people simultaneously. These drills included rolling or falling off other people or over people. I believe this progression from managing pressure alone in relationship to the environment to managing pressure in relationship to the environment in combination with other humans is a vital part of the pedagogical approach I apply in this research.
Another aspect of the system that challenged fear management was the training of shock absorption. Shock absorption involves receiving force from another person rather than resisting it. One exercise I distinctly remember involved about twenty students lying shoulder to shoulder on the ground. Since we were training outdoors in February most of us were wearing boots of some sort. The first person in the line got up and ran down the line alternating each step between the ground and the stomach of the next person in line. When each person got to the end he or she would lie down and the next person would go. The instructions to the runners were to go as fast as possible, and the instructions to the absorbers were to relax as much as possible, and let the impact push the air from the lungs.

Doing this exercise for the first time, I felt trapped and frightened. When the feet came down my body had nowhere to go. I had no control over what happened. If I tried to brace it hurt more. I could not even dodge. The solid ground behind and the bodies on either side halted any sort of retreat. The running pace of the people stepping on me prevented them from controlling their descent. The only choice was to relax, breath, and let go of the desire to control what was happening. Amazingly, once I was able to let go of my need to control I found a feeling of ease in the experience. By releasing and facing my fear I was able to absorb and adapt to the situation. Actor’s often try to retreat in the face of performance pressure. Even if that retreat is only in terms of focus or energy level it detracts from their performance. By adding pressure to the training student actors experience I encouraged them to adapt to new skills on stage in the same way that I adapted to those booted feet.

After hours of this kind of work, we would discuss the experiences of a day of training, and look at the pedagogical design of the exercises. These conversations showed how the incremental introduction of pressure to the training allowed us as students to retain increasingly
more complex skills under pressure that mirrored the realities of fighting. Over the years that I have trained with Sonnon our work has gradually evolved from being combat focused to emphasizing health and fitness. The martial training is now minimized, but the principles that underpin that training are now used to help athletes, law enforcement personnel, and other people from all walks of life manage pressure. While acting is far removed from the violence of sport or real fighting, the management of performance pressure I was taught by Sonnon is rooted in an understanding of human behavior and human physiology that is transferable across different performance contexts. I have experienced this transferability in my work as an actor, and I saw evidence for the success of this process in my research here as well. The core of the pedagogical model I learned from Sonnon is a tool called the Three Dimensional Performance Pyramid or 3DPP. In the next section I consider the connections between it and the ideas of major acting teachers.

**Connections Between the 3DPP and Actor Training**

The deeper I went into my study of the 3DPP the more connections I began to see between the goals of 3DPP training and the goals of the major acting teachers. The acting teachers I studied often spoke of an ideal state for the performer. Jaques Lecoq for example, when writing of the actor’s work with the neutral mask, contends; “Essentially, the neutral mask opens up the actor to the space around him. It puts him in a state of discovery, of openness, of freedom to receive […] a neutral mask puts the actor in a state of perfect balance and economy of movement. Its moves have truthfulness, its gestures and actions are economical” (Moving 38). For Lecoq this state of neutrality is the ideal foundation of all acting. This description of the ideal acting state resonates with what in Sonnon’s system is called “flowstate.” In his book *The Three
Sonnon describes flowstate as, “Seeing everything and focusing on nothing individually, feeling as if you need not think about what you must do before you do it, perhaps not even really looking at your opponent, you are on, simply there, confident and dispassionate and dominant in the exchange” (61, emphasis in original). Similarly, preeminent flow researcher Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in *Flow in Sports*, co-written with sports psychologist Susan Jackson, defines flow as, “a state of consciousness where one becomes totally absorbed in what one is doing, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and emotions” (5). The ability to perform in flow is the ultimate goal of training for Sonnon. The 3DPP is designed to teach material in such a way that new skills fold into the over all flow of the old skills.

This state of altered consciousness resonates with acting teachers encouraging students to “get out of their heads!” When practitioners such as Suzuki and Grotowski push their students to the edge of exhaustion in part to achieve a more open and ideal performance state they are pursuing flow. Suzuki describes this process in his book *The Way of Acting* by noting, “The goal is to ensure and enrich the histrionic unification of the whole bodily expression along with speech; both these elements are constructed on the basis of the feet. The actor can thus have a different sense of existence on stage than he does in ordinary life; he need not confront his body or his stage language in any feigned or empty fashion; both can function as one” (20-21). The idea of unification of the self into a state in which the actor is capable of performing without thought proposed by Suzuki aligns closely with flowstate in the athlete. In both the actor and the athlete, a trained psychophysical organization allows for a state a flexible and unconscious

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4 For Suzuki the actor’s relationship to the ground through the feet is key to his or her power. Suzuki training uses a series of unique walking methods to create in the actor the sense of difference from everyday life he describes in the rest of the quote.
adaptation to changing performance circumstances within a structured performance context, either sportive or theatrical. Psychologist Arne Dietrich has studied the process of “getting out of your head” in runners and other athletes. He describes the experience as transient hypofrontality. In other words, the state of exhaustion Suzuki and Grotowski pursue (which is also found by runners) shuts down the pre-frontal cortex, the part of the brain that makes logic judgments and decisions and therefore interferes with flow. Through the 3DPP process, Sonnon aims to achieve a similar result not through exhaustion but rather by teaching students to manage their attention in particular ways in relation to stress.

Similarly, when Strasberg trained actors to focus on relaxation and turning inward towards their own senses and memories or when Meisner trained actors to collapse the focus of their attention down only to the behavior of their partners, they were seeking a similar ideal state. Likewise, Michael Chekhov centers his work on the actor’s inspiration and the way it frees the performer from conscious thought. As he describes it in On the Technique of Acting, “The fourth stage involves the actor’s inspiration. Everything changes for him at this happy moment. As the creator of his character he becomes inwardly free of his own creation and becomes the observer of his own work … now the image disappears from his mind’s eye and exists within him and acts upon his means of expression from inside him” (155). The various methods of Chekhov’s technique serve to unify the actor’s efforts towards this goal. Thus, acting teachers operating across different cultures and with distinctly different aesthetics echo remarkably similar descriptions of the psychophysical state of the actor in performance. These practice defining acting teachers want their students to shift their focus outside of normal daily attention. Their methods while sometimes successful tend to be more hit or miss. I believe these inconsistent

5 See for example Deitrich and Stoll, 2010.
results arise from methods that are rooted in guesswork and speculation more than evidence-based research. Sonnon’s work by virtue of being built on research and by breaking the student’s learning process down in detail allows the building of a clear incremental learning process that improves the likelihood of positive results.

It was the recognition of these similarities that led me to think about how bringing methods from my athletics training into conversation with my acting pedagogy could benefit my students and me. In particular, I noticed that most acting theory approached these questions without reference to a scientific understanding of learning and cognition. Whether founded in the Anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner that influenced Chekhov or the emphasis on animal energy found in Suzuki and Grotowski, acting theorists approach the question of the actor’s psychophysical state from a position grounded often in philosophy or mysticism rather than a scientific notion of the bodymind. Stanislavsky based his work in his understanding of the psychology of his time, but with the exception of Rhonda Blair’s *Actor, Image, Action* little effort has been made to update the understanding of the actor’s psychophysicality to align it with contemporary scientific understanding. In the 3DPP I believe I found one approach to updating the science behind actor training. This approach is different from previous approaches in that it is not an argument about how acting works. Rather, it is an argument about effective and efficient methods of teaching while helping actors manage the psychophysiological experience of being on stage.

**The Influence of Context on Training and the Context of this Study**

This is not to say there is no value in the approaches of past acting teachers. Each of these practitioners whose work I noted and many others have created systems that have helped actors
develop their craft for decades. While I have a personal belief in the value of understanding the scientific underpinnings of the actor’s experience, I recognize that for most practitioners the apparent end supplants the means used to achieve it. Where I think the problem currently lies is in the realities of contemporary actor training in the United States. Most actors receive the bulk of their training in college or university undergraduate programs. The main systems of actor training are designed to be practiced for years with a qualified teacher. Even Lecoq, who has one of the most streamlined and clear pedagogical structures in contemporary actor training, requires two years of dedicated study. The reality of contemporary actor training in the United States is that few students commit to an ongoing study of a single method. Rather most students of acting encounter training in one of two contexts: either a liberal arts style university program or a conservatory style university program. The conservatory and BFA settings, while potentially coming closer to the dedicated study model, still generally offer students a range of experiences with different teachers at each year through the program. Meanwhile, students in BA programs may only get a few semesters of actor training. Bowling Green State University, where I did my doctoral work, for example offers a semester long introduction to acting course that is Stanislavsky-based, and then offers a range of upper level topics classes that generally focus on specific detailed subject areas such as character development, performance in the classics, or devised theatre to name a few. This arrangement is similar to my undergraduate experience at The College of William and Mary. Over the course of the last few years I have for a variety reasons examined the online program and course descriptions, as well as, course catalogues from a couple dozen universities ranging from small private schools to large state institutions. From this examination I have gleaned that this eclectic approach appears typical of BA programs.
While I have some experience with each having studied in a BA program as an undergraduate and having taught in a BFA program while studying for my MFA, I focus this study on how actor training occurs in a liberal arts BA program. I do this for several reasons. Firstly, because having now taught in such a program at BGSU, in addition to my undergraduate training, the BA is the context with which I am most familiar. Secondly, this is the type of program in which I hope to one day teach. I do believe that Sonnon’s research could be equally applied to a BFA program, but the issues that need to be addressed in that context are different. Lastly, in terms of practical research these are the type of students to which I had access. For the purposes of this study, I chose to clarify my focus by only considering applications to a BA program.

Since students in a BA program are only devoting a small percentage of their overall credits to their major, they generally receive only a few semesters of actor training. This means that students and teachers often only have a semester in which to cover the entirety of a fundamental or specialized approach to acting before they need to move on to other subjects. In my training, and in talking to fellow students and teachers in the programs I have been a part of, teachers often take a coverage approach. This exposes students to a range of ideas and techniques from which they could expand their future study. The coverage approach often leaves scant time for students to integrate new ideas, and to practice those ideas in a high-pressure performance context. This leads to the problem I expressed at the beginning of this chapter. Many students quickly lose newly acquired skills even in final class performances, and almost all students lose them once they have left the class.

I am not suggesting that the process of in class performance is devoid of stress. Rather, I argue that putting skills under stress, while learning them, and pre-incorporating stress into the
rehearsal process allows actors better access to newly acquired skills under performance conditions. The beginning acting classroom was an ideal circumstance to explore this theory. For the purpose of this dissertation the students in my fall 2013 section of THFM 2410: Acting Principles served as test subjects for my theories. This class setting was ideal for several reasons. The students in it tended to bring a range of backgrounds to the classroom that reflected new students in any BA program. They did not have any previous training in acting from the university, and many of them had no training at all. Also, because the class was a requirement for students in a variety of programs, not only the acting/directing track, the students ranged from those with some previous training and a desire to be professional performers to those with little to no previous experience and/or no desire to enter the profession. This created an opportunity to test the application of my theory to a diverse student population, which if successful suggests a broader range of applicability. Further, the class was structured around the basics of Stanislavskian acting. As this is the predominant approach used in American actor training applying my ideas to the teaching of this method could make clearer its potential use across a variety of university acting classrooms that teach a similar approach.

**An Exploration of the Nature of Skill Development**

Generally, actor training is made up of a series of skills. In the Methodology section below, I will also address attribute training, but because the majority of time in any acting course is spent on skill development, I will focus on that aspect. I have encountered confusion from many people about the difference between skills and attributes and the line can sometimes be blurry. For this reason it is important to briefly clarify the difference before moving on to a more detailed analysis of skills.
Attributes are abilities that are innate to human psychophysiology. For example, actors often need to expand their breath capacity. Breath capacity is innate to human existence. Anyone who is not being kept alive by technological means has some level of breath capacity. Breath capacity can be trained using a variety of cardiovascular exercises depending on the specific goals. This training though is not a matter of explaining to students how to breathe in a particular way. Rather it is a process of taxing the student’s breath capacity in order to strengthen it.

Teaching actors to speak with good vocal support on the other hand is a skill. It is something humans are capable of doing, but it is not something people do anytime they speak. Therefore the technique of speaking with breath support has to be explained, practiced, and corrected. The need to be explained, practiced, and corrected in order to develop are the hallmarks of a skill.

Distinguishing acting as a set of skills to be learned rather than as a set of attributes innate to some people is important with new students. Many students and even some teachers of acting believe that acting is an ability someone either has or does not have rather than a skill to be learned and mastered. A belief in the connection between talent and success causes consistent struggle in the process of actor training, and in justifying training to students. While many students actively participate in training, their beliefs about talent can limit their willingness to work hard to develop skills. Talent, genius, and instant success underpin the popular belief about what creates success in many aspects of life, but seems especially strong in the arts. This belief undercuts recognition of the value of hard work, diligent training, and years of struggle.

Contemporary reality TV competition shows reinforce the idea of people leaping to fame out of obscurity and seemingly without training. Many students enter beginning acting classes with a belief that talent will carry them through the work. My work argues for the opposite position;
that acting like athletics consists of a collection of skills and attributes that can be developed through training.

A standard example of this trope of genius over practice is Mozart. Many anecdotal accounts suggest that he sprung fully into his powers at a young age. However, psychologist Michael Howe explodes this myth in his book *Genius Explained* by pointing out that by his sixth birthday Mozart had spent thousands of hours practicing with his music teacher father. Indeed, Psychologist Anders Ericsson, who researches expertise explains, “Contrary to the popular "talent" view that asserts that differences in practice and experience cannot account for differences in expert performance, we have shown that the amount of a specific type of activity (deliberate practice) is consistently correlated with a wide range of performance including expert-level performance, when appropriate developmental differences (age) are controlled” (392). This supports the belief that in order to succeed actors need to develop a consistent and diligent practice. It is impossible to achieve the volume of training described by Howe and Ericsson in the length of a semester. However, what can be achieved is to inculcate in students a particular form of practice.

Of course as Ericsson acknowledges practice in and of itself is not enough. Practice must be of a certain type. Drawing on the work of psychologist Robert Bjork, Daniel Coyle in his book *The Talent Code* argues that skill is built through “deep practice.” Coyle identifies three rules for deep practice: chunking, repetition, and developing feel. The pedagogical process I outline in the next chapter based on the 3DPP incorporates each of these elements of deep practice with the intent of helping students move in the direction of skill mastery.

Chunking is dividing a large complex skill into small pieces. Skills should be pulled apart, slowed down, and then reassembled as necessary. This allows the student to focus on the
area where difficulty happens. By being able to pull out just that piece the student can refine that element before trying to plug it in to the larger skill.

Repetition seems like a self-explanatory concept. However, there is an important element of repetition that is tied to deep practice and to chunking. A former Head Coach under Sonnon, Brandon Jones, liked to say “More isn’t better, better is better.” To understand this phrase, imagine a new skill a student is practicing. If I call complete mastery of that skill 100% of the skill, and a given student’s level of mastery of that skill is 50%, then it seems obvious that student needs to practice more in order to achieve complete mastery. Here is where the quality of the practice becomes important. If he or she just rote practices that skill without an emphasis on specifically improving technique then half the time the student is successfully practicing the skill he or she wants, and the other half of the time he or she is practicing a skill that is not the skill he or she wants. Even worse the student does not know what undesired skill he or she is practicing. Mindless repetition leads to unconscious repetition of errors, which leads to incorrectly learning the skill. So, before repetitive training of a skill is used a student must be able to repeat it at a high level of ability. Otherwise the student fails to master the target skill.

Finally, students must be able to feel for themselves when they are practicing well versus when something is off. Students need an opportunity to slowly incorporate new skills into the broader context of their pre-existing skills while still allowing for chunking. Training must leave space for mistakes, and students must learn to recognize those mistakes for themselves so that they know when and how to chunk, as well as, when they have mastered a skill to the point that heavy repetition is effective.

Designing a program that helps students to develop these skills is part of the goals of this dissertation. In Sonnon’s 3DPP, I find an approach that address these concerns through a model
of incremental progression. The 3DPP also balances three aspects of development: practice, training, and competition to address the development of skills, attributes to support those skills, and pressure management to apply those skills in performance. I do not believe Sonnon intentionally based his work on the specific theorists I cited above, but his methods reflect a similar approach to learning. In the next section I will explain the 3DPP in detail, and discuss how it applies to my project of helping student actors retain new skills under performance pressure.

**Methodology**

In order to test my theories on the application of Sonnon’s work to acting pedagogy in the beginning acting classroom, I taught a semester long course at BGSU using the pedagogical approach outlined below. This course covered the same material as any other section of THFM 2410: Acting Principles; however, I took steps to challenge the students to apply the skills learned under conditions that are psychophysically similar to the pressures of live performance. In planning the course it was my contention that by training under these conditions student actors would better retain new skills over the course of the semester as the complexity of work demanded of them increased. I also believe that these pedagogical practices allow students to better retain skills under the pressure of actual production work. Application under production conditions was not included in my project as none of the students enrolled in the course were cast in productions over the course of the semester.

The plan outlined below was approved by the BGSU Human Subject Review Board (HSRB). It raises questions in terms of student/teacher relationships when also engaging students as subjects of my dissertation. I managed the student/subject dynamic in the following way. At
the beginning of the semester the students had the entire project explained to them both orally and via a consent form. At that time they had the option to opt in or opt out of being a research subject. These consent forms were filled out without my presence and delivered in a sealed envelope to my advisor, Dr. Jonathan Chambers, who kept the forms until final grading had been completed for the semester. At that point, I received the forms from him, and only then knew which students agreed to have their course experience included in my dissertation. Further, when drawing on student responses I use only non-identifying information. A given subject’s responses had the name removed and was coded with a number. Additionally, any quotes from subjects had identifying characteristics removed. Fortunately, all of the members of the course agreed to have their work included in my dissertation.

There were two methodological elements to my process. I will describe the two elements in a general sense, and then I will chart how those methodologies played out within the structure of the class. The methodologies are divided into a training methodology and a testing methodology. The training methodology is based on Sonnon’s 3DPP. The testing methodology draws on Roland Carlstedt’s Primary Higher Order factors, hereafter PHO factors, for predicting and assessing performance in critical moments.

**Training Methodology**

Sonnon’s work with the 3DPP structures learning along three lines: practice, training, and competition. Practice refers to the development of skills or the specific techniques of an activity. Training involves the development of attributes or the necessary conditioning to perform skills well. Competition refers to developing the ability to access skills under the pressure of performance. Each of the three sides of the pyramid builds through learning progressions. In
adapting this work for use in the acting classroom, I make a shift away from “competition” as the cultural baggage associated with the term frequently suggests a level of aggression and resistance that is generally not part of an artistic process. Therefore I reframe competition as performance. The 3DPP structure shapes the athlete’s work towards the goal of achieving and maintaining, under pressure, peak levels of functioning in competition. My belief was that using this model in the acting classroom would achieve similar results for stage performance. Below, I breakdown the three sides of the pyramid.

The training side moves through four levels of preparedness: from general physical, to specific physical, to activity specific, to mental and emotional (see Figure 1 below).

In athletic conditioning, training allows the development of a general strength base and then a gradual refinement of attributes towards the specific activity. In the context of actor training, I believe this would mean building attributes in breath capacity, full body coordination, and selective tension. The shifts up the pyramid on the training side happen through sophistication of movement and compression of time. Once a movement can be performed well and safely students are expected to work at a higher rate of effort. Once a high rate of effort can be
maintained then the exercise can be sophisticated and the effort level drops back while the new movement is developed. In the 3DPP, the training side of the pyramid is designed to build in performers the capacity to do increasingly sophisticated work.

The practice side of the pyramid suggests a model for progressing skills (see Figure 2 below).

![Figure 2](image)

This model begins from static drills where a basic skill is developed in isolation. Fluid drills incorporate a few already practiced additional skills to start to fold the new skill into pre-existing abilities. Dynamic drills insert the newly learned skill into the full range of the athlete’s pre-existing skill base. This progression is not quite as hierarchical as it might seem. Each stage flows smoothly from the previous, though sometimes the stages overlap as well. A student actor moving through this process might work on a skill such as the playing of action. The student would move from a simple situation with a prescribed action and strict parameters of how to apply that action to a relaxing of those parameters to choosing his/her own actions to finally incorporating the skill of playing actions back into full scene work.
The performance side of the pyramid explores a continuum from experimentation to repetition (see Figure 3 below).

Experimentation entails working under the psychophysical conditions of performance, but at less than full pressure in order to develop skill sophistication under incremental resistance. Gradually the pressure ramps up to move towards repetition with an emphasis on effective and efficient application of skills and attributes under circumstances that stimulate the full psychophysical experience of the actual performance event. It is important to understand this process as a continuum. The actor moves back and forth between degrees of experimentation and repetition in order to stay under the participants stress threshold. If an athlete becomes overwhelmed by the pressure then training value plummets. Experimentation develops sophistication of skill application while repetition serves as a check on the ability to use those skills under performance like conditions. If a skill disappears under the pressure of repetition then the problem needs to be assessed in terms of whether the deficit is in the skill or attributes and an appropriate adjustment made before plugging the skill back into experimentation and gradually ramping back up into repetition with it.
In many athletic contexts, and certainly in combat sports, where I first encountered the 3DPP, pressure generally comes from an athlete’s competitors. In acting, while there is often the illusion of conflict on stage, actors work together to create an experience for the audience. Therefore the primary stressors in acting come from internal anxiety and distracting elements such as lights, sound, set, and audience. Therefore in adding pressure to the acting process I drew on two main tools. I used simple conditioning exercises to raise students’ heart rates before they engaged in scene work. This created a situation where the students must recover as they are working. It mirrors the experience of coming on stage full of anxiety and by incrementally adding this opportunity for recovery into the training process students experienced repeated success at maintaining a zone of optimal functioning while in performance. The second method of pressure I introduced into the training process was distracting elements. These included the playing of music, the changing of lights, and the placement of objects or people in the space in such a way that the student actors have to adapt to them. As with all the work this was done in an incremental way so that it distracted the actors, but did not overwhelm them. One of the key principles of the 3DPP is incremental pressure. If a student is overwhelmed he or she tends to shut down. However, adding just a bit of distraction will create a circumstance where students can learn to recover from perceived errors or changes in circumstance that occur as new elements of production are added to a rehearsal process.

I had used these methods informally in acting classes for years. My master’s thesis conceptualized some applications of the training side of the pyramid. My primary struggle has been to discover ways to test the effectiveness of this approach. With help from my committee I reached beyond my grounding in the 3DPP to the work of other researchers to look for a testing model. I based my assessment on the work of sports psychologist Roland Carlstedt.
Methods of Assessment

The pedagogy of the class was built through application of the 3DPP. The effectiveness of the pedagogy was checked in three ways: through my in-the-moment observations, through tests of Carlstedt’s PHO factors administered periodically throughout the semester, and through student self report.

My in-the-moment skill development assessments were checked through observation of the participants’ integration of breathing, structure (alignment), and movement. Within the system of training, created by Sonnon, the integration of breathing, structure, and movement is referred to as form, and is assessed in particular ways outlined below.

Breathing is the governor of pressure management. As the students trained, I looked for four levels of breathing: fear breathing (an inhalation and hold), power breathing (an inhalation followed by a short partial exhalation to pressurize the body), effort breathing (an active exhalation on effort with no conscious inhalation), and flow breathing (the body is breathed by the movement and ultimately action occurs in the pause following exhalation). These different levels of breathing are activity specific, so they can be observed with the process of learning any new activity or facing any new pressure. If a participant is fear breathing or power breathing then he or she is still struggling to incorporate the new experience. If he or she is effort breathing then he or she is beginning to master the task and at this point new elements of a skill or pressures can be added keeping attention on how those new experiences are impacting the participant’s breathing.

It can be difficult to monitor the breathing of a group of people all at once. Fortunately, disruptions in the participant’s structure or movement are easier to observe, and reflect breath
level. In examining a student’s structure I looked at the extent to which they were integrating seven components: leg drive, hip recruitment, core activation, coccyx to crown alignment, shoulder pack, arm lock, and grip confirmation. These terms come out of a focus on strength training. A broader understanding of a term like grip confirmation to mean not simply how someone grabs something, but rather an observation of the alignment and tension within their wrist and hand as they work, allows the idea to be extrapolated to any number of activities. Rather than breaking each element down, what I did in the moment was look to see if the person’s movement was supported by whole body engagement. Part of the process also involved conditioning students towards better structural alignment.

If a participant’s structure appears well maintained as they are moving, then there was one other element that could be observed to check the degree to which the student was incorporating the lesson: they should be able to move freely in a variety of directions. Sonnon’s system uses the six degrees of freedom from aerodynamics as a basis for movement analysis (heaving, surging, swaying, pitching, yawing, and rolling). As with structure movement capacity was improved through the training portion of the class.

In order to assess the students’ personal development in ways that were not visually apparent in the moment, I drew on the work of sports psychologist Roland Carlstedt. In his book *Critical Moments During Competition: A Mind-Body Model of Sports Performance When It Counts the Most*, Carlstedt describes three psychological factors, which he calls primary higher order or PHO factors. Factor one is absorption, which is the athlete’s tendency to become engrossed in an experience. Factor two is neuroticism, which is the athlete’s tendency to engage in self-critique and negative self talk. Factor three is repressive coping, which is the athlete’s ability to set aside negative or distracting experiences and reengage with the athletic task at hand.
Carlstedt identifies an ideal relationship of these three factors: low absorption, low neuroticism, and high repressive coping. In his work, he engages a range of psychological interventions with athletes including hypnosis and biofeedback. I am not a trained psychologist, and therefore did not use those methods in the training of my student actors. However in looking at Carlstedt’s constellation of factors, and reflecting on my experience using the 3DPP to train myself, I can recognize how my training has shifted the relationship of my PHO factors towards Carlstedt’s ideal. Of course this is purely an anecdotal claim, but over my years of training I have noticed shifts in all three of Carlstedt’s factors. I have much more external awareness and am less prone to daydreaming. My neuroticism has minimized. This was a huge struggle for me for many years. I have also noticed in increase in my willingness and ability to manage higher levels of stress.

Of course some students could have come in with Carlstedt’s ideal constellation of factors, but assessing this at various points throughout the semester was designed to give me workable data in conjunction with my observations and the student’s self-assessments. Carlstedt offers a complex protocol of tests for these traits involving the use of heart rate monitoring and EEG. However, he also offers some lower tech suggestions that were more realistic for my process, and provided additional data on potential change in students across the semester. Each of these tests was a written personality test. All are available online. For Absorption he recommends the Tellegen Absorption Scale, for Neuroticism the Eysenck Personality Inventory, and for Repressive Coping, the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. Having the students take these tests at three points during the semester was designed to give me data on the psychological impact of the work on the students.
In addition to data gathered through in the moment observations, and using Carlstedt’s models, I also drew on data from student self-reporting. At the beginning of the semester, students filled out two self-assessments of their previous experience as performers. The first (see Acting Knowledge Pre-test in Appendix A) gathered information on how students thought about the process of acting, and checked their level of familiarity with some key ideas from the class. The second assessment (see Pressures of Performance Reflection form in Appendix B) asked them to consider how they have experienced the pressure of performance in the past and gather some information in relation to the PHO factors. Throughout the course of the semester each of these assessments was retaken at significant points (as outlined in the detailed account of the semester, which is below). This periodic assessment allowed me to track student progress through the semester, and gain insight into whether or not the pedagogical interventions I explored had the expected effect. The three testing protocols allowed me to see student response in terms of an outside observer (myself), the student’s perception of his or her experience, and the influence on Carlstedt’s PHO factors.

The course structure developed from a combination of the goals and structure of the class laid out by the suggested course plan and syllabus from Dr. Chambers, my understanding of the 3DPP, and the inclusion of the testing protocols laid out above. Below I give a brief explanation of how these methods came together in practice.

**How the Training Progressed**

Each skill was initially approached in relative isolation (static drills). The first drills done were simple and specific enough to allow the participant to focus only on the skill to be developed. If participants struggled to master a skill then regressions (i.e., even more targeted
exercises) were applied to help them. Once the students began to develop skills, which were assessed as described above, increasing levels of pressure were introduced. The first progression was fluid drills by practicing exercises that asked participants to incorporate preexisting knowledge into the application of the new skill. Initially only a couple of pre-existing skills were added. Gradually the participants moved to dynamic drilling where a wide range of pre-existing skills were incorporated while still working in a drill based context rather than an application or performance context. As an example, following this process with the playing of actions began with simple single action conflict games and the introduction of action verbs (static drills). Then work shifted to more complicated action scores that involved shifts in actions and objectives (fluid drills). Finally, the skills developed in the earlier drills were incorporated into working with a script and building a full actor’s score from actions (dynamic drills).

Once a level of competence was achieved with the new skill, I shifted the work to the performance side of the pyramid by adding in a performance context. In other words participants began applying the skill to performance work. Given the goal of applying this work in BA program beginning level class, the performance context was text based and stayed within the general confines of stage realism. This incorporation process reflected the experimentation end of the performance continuum. Once students had a performance piece developed their ability to apply their new skill under pressure was tested by the incremental addition of exercises to raise heart rate or distractors. I believe that differing types of stress from physical (through exercise) to focus interrupters (incorporating distracting elements such as sound, light, or objects) not only better prepared students to manage performance, but also make the method applicable across a range of student ability levels. For example, there were students who for various reasons could not handle certain forms of physical exercise, but they safely experienced distraction-based
stress. This resistance oscillated up and down the experimentation to repetition continuum attempting to stay under the pressure threshold of the participants so that they are challenged without being overwhelmed.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation represents an important step for me. The experience examined here is my first formal attempt to test the ideas about actor training I have been developing for many years. Even the writing of this dissertation reflects an experiment in writing for me. The style of reporting on a study and analyzing data is not a method in which I have formal training. Writing this project has been hugely useful in advancing my thinking and process for future iterations of this research.

In Chapter II I lay out in detail the structure of the course. I explain the underlying goals and principles of the course, and examine the ways I structured the course based on a blending of those goals and principles with the methods of the 3DPP. I then explain in detail the day-to-day workings of the course including each step of the training process.

Chapter III examines the data gathered from the testing process. I discuss the struggles of the data collection process, and then reflect more deeply on the useable information. I, also, discuss ways in which the data both supports and challenges my theories. At the end of the chapter I posit methods for improving the process of data collection and consider some larger methodological questions about best practices in actor training.

I learned many things from the experience of this study. These lessons include reflections on the nature of students in a beginning acting class, the effectiveness of certain techniques, and the ineffectiveness of others. In Chapter IV, I describe twelve things I learned from this process.
While at times this reflection covers some similar ground to Chapter III, Chapter IV focuses on the specific experience of the course taught for this study, and looks at more detail level concerns rather than larger conceptual questions. Further, I propose in Chapter IV a revised course plan based on the results of this study.

Lastly, I conclude by considering the work of the previous chapters. From there I discuss areas of related research for the future. I discuss ways I have begun to apply the things I learned from this study in my current position teaching acting at Stephen F. Austin State University. Finally, I consider the place of this study in the current scholarly and practical discussion of acting.
CHAPTER II

A DETAILED BREAKDOWN OF THE PROCESS

Introduction

In this chapter I will explain the structure of the course as I designed it. I begin with the elements of the class that are given based on the course description and discussions with the course supervisor, Dr. Chambers. Next, I discuss the primary graded assignments of the course. Finally, the bulk of the chapter addresses the day-to-day course plan. This includes the central lessons of the course and how they were taught. I begin by describing the warm-up I used with the students, and a discussion of how this warm-up pre-incorporated stress management tools. I further detail how those tools were tested during the conditioning portion of each class session. Following this, I reflect on each of the core acting skills I focused on in teaching the course: Partner Connection, Playing of Actions, and Character Rhythm. In this reflection I draw a clear line from the 3DPP to the pedagogical methods employed. This includes a detailed description of how fear impacts the performer and the ways in which training to manage fear were imbedded into the course. I end by discussing the methods by which I incorporated pressure into the students’ rehearsal process. In addition to the explaining the process itself, I review some of the research that underlies this method.

Standard Class Structure

Theatre and Film 2410: Acting Principles is a general education course that serves as the introductory acting course at Bowling Green State University. It is required of all theatre and film majors. It is also taken by a number of students pursuing degrees in animation offered through the School of Art, vocal performance students from the College of Music, as well as, by
students from a variety of majors across the campus. This means that the range of experience students bring to the course is wide. Some have been acting and even studying acting for several years, others may have been in a play or two in high school, and still others have no experience at all.

The students enrolled in the course that forms the basis of this study included a full range in terms of career goals, experiences, and interests. Several students were committed to becoming professional actors, and already had some experience. Several were taking the class to fulfill other requirements, but had some acting experience. At least one student acknowledged that she was taking the class to fulfill a requirement, and was terrified of the idea of acting. There was also a student who was just there for the fun of it.

Given this variance within students’ goals, experiences, and interests, the course was designed by course coordinator Dr. Chambers to teach a simple and practical process of script analysis and scoring that is useful to a variety of student goals, and also allows for grading to be less subjective, and more focused on whether or not students use the tools taught in the class. The methodology is based on a simplified, Stanislavsky influenced approach to given circumstances analysis, character biography, and scoring a script for subtext, objectives, obstacles, tactics, and personal imagery. The core tool of the class is the Actor’s Workbook. This document, which also serves as an assignment revisited throughout the semester, guides students through each of the elements of the process described above. (See Appendix C for the Actor’s Workbook used in the class described.) Individual graduate student instructors of the course are encouraged to bring their own background and approach to the teaching of the course.

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6 The Actor’s Workbook is a guide prepared for student actors by Jonathan and Sara Chambers. It is periodically updated. It covers the script analysis process, and draws on a number
The semester of work that forms the basis for this dissertation was the fourth semester I had taught the class. I redesigned the syllabus somewhat in all, but the first of those semesters. These redesigns were always done with the approval of Dr. Chambers, and did not represent fundamental changes to the goals or structure of the course, but rather resulted from working to bring the syllabus into coherence with my personality and teaching methods. The course as I taught it this past semester was structured around the following assignments (the course syllabus has been included as Appendix D).

**Primary Graded Assignments**

The first assignment guides the students slowly through the Actor’s Workbook process over the course of several weeks. As much as possible all students are assigned to work with the same ten-minute play. As a result of having an uneven number of students, there was one group of three women that worked on a different script than did the rest of the students. The Actor’s Workbook can be broken down into three parts: given circumstances, character biography, and script scoring. Students spend roughly a week and a half on each of these elements in order. Part of the logic of the Actor’s Workbook is that each section builds on the work done in the previous section. In class students would engage in exercises designed to get them thinking about the section of the Actor’s Workbook being explored, and they would also turn in an ungraded draft of sources including (but not limited to) Charles Waxberg’s *The Actor’s Script*, Robert Cohen’s *Acting I*, John Perry’s *Encyclopedia of Acting Techniques*, Melissa Bruder’s *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*, Michael Chekhov’s *To The Actor: On the Technique of Acting*, and Stanislavsky’s *An Actor’s Work*. 
of that section for review. By the time the class reached the final section of the Workbook they were expected to have chosen a two to three minute scene from the play. These scenes were rehearsed and then performed. On the day of final performance the students also submit Actor’s Workbooks revised from their earlier drafts for grading. The use of this assignment is the primary way in which my syllabus differs from the original class syllabus. I have used it for a few semesters. I like it because it gets them focused on script analysis from the beginning. I have found this early and slow introduction to the Actor’s Workbook helps students to understand it before a major assignment is due.

For the second main assignment, in the class students independently write an Actor’s Workbook for a specific play. In this dissertation, I will largely ignore this assignment, as it is a solo assignment that does not include a performance component, and as such, does not involve the type of stress that is the focus of my study.

The final assignment has three parts. Students rehearse a scene largely outside the classroom, write an Actor’s Workbook for that scene, and keep a rehearsal journal of their out of class rehearsal process. These scenes are generally full ten-minute plays, but in the term from which I am drawing the data for this study, I had one group that chose a scene from a full-length play. I give the students the option to choose their own scenes, and then provide scenes for any groups that encounter difficulty in choosing their own work. At this point in the semester class time becomes dedicated entirely to this project. In many ways it becomes an opportunity for the students to apply what they have learned in course with relative independence. The actors are expected to complete a journal documenting twenty hours of rehearsal time for these scenes including time spent working with me (typically 2-3 hours). The scenes were read through and discussed in class. Each group had three opportunities to rehearse with me over the course of the
remainder of the semester. Further they had an additional day before the final performances to present their scenes to the entire class, and to get feedback from everyone in the class.

**In-Class Work**

**Introduction**

The assignments described in the previous section form the skeletal structure of the course. The day-to-day work involves teaching students how to embody the intellectual tools of the Actor’s Workbook in performance. This semester I broke that work down into three aspects: partner connection, playing of actions, and character rhythm. Below I will talk through each of these aspects, as well as, the class warm-up, and explain both the rationale behind them, and how each was approached.

**Basics of Fear and the Warm-up as a Fear Management Tool**

The heart of the training of the course was the warm-up and conditioning that began almost every class session. This work introduced the basics of stress management while providing a physical and vocal warm up. I believe contemporary American interpretations of Stanislavsky frequently minimize the active and embodied nature of acting. Instead they focus on textual interpretation or the actor’s individual emotional life. In the pantheon of American teachers of Stanislavsky, Stella Adler and Uta Hagen both emphasize script analysis. They suggest looking to perform the actions of the character, and Adler in particular focuses on noting the differences between self and character. Strasberg and Meisner on the other hand take strikingly different approaches to develop the actor’s ability to more fully be themselves on
None of them engage with the performers psychophysiological experience as anything more than a vehicle for either emotional or textual expression. An actor’s struggles to achieve either of these goals are treated either as a failure of understanding of the script or as a post-Freudian psychological block to be overcome. In all of these methods the primary emphasis lies on what the actor is thinking while performing. These teachers expect that any form of physical embodiment will arise naturally from the actor engaging the thoughts and emotions of the character. Therefore it is often difficult for students who are also trying to manage stress and fear in the performance process to perform well. In my time teaching acting I see actors whose practice and research is overwhelmed by stress. Rather than conveying the actions of the character they end up only conveying fear. Students trained in the traditions of Adler, Hagen, Strasberg, and Meisner very frequently have tools for acting; just as frequently, however, they lack the tools for handling their embodied response to stress.

Situating himself as a counterpoint to the Stanislavsky tradition in American actor training, Phillip Zarilli in *Acting: Psychophysical Phenomenon and Process*, reframes training as an embodied, enactive process. He notes that acting may, “productively be considered as one among many extra-daily skilled modes of embodied practice requiring the performer to develop a heightened attunement of sensory and perceptual awareness of a certain sort in order to be fully responsive to theatrical environments and dramaturgies” (29). For Zarilli (and myself) acting is a process that requires a heightened engagement with the corporeal self and the environment in the

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7 One of the best discussions of the differences and similarities between these four practitioners is Rosemary Malague’s *An Actress Prepares*. While her goal is a feminist critique of American actor training, Malague does a beautiful job of highlighting the similarities and differences in the pedagogies of these teachers.
moment of performance. As Zarilli further claims, the work of the actor on stage is less about character or scenic choices, and more about fully embodying the score of the performance with open awareness and sensitivity to both changes within the self and within the environment. He goes on to say, “rather than considering acting in terms of representation, it may be much more useful to consider acting in terms of its dynamic, psycho-physical, embodied, enlivening processes—the actor-as-actor and actor-as-human-being senses, perceives, imagines, feels, and remembers in the moment of performance” (29).

One way to better understand the ideas Zarilli presents in his study is to consider the creative choices of the actor as the signal trying to get through to the audience, and the noise of the actor’s fear interferes with it. I believe thinking of acting this way highlights the importance of creating a high signal-to-noise ratio for the performer. If the “actor-as-human-being” is having even a low-level fear response then that noise competes with the signal of the environmental and dramaturgical context. When fear enters the equation, and the noise begins to overwhelm the signal, the embodied psychophysical stress response competes with the clear performance of the actor’s score, and with his or her ability to attune to the present moment of performance.

As noted in Chapter I, Sonnon contends that heart rate is the governor of stress level. To understand the psychophysical state that competes with the intended performance, I will examine the changes that heightened heart rate inflicts on the performer. This information comes from combat stress research. In particular I draw on the work of psychologist Dave Grossman in his books *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* and *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and Peace*. I should note that Grossman, who is writing for soldiers and law enforcement officers, color-codes the heart rate ranges. It is certainly possible to see the color assignments, especially as they can be read in
relation to skin color, as problematic. They range from white, which is resting through yellow and red, which are increasing levels of arousal, to black, which is full on psychophysical deterioration. I suspect Grossman is unaware of these implications, but I believe it is important to recognize this issue.

According to Grossman’s research, operating at a heart rate range between 115 and 145 beats per minute (called condition red) is optimal for the performance of any kind of physical task. Below that the performance can lack energy and above that performance begins to deteriorate. At the extreme end, above 175 beats per minute (condition black), irrational fight, flight, or freeze behaviors set in. Submissive behavior and voiding of bowels and bladder are common responses to condition black; gross motor skills (running and charging) become the only functional movement options.

Fortunately, this phobic level response is rare among performers. Instead, I will focus on the level that performers frequently experience this is called “condition gray” by Grossman. Condition gray occurs between 145 and 175 beats per minute just slightly above high functioning. At this heart rate range a variety of cognitive distortions begin to occur. Potential cognitive issues include: Autopilot (having access to only well practiced rote actions), Slow Motion Time (the sense that things are happening very slowly), Memory Loss for Parts of the Event, Memory Loss for Some of Your Actions, Dissociation (feeling as if you are not actually present for what is happening), Intrusive Distracting Thoughts (this includes both negative self talk and random unrelated thoughts), Memory Distortions (false memories), and Fast Motion Time (the perception that things are happening too quickly to process). There is also a loss of peripheral vision, depth perception, and near vision. Further, auditory exclusion begins to set in. Under high stress, the body tries to eliminate non-essential functions. Often sight is given
preference over hearing, and therefore hearing deteriorates or shuts down altogether. Research shows that this is a literal mechanical shut down, not a psychological disconnection.

Additionally, complex motor skills deteriorate. As one might guess this plethora of cognitive and physiological changes make being a responsive actor increasingly difficult. Not all of these occur simultaneously or for all people, but it is easy to imagine any one of these events would make the process of being an engaged actor incredibly difficult. This is especially true if, like my younger self, the actor does not recognize these fear responses for what they are.

Just as heart rate is the governor of stress, breath is the governor of heart rate. Therefore a key element of teaching students to manage their stress is teaching them how to recover from erratic or inefficient breathing patterns. In my training as an actor, I was taught deep breathing as a form of relaxation, and this makes sense in the context of meditation or relaxing further from an already calm state. However when using breath to lower heart rate a more sophisticated process is required. It is easy to breathe deeply and smoothly when managing the stresses of daily life. When the heart rate is elevated and conscious thought has been hijacked by fear, a more active approach to breath recovery is required. The method I describe below comes from my training with Sonnon. The methods that he developed based on his experience with Russian military and Olympic trainers, he applies with high-level athletes and tactical teams.

I have taken these tools and begun to adapt them to use in the world of acting. Sonnon’s breath recovery process has four steps: *closed mouth diaphragmatic inhalation focused breathing*, *diaphragmatic breathing with a strong two part exhale, exhalation focused breathing*, and finally *tactical* or sometimes called *square breathing* which involves a four count inhale, four count pause, four count exhale, and four count pause. I prefer the word “pause” to “hold” because “hold” implies and often creates tension whereas “pause” does not.
The warm up I developed for the class pre-incorporates this breath recovery process into the daily practice of the class. The warm up was ten minutes long and included a full range of movements. It was based on the warm up exercises of Iranian wrestlers referred to as Zurkaneh. This choice was more serendipitous than anything else. I was practicing a collection of these exercises myself at the time, and I realized that I could craft from them a four-minute movement sequence that addressed most of the major joints of the body and raised the heart rate. Further, the Zurkaneh is built on maintaining an in-place trot through most of the exercises. This allowed me to scale the intensity to the fitness level of the students by adding the trotting to some exercises and not others, and also for some students and not others.

There are ten exercises to the warm-up I used: swinging the arms from side to side with one arm crossing the chest at a time; swinging both arms up overhead and then down to the hips with the arms straight and fingers extended; swinging the arms open and closed across the chest; scooping the arms which involved a partial lunge to each side while dropping the opposite arm down and acting as if scooping something up; swinging one arm up and one arm down in alternation; alternating rear lunges with exaggerated oppositional arm swing; squats with alternate side hand to knee touches on rising; alternating between running in place and jumping in place; 180 degree or 360 degree jump spins in alternating directions; and an extended reach towards the front with alternating feet. Each exercise was performed for thirty seconds. The students in the class trained with no rest. By the end of the four minutes the students breathing was generally ragged indicating that their heart rate was somewhere above optimal. At the five-minute mark, students would begin mouth closed diaphragmatic breathing. When the heart rate is above ideal, people tend to over-breathe into the upper chest. Asking the students to close their mouths and focus on diaphragmatic breathing began to get the respiratory process back under
conscious control. After fifteen seconds, the class would add two hard exhalations. This began the shift to exhalation focused breathing. At the thirty-second mark the actors began exhalation focused breathing. This means they focused on consciously exhaling on each breath and let the autonomic nervous system take over the inhalation. This prevents over-breathing. As the body starts taking in just the amount of oxygen it needs, the heart rate continues to down shift. After thirty seconds of exhalation focused breathing, the students began tactical or square breathing. This four count inhale-pause-exhale-pause-repeat method finished the process of ratcheting the heart rate back down to manageable levels. Once breath was recovered the warm up moved on to voice preparation for the final four minutes. In the description above I used rigid time counts. In practice, I used these with students when I first introduced the warm up, but everyone’s recovery process will function somewhat differently. Therefore, while we always breathed for two minutes at this point, the pace at which the students moved through each step varied depending on their individual needs.

This physical warm-up was followed by a four-minute vocal warm-up, which was again broken down into thirty-second chunks designed to engage the voice gently, but also to encourage vocal exploration. As the semester progressed and ideas of action and characterization were introduced, they became part of the vocal exploration portion. In the beginning, the vocal exploration added a sense of silliness and play to the procedure that I intended to help novice actors become comfortable making unusual sounds and expressions. The first exercise consisted of simply contorting the face in as many ways as each of us could create. These were varied each day, and I constantly encouraged students to make new discoveries. We then practiced sighed vowel vocalizations followed by lip buzzing shifting from unvoiced to voiced at the fifteen
second mark. Following this was sirens. We then intensified the amount of play by
improvisationally exploring letter sounds. We made the sounds of various letters while
experimenting with various types of meaning that might be made by changing the quality of the
sounds. Lastly, we would apply a similar concept to text. For this we used the first few lines of
Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy. I chose this simply because it was something with
which most students were already familiar.

The final stage in the warm-up was more intensive physical work. This work was
designed to be cumulative throughout the semester. As described in Chapter I, it was intended to
progress through the four levels of the training hierarchy pyramid. I will explore the challenges
of this part of the process in more detail in the following chapters, but sufficed to say, here that
getting the majority of the students capable of performing the basic levels of these exercises well
was a semester long endeavor. I lay the full program out below, but none of the students ever
performed it in full. Some of the students managed to progress to the Activity Specific
Preparedness level on a few of the exercises.

The work took ten minutes. This time was divided over five exercises with ninety
seconds of work and thirty seconds of rest following each exercise. During the rest period
students moved between stations and also applied the recovery process developed through the
warm-up. Each exercise was designed with a specific acting related movement pattern in mind.

8 I am not giving a great deal of description for these three exercises as they are standard
vocal warm-ups that could be found in almost any book on theatrical voice training.

9 Note that the descriptions below are designed to give the reader a sense of the
movements. They are not designed to teach the exercises. Trying to do so through written
description alone would be inefficient at best.
Exercise 1:

- General Physical Preparedness (GPP) Level: Standing tall, push away the ground and open your arms out to the side expanding the chest. Begin an exhalation and move into your lowest possible flat foot squat. At the low point of the squat deepen the compression on the lungs by dropping the arms between the legs, rolling the shoulders forward, and dropping the head to the chest.
- Specific Physical Preparedness (SPP) Level: As above, except rising to the balls of the feet on the expansion. Then performing a ball of foot squat that converts to a flat foot squat at the bottom.
- Activity Specific Preparedness (ASP) Level: At this point add a partial backwards roll to the bottom of the squat and return to standing
- Mental and Emotional Preparedness (MEP) Level: Finally add an upward leg extension followed by dropping the knees to either side of the head for full compression.

Purpose: Two key elements of the actor’s body in Western practice are deepened breath capacity and openness through the upper body. Breath capacity supports the voice and opening through the chest is considered to signify an open body in the West. This exercise takes the actor through the extreme ends of both bodily openness and inhalation and exhalation. By exploring these extremes the actor develops comfort with the middle range used on most realist performance.

Exercise 2:

- GPP Level: Travel across the floor starting from standing with feet shoulder width apart and weight evenly distributed. Load the weight on one foot to push off moving forward
catching your weight on the opposite foot from the one that pushed off. Repeat across the room

- **SPP Level**: Same as above except beginning with one foot forward and one foot back pulling the front foot to the back and then pushing off that foot to travel.
- **ASP Level**: Same as above except let the forward motion propel you into an extended low forward lunge (similar to a wrestler’s shoot).
- **MEP Level**: Rather than halting the momentum of the forward lunge allow that momentum to carry through into a forward roll.

Purpose: Western actors need to be light on their feet and also able to quickly change direction. This lightness and adaptability gives the performer a sense of control of their movement, and the audience a sense of unpredictability that is often prized in Western acting. On a deeper level the full motion trains a high level of commitment to action much in the same way that Grotowski used rolling and falling exercises in the Theatre of Productions period to train the actors’ commitment.¹⁰

**Exercise 3:**

- **GPP Level**: Standing with feet shoulder width apart rotate the torso to one side allowing the opposite side hip to rotate inward as the heel comes off the ground and the knee rotates inward. The arms open as if playing the accordion. As the body shifts back to the middle drop both arms to the front and perform a sharp compressed exhale. Repeat on the other side.

¹⁰ For a more complete discussion of Grotowski’s use of similar exercises see the “Actor’s Training” chapters of *Towards a Poor Theatre*. 
• SPP Level: From a flatfoot squat alternate one knee and then the other dropping to the ground.
• ASP Level: Add the accordion movement from GPP to the squat switch from SPP.
• MEP Level: Return to standing in the middle between dropping into the extended low squat on each side.

Purpose: This exercise develops comfort with level change and quick and body driven exhalation and inhalation. Allowing the body to be breathed by movement rather than consciously breathing encourages a fluency of body and voice. The movement capacity to change levels with ease gives the actor and the audience a sense of the actor’s comfort in his or her body. Also, helping actors make the conscious connection between breath and movement enables them to more efficiently manage their breathing for speaking while in motion.

Exercise 4:
• GPP Level: From a ball of the foot squat rock forward onto the hands coming to a position of even weight distribution between the hands and feet (quad squat). Return to ball of foot squat and repeat.
• SPP Level: From the quad squat position press the arms and legs up and down in a compressed push up.
• ASP Level: From the quad squat use the pressing action to propel yourself slightly into the air and then land in the quad squat position.
• MEP Level: Alternating between a quad squat and flat foot squat.

Purpose: This exercise is designed to work on the feeling of elastic energy within the body. This gives actors a higher level of apparent energy in performance since they learn to engage their full
body in creating force. Further, it develops the actor’s ability to move in unconventional relationships to the ground. While this is not a universal necessity, helping actors develop comfort moving in unusual ways has carry over to many approaches to character work.

Exercise 5:

- **GPP Level**: Beginning on hands and knees use one arm to reach under the opposite arm touching the palm and shoulder of the reaching arm to the ground. Repeat on opposite side.
- **SPP Level**: From a seated position with feet on the ground rock back onto the spine and up onto the shoulders then return to the original seated position.
- **ASP Level**: From the original position extend the reaching arm through as in the original exercise but continue the motion until it leads you into a shoulder roll.
- **MEP Level**: Move the roll from the previous exercise into a crouch and then a standing position.

Purpose: This exercise develops rotational force and energy within the body. By doing so it trains a kind of movement often neglected in more traditional exercises. It also develops the actor’s comfort with rolling and falling, which can be useful skills for stage combat and general stage movement. Finally the commitment involved in practicing the final exercise especially on a hard surface mirrors the level of commitment actors need in performance. This again mirrors some of Grotowski’s use of rolling and falling exercises.

This warm-up and conditioning work formed the foundation upon which the rest of the class was built. It developed the students’ ability to manage stress. Further, it introduced them to
the idea of incremental progression when learning complex skills. The next section discusses one of the three main skills I sought to develop with the students.

**The Three Core Skills of the Course**

The primary work of the course centered on three key skills: partner connection, playing of actions, and character rhythm. I chose these three ideas as foundational for all acting. I also designed them to develop progressively. First, students worked to develop a psychophysical connection with a partner. Second, they explored directly affecting their partner through action. Third, they filtered these previous skills through specific character choices.

**Partner Connection**

With the term partner connection, I am referring to the responsiveness that is necessary between actors on stage. Many novice actors focus on themselves, their lines, and their movements. One fundamental concept of Stanislavskian acting is the emphasis on the partner. In my experience with novice actors they often struggle when asked to engage their bodies and their voices simultaneously. This struggle leads them to self-consciousness and a loss of connection to their partners. Therefore, in constructing the progression from static to fluid to dynamic drills for this element, I initially separated the two elements. Additionally, the element of partner connection is expected within the Stanislavsky tradition to be accessed largely improvisationally. The actor is expected to adapt moment-to-moment to the behaviors of the other actor. In order to accomplish these two goals of separating voice and body while simultaneously allowing students to respond spontaneously, I drew on two different techniques the basic repetition drills of the Meisner Method and basic elements of contact improvisation.
Sanford Meisner’s Method developed out of the work of the Group Theatre in the 1930s and its foundations in Richard Boleslavsky and Maria Ouspenskaya’s interpretations of Stanislavsky first introduced to the United States in the 1920s. In his rendering of Stanislavsky’s approach, Meisner chose to emphasize the spontaneous emotional relationship between performers. As noted in the introduction, I first trained in the Meisner method for two years beginning in 1989, and have revisited the system through workshops at various points in the subsequent years.

The fundamental exercises of the Meisner Method are built around simple repetition. In its most basic version two actors sit facing each other. One starts by making a simple and benign observation about something they see in their partner’s appearance. For example if his/her partner is wearing a blue shirt, the partner who is beginning the repetition might simply say, “blue shirt.” The other partner will then repeat this phrase, and the two partners will continue to repeat “blue shirt” back and forth until asked to stop. The goals in this repetition are simply to listen to your partner, and repeat what you hear. Therefore there is an effort to tune into and repeat the vocal tone and affect of the partner who is speaking. Further, actors are asked to simply allow whatever feelings come up to influence the exploration, but not stop the repetition. They are encouraged not to try to make anything happen, but to simply let what they are feeling come out. The process of repeating a relatively meaningless phrase for several minutes usually carries partners through a range of emotions including, boredom, humor, frustration, anger, and even on occasion sadness. This experience of simply listening closely to a partner, while allowing the actor’s own feelings to arise, is foundational to what I am calling partner connection. Putting attention on the other person, and allowing one’s self to affect and be affected by another, is the basis of all partner interaction.
Meisner’s repetition work progresses in a variety of ways, and ultimately works towards his specific goals. He wants to create actors who respond spontaneously, honestly, and emotionally to the given circumstances of the play and the actions of the scene partner. Given the time frame of my class, and the variety of other objectives, I took students only a few more steps into the repetition. The next step involves adding a self-centered viewpoint to the observation. With this step, instead of “blue shirt” the partner would say, “you are wearing a blue shirt” and the other partner would respond, “I am wearing a blue shirt.” The next step is to move away from basic appearance observations, and to begin to make observations about the partner’s physical demeanor. Now comments often include remarks such as, “your arms are crossed” or “you are tapping your foot.” This stage introduces a complication that makes the exchanges more dynamic. People can and often do change their physical behavior. As such, at this stage in the repetition work statements about the partner will shift as things change. The final step that I took in the class’s progression through the Meisner Method was to begin to use assessments of physicality as a way to intuit emotional state. For example, upon seeing a partner sitting with arms crossed the other partner might begin the repetition with a statement like, “you are protecting yourself.” Of course, sitting with arms crossed is open to a range of interpretations, but the purpose of the exercise is to shift the nature of observations to the partners feelings, and begin to develop the skill of quickly reading other people’s moods. In my personal experience of training in the Method this skill can become highly developed with practice. This work developed one side of partner connection. Further, the progression I designed based on Meisner follows the static to fluid to dynamic progression of the practice side of the 3DPP.

In addition to approaches borrowed from Meisner, I also drew on contact improvisation, a dance form whose development is generally credited to Steve Paxton. As a dance form, contact
improvisation involves moving through various points of body-to-body contact and weight sharing with a partner to create an improvisational dance. My training in contact improvisation has involved work with dancers and also acting teachers who use it as a method of movement training. For the purposes of this class I used some work that I have been developing in conjunction with my colleague Angenette Spalink that blends concepts from contact improvisation with some elements of Russian martial arts practice to create a partnered improvisation method that progresses from basic embodied listening to action verb based embodied action.

The work begins with partners sitting back-to-back and exchanging pressure through the spine. It then moves to standing. After students are comfortable listening to their partner’s movement through the spine, they turn to face each other. In this facing position the partners begin to work from close bodywork to increasingly distal parts of the body. In this work, they move through several depths. Starting with spine-to-spine, moving to shoulder/hip depth, then to elbow/knee depth, and finally to wrist/ankle depth. The further partners move away from each other the more difficult it becomes to maintain attention and contact. Once the students developed a reasonable level of facility with simply listening well enough to maintain contact each partner chose an action verb (which will be explained in more detail in the next section). Each partner then worked to use their points of contact to perform the chosen action on their partner. This was initially done with one active and one passive partner. The passive partner simply responded to the impulses from the active partner. Then, each partner worked to perform his or her action in exchange, then finally simultaneously. This work serves as a more physical counterpoint to the face and body language focused Meisner Method. The final iteration of the work on partner connection involved progressing through the Meisner repetition stages while
simultaneously progressing through the contact improvisation based work. Doing the two together brought body and voice, as well as, visual attention and kinesthetic attention together in a dynamic interaction.

Using the principles from the practice side of the 3DPP helped me to design the progression of this work in partner connection. By making each step more incrementally challenging than the one before, students had to manage increasing levels of stress while developing consistently more sophisticated skills in partner connection.

Playing of Actions

The concept of action permeates most contemporary versions of Stanislavskian actor training. As Rosemary Malague notes in *An Actress Prepares*, Strasberg’s “Method” de-emphasized and rarely mentioned the idea of action focusing instead on the inner emotional and sensory life of the actor. Part of the shake-up in American training that resulted from Stella Adler’s meetings with Stanislavsky in the 1930s was a shift towards the importance of action. For Adler and later Meisner, as well as many other contemporary teachers of American acting, character actions interpreted through the lens of the given circumstances of the script forms the central focus of actor training.

Acting Principles follows in this tradition. I believe in teaching action as fully embodied. I begin with simple and easily physicalized actions that one actor can do to another. As in most systems, I use verbs to represent the character’s actions. The first exercise I use are very simple action games where actors attempt to literally push or pull another actor who either resists or counters the first actor’s action. Allied to this is the idea of stakes. I use a simple game called Cookie/Apple, which involves actors trying to get an imaginary cookie from a partner who
instead tries to give them an apple. The game is set up so that the apple giver always wins. The level of effort progresses through a ten-point scale moving eventually to what I refer to as “cookie or death.” In addition to giving the actor a visceral yet fun experience of stakes the game also gives the class a useful verbal reminder to play high stakes with the phrase: “The scene needs more cookie or death.”

After the development of these initial ideas I move the class into what I call action scores. These are short exchanges of literal physical actions between characters. Since the actions need to be literal, we confine ourselves to words like push, pull, kick, and slap. At this point the scenes resemble stage combat on a certain level. I believe this exercise reflects the conflict driven nature of contemporary realist plays, as well as, the conceptual base of the Stanislavsky system. For safety these exercises are done in slow motion as needed. These exercises also require a high level of partner connection so students continue to refine the skills from the previous section.

Once this exercise is flowing well simple text is added to it in the form of a blank scene.11 After the actors are able to perform the scene this way the physical actions are transformed into psychological actions. The actors must consider how someone pushes, pulls, kicks, or slaps another with focus and words rather than hands and feet. This exercise lines up in the larger flow of the semester with the time when students are scoring their first scenes in preparation for performing them for the first time. The final step in the playing of action process was using the

11 Blank or Open scenes are short exchanges of dialogue (usually between two characters) that hint at a relationship and action, but provide the actor with little in terms of given circumstances. This allows them to be used as text with a variety of action choices.
lessons learned in the process to develop and refine the actions for the first scenes. From here the students develop a deeper understanding of how to embody action in performance.

**Character Rhythm**

Once the students had a foundation in partner connection and playing action I shifted the focus of the class towards characterization. Characterization is a contested term with many different potential meanings within actor training. Some acting systems such as the Chekhov Technique sometimes speak of taking on a character in words that make it sound like a form of spiritual possession. Others such as Suzuki see characterization as something that exists in the mind of the audience influenced by the actor’s physical and vocal choices, but not something outside the actor that he or she tries to take on. In my personal work, I fall closer to the Suzuki end of the spectrum, but for the purposes of this class I chose a more middle ground position where the actor uses textual clues to make decisions about the way a character speaks and moves that are in line with realistic quotidian behavior, but does not assume the character to be any more than an idea on the page created by a playwright and embodied by the performer. Given the short time frame of the class I chose to teach the students the eight efforts of Laban movement analysis. To simplify things further I tried something new (to me at least), which was applying the efforts to the voice as well.

Rudolph Von Laban was a twentieth century German dancer and physical culturist who among other things developed a system of movement analysis. His system considers the movers effort across four continua of weight (strong/light), space (direct/indirect), time (sudden/sustained), and flow (bound/free). The way I have encountered these elements in actor
training has been less in the original purpose of analysis and more as a tool of creation. This is the way I taught them to the students.

We first studied each of the continua independently. Once the students were beginning to understand the continua I asked them to begin combining them. Laban calls each of these combinations “effort actions,” and gives each combination a name.\(^\text{12}\) I mentioned these names to the students, but I did not emphasize them, as I was more interested in them developing a free flowing understanding of the relationships between the continua. After the actors felt comfortable shifting between the various efforts I asked them to choose a particular combination and move through the space thinking about what type of person might move in this way. I made it clear to them that there was not one correct character for each combination; rather they should let their imagination guide them to making a specific choice and seeing how that choice developed individually and then in interaction with the other characters in the room.

At this point we began using sounds and small words to explore how the effort continua could apply to the voice. From here we followed the same procedure as above, but adding in the

\(^\text{12}\) Laban’s Effort Actions are:

- **Punch**: Strong, Direct, Sudden, Bound
- **Press**: Strong, Direct, Sustained, Bound
- **Slash**: Strong, Indirect, Sudden, Bound
- **Wring**: Strong, Indirect, Sustained, Bound
- **Dab**: Light, Direct, Sudden, Free
- **Glide**: Light, Direct, Sustained, Free
- **Flick**: Light, Indirect, Sudden, Free
- **Float**: Light, Indirect, Sustained, Free
voice. Initially the actors made sounds and then gradually adding words alone and in interaction with other characters. Once the students were comfortable with these we applied them to both the characters from scenes they had worked on earlier in the semester and the scenes they were developing for their final project.

Again in this work I hope the progression through the practice side of the pyramid is apparent to the reader. Taking small incremental steps gave the students the time to process and incorporate the new information, while also managing the stress of the increasingly sophisticated material. These three elements of the acting process gave students a base for developing what I see as the core elements of acting, an active relationship with a scene partner filtered through the lens of the given circumstances of the play. Each of these elements were taught incrementally, so that students felt a gradual mastery of the process. There is one final side of the 3DPP that must be addressed: the application of performance pressure.

**Adding Pressure**

The final portion of the process was the application of stress to the newly learned skill when applied to scene work. I primed the students with stress management strategies in the warm-up, and then asked them to apply the strategies to the practical work of the actor. This work could be seen as choke proofing the actors.

In her book *Choke: What the Secrets of the Brain Reveal About Getting It Right When You Have To*, sports psychologist Sian Bielock delineates two forms of choking: explicit or working memory chokes and implicit or procedural memory chokes. She defines each as follows, “In the former case [explicit memory] you have activities such as adding numbers, reasoning through a difficult issue with a client, or recalling what was said in a heated argument
you had last week with a coworker. In the latter case [procedural memory], it’s taking a golf
swing, landing a double axel on skates, or operating a cell phone” (20).

Explicit memory chokes are predicated on each person’s finite amount of working
memory. This part of memory searches for information learned, but not practiced to the point of
unconscious action. Actors who have “memorized” their lines, but not perfected the lines lose
them quickly when first “off-book.” The actors practiced the lines focusing on the words, and
now must perform while also thinking about the other elements of acting. Further once things
start deteriorating the actor focuses on managing the downward spiral of fear. In these cases,
actors are doing too many things at once, and need to be allowed to slow down and consciously
process through what they need to accomplish. We often tell actors to get out of their heads, but
in a working memory choke they need the opposite: to engage more fully with what is happening
in their minds.

Procedural or implicit memory chokes on the other hand occur when conscious thought
interferes with normally unconscious activities. For an actor this kind of choke might happen
when something breaks the pattern of the performance. A cue goes wrong, a line gets dropped, or
a prop is in the wrong place. Anything that breaks the pattern of practiced actions the actor has
perfected through the rehearsal process can interrupt those automatic processes with conscious
thought. Acting teachers describe this experience as the actor being in his or her head. In a
procedural memory choke conscious thought interferes with rehearsed actions.

To stop a choke, regardless of type, the actor must first recover physiologically in order
to regain conscious control of thought and action. Sonnon teaches a specific method for
managing this process, which I have found valuable for myself, for athletes, and for performers.
He identifies three central areas of dysfunction in moments of stress: the breath is held, the torso
locks up, and the movement of the limbs becomes disconnected from the torso. Sonnon’s research suggests that the best way to recover the breath in these circumstances is to focus on exhalation. Thinking about inhalation tends to lead to over breathing. Exhalation focused breathing allows the body to pull in only the amount of oxygen needed. Also, the abdominal contractions of exhalation start the process of unlocking the torso.

When I say the torso locks I mean that two particular areas of the torso that in normal function should move independently become fused through muscular tension. Sonnon calls these two areas: the solar plexus and the lunar plexus. Solar plexus refers to the area directly at the base of the sternum. The lunar plexus refers to an area about two inches below the belly button and relates to pelvic movement. These two areas usually move separately, but under stress they lock up. As breath recovery begins the actor creates an oscillation between the rib cage and the pelvis to break up the tension fusing the lunar and solar plexuses. As this tension breaks up mobilizing the limbs finishes the recovery process. Limb mobility can be accomplished by lightly shaking. The vibration caused by the shaking releases the muscle tension. While I described these actions as sequential, once mastered they can be performed quickly and simultaneously. Recovering allows the actor the wherewithal to consciously shift his or her mental state.

Once the mind/body returns to conscious control thought needs to shift to the appropriate form of awareness for the situation. In this process, the teacher helps the actor manage what sports psychologist Grigori Raiport in his classic book *Red Gold: Peak Performance Techniques of the Russian and East German Olympic Victors*, calls “attention switching.” Multiple models for thinking about awareness exist. The model I learned from Sonnon is one of the clearest and easiest to convey to students. It is also easy to train. The y-axis represents a continuum from
external awareness at the top to internal awareness at the bottom, and the x-axis represents a continuum from broad focus to narrow focus (see Figure 4 below). In the internal and narrow quadrant, called strategizing, a person focuses on developing a plan of action. The internal and broad quadrant, called meditating, entails reflection on experiences. The external and narrow quadrant or intending involves focusing on one specific thing or action outside the self. Finally, the broad and external quadrant, called attending, results from opening up to all incoming external information. Each of these four states serves a purpose and has value the challenge is applying the appropriate state at the appropriate time. To address this issue, I will turn to the realm of military strategy.

Strategist and fighter pilot John Boyd describes the decision making process in high stress and shifting situations as a loop of Observing, Orienting, Deciding, and Acting. In brief, when a person encounters a new situation he or she must first gather information (observe), then bring his or her thought process into line with that information (orient), then make a plan of action (decide), and finally do something (act). Called the OODA loop, this process maps relatively easily onto the awareness diamond discussed above: attending is observing; meditating...
is orienting; strategizing is deciding; intending is acting. Mapping these two ideas onto each other allows me to explore how shifting awareness helps recover an actor from chokes.

It is possible to think of the two different types of chokes I previously explicated in relation to the OODA loop and awareness diamond. The working memory choke is an experience of being stuck in orienting or meditating. There are too many inputs in play for the actor to be able to get to “deciding.” The procedural memory choke on the other hand means a performer is stuck in deciding or strategizing in a situation in which he or she should just act. The two chokes therefore have two different solutions. After the physiological recovery process, an appropriate attention switch will get the actor back on track. I use mantras to cue the right switch. It is important to note that I use the word mantra in the way it was taught to me, not with any religious context attached, but simply as a short phrase to focus on to bring yourself into the necessary state.

A mantra needs to be three things. I call these the “three p’s”: personal, positive, and procedural. Personal means that mantras must be individual to the actor’s needs. The mantra should be phrased in the positive, not in the sense of uplifting, but in the sense of something to do. The mind is incapable of actively not doing something. The classic example: don’t think of a pink elephant. Of course, you just did. Following this, the mantra needs to be something to do rather than something to not do. Lastly, the mantra needs to be procedural meaning that it should be clear and simple. If I tell an actor to relax he or she will often tense up because relax is a vague and difficult goal. If on the other hand I ask an actor to exhale and drop his or her shoulders that is doable and clear, and will usually lead to relaxation.

For example, when I am falling into a working memory choke I tend to speak and think way too quickly, so my mantra for those moments is “talk slowly.” This is personal to my needs,
it is something I can do, and it is simple and specific. When I am heading into a procedural memory choke I tend to slow down, minimize movement, and start thinking through all the possibilities of what I could do. Therefore my mantra in those situations is “listen.” It is personal and positive. It may not at first blush seem procedural as it is rather vague, but for me it is a condensation of bringing my head up, looking around, and turning my attention to the other actors. That is just a lot to remember and think when someone is in the middle of choking. With another actor I might give a simpler cue like head up or look at your partner, but “listen” works for me. While students develop mantras the teacher can guide them to manage choke moments.

In a working memory choke the actor struggles to process too much information at once. He or she needs time to orient in order to decide. When teaching, I help the actor recognize the problem by slowing him or her down, which can be a challenge because under the influence of fear he or she will want to speed up. I have the actor do the physiological recovery, and then address the most difficult element (usually lines) separated out from the other components of acting the scene. We pull it out, and focus on it, and then plug at least some chunk that they have effectively memorized back into the full context of the scene in order to feel a fuller engagement with the acting process. The student has a modicum of success, and also the realization of how much more can be done with better preparation.

If a student has a procedural memory choke, the work becomes getting him or her to focus on something other than the problem. After physiologically recovering, the actor must shift from strategizing to attending. Sometimes asking the student to attend to his or her partner works. Other times I give the actor an outside activity to do while rehearsing the scene. My intention is to shift the actor’s awareness away from the choke. Once a procedural memory choke has been cleared it will usually not recur, unless it has gone unnoticed long enough to
become epidemic or if the stakes were particularly high and the experience of choking was shaming.

In the Acting Principles course I taught, students practiced stress management in scene work. I used three different tools to add stress to scene rehearsal. First, I used physical exercise to elevate the actor’s heart rate. My students performed ninety seconds of conditioning and then immediately went into scenes. This forced them to recover while in the midst of performance. Another tool I used is disorientation. The simplest method I have found for this is spinning. Just as in the childhood game of making one’s self dizzy. The students spun at a moderate pace again for ninety seconds before jumping into a scene. Both of these techniques rely on recovery at the end of the stress experience. The final way I introduced stress into the training process was through distracting or irritating music played loudly during rehearsal. My students were particularly “fond” of Meredith Monk. In this process the actors must continually address an ongoing stressor. These various stressors were applied individually in different classes. At other times students chose the method that worked best for them.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I outlined the structure of THFM 2410: Acting Principles as designed by the department. I explained the specifics of how I taught the class during the semester examined in this chapter. These decisions were made in line with contemporary Stanislavsky based acting methods, and the 3DPP designed by Sonnon. I reviewed in detail the warm up and conditioning portion of the class. I explained the concepts behind and the methods of application for each of the three acting skills I built the course around: Partner Connection, Playing of Actions, and Character Rhythm. Finally, I described the particular process I used to add stress to the rehearsal
process. In each of these sections I further detailed the connections between my methods and Sonnon’s work, as well as, other research into performance under stress. In the next chapter, I will discuss the results of the testing process outlined in Chapter I, and point to the ways the results suggest successes and areas for improvement with my approach.
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS

Introduction

In order to make a case for the validity of my training plan and argument I performed a series of tests on the students throughout the semester. In addition, I had group conversations with them about how they were experiencing the training at the mid point and end of the semester. The testing, as outlined in previous chapters, took two forms. The first form of testing was of the students’ thoughts on acting, which aligned with the principles and learning goals of the course. These questions tracked the change in the students’ understanding of the lessons of the class. What I hoped to see from the tests was a deepening of the students’ understandings of the process of acting, and also increasing application of the language of the class to their answers.

The second form of testing was a series of three personality metrics designed to track the change in what Carlstedt calls primary higher order factors: absorption, neuroticism, and repressive coping. In accord with the BGSU Human Subject Research Board all the students were made aware of the testing that was being done and why. Further they had the opportunity at the beginning of the semester to agree to have their responses included anonymously in my study or not. Their decision to participate or not was kept secret from me until after final grades had been posted to prevent the potential for any unconscious bias in grading based on a student’s willingness to participate. As it turned out all thirteen students agreed to participate. However, not all of the students completed all of the tests. Two students did not turn in their final tests, and a few others either failed to complete certain of the tests or completed them incorrectly.
“Complete” in this case means they submitted a response from the beginning of the semester, one from the middle of the semester, and one from the end of the semester.

When I proposed this study, I had hoped to dedicate the bulk of this chapter to the review of the later form of testing looking at how these tests documented a change in the students constellations of primary higher order factors over the course of the semester thus providing some quantitative support for my claim of efficacy for the approach used here. As I explain in the section to follow, the data proved inconclusive for a variety of reasons. I will discuss the results of the analysis, and I will outline the causes of the inconclusive results with the tests, followed by briefly arguing why despite the problems of this testing model I believe applying this type of model to the acting classroom is valuable. Then I dig deeply into the comments in various forms I received from students during and after the process, as well as, considering my observations of the process to put forth some more qualitative evidence. Building on these observations, I will then raise what for me are larger methodological questions about successful actor training, and continuing research of this type. I consider the larger question of the role of physical conditioning in the context of both diverse classrooms, and within the time constraints of semester length course. I have become particularly intrigued by improvisation as a tool for exploring pressure continuously throughout the semester. I examine how this could function, and why it might function that way. Lastly, I give some consideration to the nature of collaboration between the humanities and the hard sciences. I believe this kind of interdisciplinarity will be essential for my future work, and I briefly consider the nature of that dynamic as a conversation and exchange.
Data Analysis

Introduction

Before I describe the analyses of each of the individual tests, some general comments are
in order. The results of the tests were compared in a few different ways. Comparisons were made
between the three times the students took the tests. Also, the students were divided into two
groups and those groups were compared to each other both on individual tests and across the
semester. The first group was composed of four students I identified as highly skilled and
experienced. These students came into the class with significant abilities and experience as
actors. These students were coded HSE in the data analysis. The second group comprised two
sub-groups. The first sub-group, which I referred to as experienced but not skilled (ENS in the
data), denoted students who had previously acted, but who did not have actor training or possibly
had poor actor training. The second sub-group contained students who were new to acting, and
therefore neither experienced nor skilled (NE in the data).

As a whole the analysis did not yield any results that were statistically significant.
Additionally, the sample size was too small to make even the occasional nearly significant result
robust. Below, I describe the analysis of each of the individual tests in more detail. In addition to
describing the results below a chart of the means, adjusted marginal means and 95% Confidence
Intervals (CI) for each test has been provided in Appendix F.

The Tellegen Absorption Scale

The Tellegen Absorption Scale measures a person’s tendency to become engaged in
thoughts, activities, or experiences to the exclusion of other stimuli. While this might seem like a
good trait for an actor, Carlstedt argues that high absorption has a negative impact on the ability
to manage high-pressure situations. I would concur with him from the perspective of acting. An actor who loses awareness of what is happening around him or her is no longer present, and can be a danger to everyone on stage.

Tellegen’s scale measures six factors: Responsiveness to Engaging Stimuli, Synesthesia, Enhanced Cognition, Oblivious/Dissociative Involvement, Vivid Reminiscence, and Enhanced Awareness. However, this collection of traits has been critiqued by a number of researchers. The strongest critique in my opinion comes from Angiulo and Kihlstrom. They argue that many of Tellegen’s factors are vague at best for use in contemporary psychological research. They posit an alternative list of factors using the same test. Convinced by their argument, I have chosen to use their factors for my analysis. Those factors are: Sensory/Perceptual Absorption, Intuition, Imaginative Involvement, Trance, and Nature and Language.

To examine the hypothesis that there were differences for the five factors for students grouped according to previous theatrical experience separate Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were completed for each of the five factors between the two groups and across the course of the semester.

The results for all five factors both between groups and across the semester were non-significant, meaning they do not represent any notable difference between students or across time. This resulted in part from the small sample size and also from the drop off in tests turned in by students at the end of the semester. The significance scores all stayed below p = .05 except for factor four Trance which scored p = .823, while this approaches significance it is not close.

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13 For a detailed description of Tellegen’s Scale see Tellegen and Atkinson 1974

14 See Angiulo and Kihlstrom 1991
enough to be meaningful and given the small sample size and fewer available tests at the end of the semester remains non-significant.

**The Eysenck Neuroticism/Extroversion Profile**

Carlstedt argues that to perform well in high-pressure situations athletes and by extension for my study, actors should score low on neuroticism and higher on the extroversion profile. To examine my hypothesis that there were differences for the Neuroticism and Extroversion subscales of the Eysenck Neuroticism/Extroversion Profile\(^\text{15}\) for students grouped according to previous theatrical experience separate Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were completed for EYEN (Neuroticism) and EYEE (Extroversion) for each of the three test times.

I expected that there would be differences in both EYEN and EYEE factors between the groups of students. The multivariate test result for EYEN was, \(F(2) = 3.15, p = .089, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .384\). The multivariate test result for EYEE was, \(F(2) = 1.78, p = .218, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .263\). The interaction between EYEN/EYEE and groupv2 was not significant which showed that the profile of the two groups in reporting their scores was essentially the same across all three administrations of the survey. This indicates that I did not discriminate between the groups and therefore that the tests are an accurate reporting of their development. The effect size reported a large effect, which indicated a good test statistically.

There were no differences in the development of EYEN or EYEE across the semester. Interestingly there was a decrease in both EYEN and EYEE due to the scores for the end-of-semester being far lower than the other two administrations. The only reported significant result was a within-subjects tests effect for EYEN \(F(2) = 3.772, p = .039, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .255\). This result

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\(^{15}\) For details on the Eysenck profile see Eysenck, 1998 and Francis. Lewis, and Ziebertz, 2006.
indicated that there were differences in the time administration of EYEN regardless of group and that examining the estimated marginal means in Table 1 this was on the basis of the low score reporting from students for the third test administration. All other tests were non-significant.

The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale

The final test administered was the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale.\textsuperscript{16} Carlstedt recommends this test for measuring repressive coping. The test measures the ability to suppress personal feelings in the face of negative experience. In other words, when everything is going wrong and the actor just wants to quit, repressive coping is what enables her or him to not only keep going, but also to not become lost in a morass of negative thoughts. Therefore my hypothesis was that over the course of the semester scores on the Marlowe-Crowne would increase.

As with the previous tests a Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was administered comparing the two groups across the course of the semester. Due to more extensive non-reporting from students in the third testing cycle on this test there was no viable data from that cycle. Therefore I made the decision to focus on the relationship between the first two cycles. The multivariate test result was, $F(2) = .51, p = .49$, partial $\eta^2 = .044$. Between test one and test two the marginal mean shifted in the inexperienced group from 15.571 to 19.143, which is suggestive of a change in students, but with the significant non-reporting by some and the small sample size the results remain non-significant.

\textsuperscript{16} For details on the Marlowe-Crowne Scale see Crowne and Marlowe 1960.
General Reflections

Looking at the students’ tests made it clear that in terms of the larger perspectives on the world tested by the personality inventories there were no clear changes. The tests Carlstedt advocates assess general personality traits that are related to performance under pressure. I did not consider that the intense level of training that professional or student athletes undergo means that their training is much more likely to have a profound impact on the athlete and his or her view of the world. An athlete, even a student one, spends hours training most days, and his or her identity often connects deeply to this training. It can reasonably be expected that intense training to which a student seriously commits could transform the way that student sees the world.

Training in an acting class in a liberal arts setting that meets twice a week for slightly less than two hours at a time is unlikely to have as significant an effect on most students. This is even truer when considering the variety of motivations most liberal arts students bring to the acting class. The drop off in answers to the tests over time suggests that students found the testing cumbersome or at least inconvenient.

Despite the inconclusive nature of the quantitative part of my study, the experience was valuable for me as a researcher of acting pedagogy. I believe that I was attempting to do something unusual in the field. Directly applying scientific research and study methods in the acting classroom is rare at best. In recent years, there have been a number of theatre scholars who have explored the relationship between scientific research, especially, cognitive science and acting. I consider many of these people my colleagues, despite being their academic junior. More precisely, along with a number of theatre, dance, and performance scholars who explore various aspects of our discipline from a scientific perspective, I am a member of the Cognitive Science in Theatre, Dance, and Performance Working Group of the American Society of Theatre Research.
Conference. This group meets annually at the organization's conference, but also interacts regularly, both online and as schedules allow, face-to-face. A number of published works by these scholars have considered the relationship between science and acting. The primary studies are: Rhonda Blair’s *The Actor, Image, and Action: Acting and Cognitive Neuroscience*; Rick Kemp’s *Embodied Acting: What Neuroscience Tells Us About Performance*; John Lutterbie’s *Toward a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance*; and Evelyn Tribble’s *Cognition in the Globe: Attention and Memory in Shakespeare’s Globe*. Of these, only Blair and Kemp make practical recommendations for working with actors. Neither of them, however, have written about attempts to formally study their applications of their research with students. Additionally, neither draws on the sports psychology based work I am using. Therefore, there is at this point no clear model to emulate. As such, I see the work I did as an attempt to step out on a limb. Though the limb did not quite hold my weight, it is only from experiences like this will I learn. I now know, for example, that I need to make contact with people who already do this kind of research, and bring them into the process. I need to make connections across disciplines, and see if I can form mutually beneficial relationships with psychologists. I believe actors and actor training can be of benefit to psychologists and to psychological research. I also believe that actor training can benefit from interaction with psychology. Many of the great acting theorists of the past have drawn from the psychological research of their times. It is time to update this work in the theatre. I will write more about intersections of theatre and the sciences, and my future participation and goals with that work below. For the time being, however, I turn to what conclusions I can pull from students’ narrative statements about the class experience.
Analysis of student commentary

Student commentary came in a few different forms: they regularly made comments during class, they answered narrative questions on the tests, and they provided feedback during discussions about their experience of the process at the middle of the semester and at the end. Beyond this, students filled out course evaluations that included comments on their experiences of the class. I will pull from all of these sources to draw some conclusions about the process.

Students answered questions both about their experience of the unique aspects of the training process, and about their understanding of the lessons of the class in terms of acting technique. For the purposes of this study I will focus on the comments that relate to the 3DPP work rather than the more general goals of the class. I will not simply cherry pick positive comments. I am interested in understanding the positives and the negatives of the process. That is the only way I can hope to improve it. Therefore the section below is divided into three parts: successes, failures, and ambiguities.

Successes

The greatest sign of success was that students frequently reported that they felt better about their scenes after going through the stress testing. Several of them consistently reported feeling more connected to the scene and their scene partner after running the scenes this way. One student, for example, stated in the midterm discussion that the rehearsal of the scenes under pressure made him feel a much stronger ownership of the scene than he had before, and that feeling had carried over into his final performance. This is especially notable because this student was generally resistant to the process. A number of them noted that the process of struggling through the scenes deepened their attention and awareness. Even more importantly
they felt like these gains carried over into their later rehearsals and performances of the scenes. Not all of them felt this all of the time. From conversation and self-report about two-thirds of them felt that way. The last third did not feel like the stress testing improved their performances.

I do not want to undercut the perspectives of this one-third. It does seem though that the students who felt that way were the ones who were least prepared for the scene work on the days we did these stress runs. Some of that was simple lack of preparation in terms of lines. Some of it was the result of many of them being less sure of the process of script analysis and who did not yet own their characterizations and action choices for the scenes. Perhaps there is room here to develop an intermediary process for students who are not yet ready for the full process of stress testing.

In addition to expressing personal experience of improvement some students commented on the improvement they observed in the other students’ scenes following this training. These comments were voluntary rather than in response to a specific question so I do not have an idea of the percentage of students who felt this way. Further, I am not providing direct quotes because these statements were made in the midst of class work either to me or within my hearing, but not during a time when I was formally collecting data or could stop and take notes. As I discuss in Chapter IV, I observed improvement in the process, and it is suggestive that some of the students felt that as well. This is especially valuable since it is possible that some students felt the need despite my statements to the contrary to tell me what they felt I wanted to hear.

Some other students’ statements that suggest they were getting valuable experience from the process include changes in the language they used to describe the acting process, and the development of performance confidence among students. One student changed from describing his state before a performance as, “a lot of shaking and nervousness” at the beginning of the
semester to saying at the end of the semester, “A little nervous, but more confident about how the performance will go.”

One of the questions on the Pressures of Performance Reflection questionnaire was “What could you do in the future to increase the likelihood of success while diminishing the likelihood of failure?” This question came after questions asking students to reflect on their successes and failures as performers. Looking at the answers of one student who had significant previous acting experience charts what I suggest is positive progress relative to the methods of the class. The first time the student answered the question he/she said, “Always remain focused, even while meditating on the character.” This statement is vague in the sense that I am not sure what meditating on the character means. Also, trying to focus is a vague goal that is difficult to achieve in practice without choosing a more specific focal point. The second time the student answered with, “focus [sic] on my characters [sic] objectives.” Objectives were a key lesson at the point in the semester when that response was written. I am encouraged by this response as it conveys an increased clarity from the previous statement. Focusing on objectives while performing has a degree of specificity lacking in the earlier response. The student’s final response to this question was, “I should spend more time warming up to get in the zone.” This statement reflects the language around flow and the zone used in the class. While at first glance it may seem vague given that I taught students specific methods for warming up for this state it is likely a specific statement. These statements show a clear change in perspective over the course of the semester. This change also lines up with the goals and methods of the class.

Two other students reported positive growth in their emotional experience of performing. One began from a place of fear; the other from a place of ignorance. Of course one would expect
any acting class to improve the students’ ability to perform. However, there are some specific elements in their responses that I believe offer some support for the class methods I employed.

One student who spoke repeatedly about being terrified of performance in class, and even said in response to some of the questions that performance is accompanied by nervousness, dread, and anxiety that does not lessen until the performance ends. This student even described the experience of working on scenes in class as, “I felt extremely embarrassed and awkward.” On the other hand, she felt a great sense of accomplishment in the final performance of the first group scene assignment. She wrote about it twice in response to the Pressures of Performance Reflection questionnaire. First, she wrote about the feeling of being able to “get into character” and that the experience was “rewarding.” In her second comment, she wrote about her interaction with her scene partner as, “I was able to work off her energy and it helped to heighten mine. It made it easier for me to get into character and to stay in character.” The student felt less successful in the final class performance saying, “I rushed through the scene so quickly that I was out of breath. I felt uncomfortable and out of place.” These responses indicate that there clearly was some growth in the student’s process as an actor. Given that the beginning part of the semester focused on partner connection the emphasis on that in the comments suggests that the student experience significant growth in that area through the training process.

Another student started the class with little experience of performance. The first questionnaire is filled with responses that indicate a general lack of knowledge, including “I don’t know” and “I haven’t performed much.” By the middle of the semester the student describes feeling successful as an actor. In response to a question about failure as a performer the student says, “I haven’t performed very much, but even if I think I’m doing good, the audience might not enjoy me as well as another actor. Since, I don’t know, I am nervous what they
thought, But I know I must move on.” The student describes the cause of his/her feeling of success in performance by saying, “I felt confident about myself and that I would do well and I did do well.” It is important to note that this was not a confident person in class or in social interaction. Something in the course of the semester gave the student a sense of confidence as a performer. This confidence even overcame common actor concerns about how the audience feels about the performance. My belief is that the context and methods of the class helped this student to have confidence in performance that was not present in daily life.

None of the above is definitive proof of the methods I employed. The students’ statements are suggestive though. They support the idea that many felt an increase in their performance ability as a direct result of the methods. Further specific students had a clear growth in their abilities, and positive feelings about their abilities.

**Failures**

There were also some clear points of failure in the process. Some students ended the semester as uncomfortable with performing as they were at the beginning. For example, one student began the semester describing her feeling while performing as panicked. She ended the semester with the same description. A few others like her did not want to perform at the beginning of the term, and it continued to be unpleasant for them despite the training. While this is clearly a failure in terms of the goals of the course, I also have to suspect that some students simply did not want to learn. Any learning process requires participation from the students, and if a student is unwilling to have his or her mind changed then it is unlikely that he or she will learn anything.
Another failing was a decrease in the quality of the responses to the written data gathered overtime. Some students either stopped answering the questions altogether or they began answering in only a few words rather than offering more detailed responses as they had at the beginning. One student at the start of the semester wrote a couple of sentences in answer to the question about how he/she felt before a performance. The student described a balance of nervousness and excitement and offered some remarks regarding personal process. By the end of the semester the same student just wrote, “excited.” This could have happened for a number of reasons. One student said in the course evaluation, “I don’t feel like my acting improved b/c class time was focused on his project.” I do not believe this is true. I did feel constrained by the process in ways I will explore in the next chapter, but I was dedicated to helping the students meet the learning goals of the course. I think though that this response reflects a failure in the training and testing methods. The approach seemed frustrating and overwhelming to a number of the students. Also, I think for some students it was difficult to tell what elements of the class were unique to my approach, and what elements were the standard rigors of a university level beginning acting class.

Allied to this though, the further we went into the semester the less students wanted to participate in the warm-up and conditioning parts of class. To some extent this is normal. Many students in Acting Principles in my experience and the experience of my fellow graduate students who teach the course have a hard time understanding the value of warm-up. They want to just get right to what they believe is the business of acting: performing. Also as the semester goes on they are often increasingly tired so the idea of performing a physically taxing warm-up seems insufferable to them. To some extent this is just how it goes with students who are less committed to the study of the acting process. As the comments from the student in the section
above about warm-up and the zone make clear at least some students seemed to understand the
value of the warm-up. On the other hand, I believe that these complaints also reflect a problem
with the process. The warm up and conditioning portion of the class did not leave many of the
students energized and ready to work. I now believe that this should be a key element of those
parts of the class. There are a number of reasons separate from specific student response why I
believe this was a problem, and I will explore them in the chapter that follows.

Ambiguities

Many of the students’ comments are ambiguous as to the success or failure of the
approach. For many, the struggles of the class, and the struggles of performing seem to center on
more basic concerns such as line memorization and blocking. For others there was the constant
struggle for self-confidence on stage. That is not to say that they did not get anything else from
the process, but it is difficult to know what. Perhaps, the fact that this is a beginning acting class,
and that some of the students had not previously performed or had no interest in performing in
the future, means that basic challenges like line memorization and blocking were the ones they
needed to confront.

I know that for many who teach acting it is important to emphasize that line
memorization and blocking are only the beginning of the process. I too believe this is true, and
an important lesson. This is especially true for students who are taking the class for the purpose
of understanding what actors do in order to better work with actors in the future. However, it is
perhaps unrealistic to expect students with no training and only marginal interest in the process
to get beyond that stage in a semester.
I noted above that students began to resist the warm-up and conditioning. There were also a number of points in the semester where students were resistant to some of the more challenging aspects of the acting work of the class. The physical contact work was difficult for some, and some of the more dynamic drilling aspects of the later class work were uncomfortable for them. In my experience students are often resistant to the difficulties of the acting process. Many students think of acting as easy, and when confronted with the challenges of actual acting work they become frustrated. However, in this case I did feel less freedom than I usually do to adapt to the needs of students. I will explore those questions in more detail in the next chapter.

All in all, I believe the testing results of this process were a mixed bag. Clearly I need to bring people more experienced with methods and processes of psychological testing into future iterations of the project. Also, I would like to find a way to either create smaller experimental time frames or to build greater flexibility into the process. I feel like coupling the experimental process with the classroom experience creates a difficult situation for both teacher and student. The next chapter explores this concern, and a number of other personal reflections on the process.

**Thoughts for Future Work**

**Introduction**

In response to the experience of this study I have considered a number of ways to continue to refine my teaching process. Some of these ideas address concerns I raised in the earlier part of the chapter. With other ideas I reflect on other considerations that have arisen upon further reflection. This includes a relatively extensive reflection on the role of improvisation in the actor training process. To that end, following my experience teaching the course, as I
reflected further on actor training, I began to consider in more detail the work of Stanislavsky and Michael Chekhov, and the importance they place on improvisatory work for the training of actors. I have come to believe that using structured improvisations as a base for the teaching of acting allows for even more regular and incremental applications of pressure to the training process. Additionally, I consider some of the cognitive skills that underpin improvisation, and how developing these skills could allow students to develop even more resilience under the pressures of performance. Finally, I give additional thought to the interaction between the humanities and sciences that is at the root of my work.

**The Work is Too Advanced**

I am left with the question of whether or not the degree of physical training and pressure testing I undertook in the course is necessary in a general education beginning acting class. To pose it as a question: Is there a need to train students in this context to that level? My current thinking is that it depends on the program. I do believe that this training is valuable in a program like the one at BGSU. The Acting Principles class is the only class on the basics of acting available to students. The topics classes available after this class assume the students have this grounding. Therefore giving the Acting Principles students as strong a grounding in this material as possible helps their later development.

On the other hand, I question the value of subjecting students who are just looking for a fun acting class to the level of intensity required by this work. That is not to say acting instruction should lack rigor or just be fun. Even with students who have no interest in pursuing performance as a career, exposing them to the often hidden rigors of the actor’s process gives them a clearer view of what actors do. Whether they use that knowledge in working with actors
in some other capacity (as designers, directors, animators, etc.) or they use the knowledge to have a deeper appreciation for the work they see on stage and screen, there is value in the work.

I think the key to addressing some of the frustrations experienced by my students lies in framing the material differently. The pressure management skills that underpin the training apply to stress across a range of situations. As such, there would be value for even the least interested student in learning to operate under pressure. This would require a different presentation of the information. Perhaps this perspective shift would be useful with students in all types of general education acting courses. Emphasizing the value of actor training for students who have no interest in acting could increase engagement with the material, and perhaps make a stronger argument for the value of acting training within a larger liberal arts education.

The training offered in Acting Principles could improve students’ ability to interpret other people’s behavior. The listening and partner awareness needed for acting can benefit any kind of interpersonal communication. Script analysis in addition to improving reading comprehension encourages lateral thinking as students work to understand the inner motivations of characters, and also to make interpretations of those character’s behavior. This work improves empathy, and focuses students on reading deeper into their daily interactions. Empathy can be deepened further when actors draw parallels between their lives and the lives of their characters. This perspective taking carries over to seeing other people’s perspectives in daily life.

This work requires a high level of buy-in from the student. For those students who are not pursuing acting careers this can seem unnecessary. Presenting the skills of the actor including the stress management skills taught in this class as skills for daily life could help reframe the experience for non-actors. This change could increase the level of engagement from these students.
Physical Expectations

Another concern I have with the process is the level of physical expectations I had for students in the classroom. The training was physically demanding, and the pressure checking throughout the process added further physical effort. I wonder about the effects this type of training might have on people with disabilities or even people who just are not in good physical shape.

The question of disabilities was raised during my prospectus process. My answer at the time was that I am trained in adapting exercises to the level of the participant. I have worked with personal training clients from a wide range of fitness levels and abilities and I am good at scaling the complexity of exercises to the ability of the clients or in this case students. While this is true, I have come to realize that this answer only considers one side of the issue.

I succeeded in simplifying exercises to the point that all students could perform them safely. What I did not consider was that this very quickly established a hierarchy among the students. I did my best to encourage the feeling that working at your personal edge was more important than doing a more difficult version of the exercise. Unfortunately, I cannot be sure that my encouragement worked. There very well might have been a sense of shame attached to the experience for some students.

Further, even if the students were not conscious of a hierarchy the less physically accomplished students may have been forced to confront emotional issues stemming from their body image and sense of self. Some of the students were out of shape and others had coordination challenges. It is possible that for these students the experience of being asked to move in uncomfortable or physically challenging ways might have in and of itself caused them
issues. It is also possible that the psychological states caused by this experience could have made the emotional openness and trust that are necessary to the acting process more difficult.

I have no direct proof that any of the students had these issues. But it stands to reason, and it also explains some of the resistance and defensiveness I experienced from a few students in the process. I believe that these concerns might have been further amplified if a student had a physical disability. This is not an experience with which I am personally familiar. In the introduction to her book *Disability Culture and Community Performance: Find a Strange and Twisted Shape*, dancer, scholar, and disability activist Petra Kuppers describes the experience of disabled dancers in detail. Given the inaccessibility of this perspective for normate performances and teachers I believe it is worth quoting her at length.

A lot of disabled dancers I know are glad for the opportunity to dance with other dancers to whom different forms of embodiment are not strange, but familiar in their individual strangeness. There is so much less explanation necessary. There is no ‘special status,’ barely disguised stares, or the enthusiastic ‘oh, let me dance with the chair’ attitude we often experience in workshops in which non-disabled dancers dominate. Others in the room are just happy to not be in the limelight with their differences: they might have been told that they can’t dance (in a normate focused class), that they aren’t beautiful, not right, or that they could hurt themselves. (2)

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17 Kuppers uses this word drawn from the work of Rosemarie Garland Thomson to trouble the idea of able vs. disabled or normal vs. abnormal. As a normate reader of her work it has the unsettling and disruptive affect she intends.
There is a deep challenge for teacher of acting to be aware of and sensitive to these concerns. I am torn about what to do with these conclusions. I believe that actors need to maximize their level of physical awareness and control. This is not to say that all actors need to be in top physical condition (whatever that is) or that people with atypical physicalities should be excluded from actor training or forced to conform to an arbitrary ideal. I agree with Charles Mee who in his “A Note on Casting” says in part:

There is not a single role in any one of my plays that must be played by a physically intact white person. And directors should go very far out of their way to avoid creating the bizarre, artificial world of all intact white people, a world that no longer exists where I live, in casting my plays. (Note)

Further, I know that creating a classroom environment that shames students, however unintentionally only limits the amount of learning that can occur. At present I do not know how to resolve this quandary. I suspect the key has something to do with creating physical experiences that are more experiential and less about the replication of specific physical forms. This could allow students to modify the work to suit physical skills. Some students would still need to be encouraged to push their edges, as this is not the natural choice for many people. However, if this pushing happened periodically throughout the semester rather than at every class students would be better able to gradually acclimate to it.

The Role of Improvisation

One of the biggest frustrations I had in teaching the class that was that it was not much fun. Usually, when I teach acting there is a sense of joy in the room. Even though we are working hard there is pleasure in the effort. I felt for a few semesters of teaching this class a
decrease in joy, and I felt this semester there was much more effort than pleasure. As I noted in
the first part of the chapter, student response seemed to reflect this as well. While I actively resist
the idea that an acting class should just be a good time, it decidedly should not be filled with
dread of certain parts of the process.

I think several issues led to the lack of joy. One was the pressure I felt to follow the plan
no matter what. Another was that I think it is hard for students to see the big picture of the
training plan even if it is explained to them. Also, I wonder if they felt a bit used; that is, though I
worked hard to counter the notion that my research trumped their education, I nonetheless
wonder is some felt as if I cared more about the results of the study than I did about them and
their development as actors. Further, I think one of the biggest transitions I have to make from
the training I received that led to this project to the training I share with students is that I learned
with other motivated students who were committed to intense hard work. That type of student is
only a small percentage of those who take Acting Principles; as such, the teaching methods I
employ need to be adjusted appropriately.

One tool that I want to explore in more detail as I move forward in this work is
improvisation. Much of my early training in acting was improvisation based. Stanislavsky relied
heavily on improvisation for training and later in his life for show creation. Meisner is heavily
improvisation influenced, as are the Viewpoints. Before arriving at BGSU, I generally taught
acting from an improvisation base. To be clear I am not speaking of “Whose Line Is It Anyway”
style comedic improvisation. Rather, I am referring to an approach in the acting studio that
focuses on putting actors in spontaneous interactive situations with clear goals.

I believe the script analysis basis of the Acting Principles structure led me away from
improvisation. I am not blaming the course design for this. I became overly rigid in my thinking,
Moving forward I need to shift focus towards training the actors’ onstage instincts rather than overemphasizing the text at the outset. This is not to suggest that textual analysis is unimportant; rather, I hold that it becomes easier to draw on a text when an actor already has a clear idea of how to operate on stage. I have come to believe that improvisation trains a certain type of thought process that can actively retrain students’ intuitive acting choices.

In order to explain this rather large claim, I will explore in some detail the cognitive processes behind improvisation. Learning to improvise is a process of changing the way the actor perceives the world around him or her. In his book *Varieties of Presence*, cognitive philosopher, Alva Nöe argues against a representational view of how the world presents itself to perception. Humans do not, he maintains, represent objects in the world as mental images in order to encounter them. Rather, we have a direct, or to use his word “actionist,” relationship to the world. In this view, the world shows up for us to the extent that it does based on our ability to interact with it. As Nöe argues, ”My main idea is that presence is achieved, and that its varieties correspond to the variety of ways we skillfully achieve access to the world” (Varieties xi). In order to take Nöe’s conceptual model and consider how it might influence the training of actors, I made a leap from his notion of skilled access to the techniques used to entrain skills. I found inspiration for this interpretation in Nöe’s work with dance improvisers. In an essay entitled “Making Worlds Available,” an analysis of Lisa Nelson’s Tuning Scores (a method of dance improvisation training) he comments:

> When we as dancers enter the >>image space<<, when we perform actions, when we issue calls and respond to calls, when we listen, and watch, we make the environment. We enact our environment thanks to our skillful engagement with
them. We enact our perceptual world by attuning ourselves to it. (Worlds: 126-127)

Improvising generates an artistic world of its own, but this created world provides a space to explore the world as the performer perceives it. However, this creation arises from a specific type of interaction: skilled interaction. This type of skillful entrainment of the perceptions of the student actor can support and clarify the more intellectual process of script analysis.

Beginning acting students often have only vague ideas of what acting is. Nöe begins his book by describing a visitor to a museum looking at a piece of abstract art. In this narrative the viewer cannot comprehend the piece of art at first, and therefore has no way of understanding it. Gradually, as she or he looks at the piece associations begin to arise. From these associations the viewer begins to grasp the painting by drawing on concepts for understanding it.

Nöe uses the word “concept” differently from common parlance. He challenges the notion of a concept as an ideal form against which people compare experience. As he says, “Concepts, in this non-representational view, are not so much categories or sets, or prototypes as different philosophers have held…. They are rather skills for taking hold of what there is” (Varieties, 35). Nöe goes on to describe concepts as calipers. They are not representations of form, but rather skills for grasping parts of the world. The museumgoer’s concepts do not need to be true of the painting in any absolute sense. Rather, the development of the concept allows the viewer access to the painting. In the same way an actor who lacks the skills to grasp a particular moment does not have perceptual access to that moment. Improvisation can function as an embodied feedback rich context for developing that access. The constant attempts and failure of the experience of improvised scenic work creates an opportunity for students to increase their conceptual grasp of acting quickly.
Nöe argues that our ability to make moment-to-moment discoveries arises from the skills we bring to bear on the experience. Improvisation arises from a process of mutual discovery. For Nöe, our phenomenological experience of the presence of the world involves a constant mix of direct and indirect sensory discovery. When I look at an apple sitting on a counter I only see one side of the apple. Still I experience a sense of what the other side looks like. Cognitively the whole apple appears present for me despite my limited view. Similarly, when I improvise with a partner I am constantly attempting to see a full scene from only a small glimpse of it. The better I understand how stage interaction works the better I am at this. Further, the process of constantly trying to create work in an improvisational setting helps me learn how clearly I am seeing the apple so to speak.

For Nöe, seeing the whole apple relies on my skilled ability to change my spatial relationship to the apple so that I can in fact see the other side. I don’t have to actually change position relative to the apple. Knowing I could change coupled with previous experience of apples gives me access to the whole apple. To put this in a human-to-human context, my friend who lives across town is present for me in a different way than my dead grandfather. I know intimately the steps necessary to arrive in the presence of my friend and therefore she shows up for me whether physically present or not. On the other hand, I do not have access to my grandfather in the physical plane. I have no way of making him present. Nöe argues these parts of the apple or my friend across town are present in an amodal way. Amodal, in cognitive science terminology, means a perception of something that is created through a blending of cognitive modes (i.e., memory, sensory input, etc.) rather than being tied to a specific mode as in only represented in the brain by what is available to the visual sense. Nöe’s use of amodal reflects a belief that human perceptions are tied to the ability to act in the world. I perceive a
person or object that is not actually available to my senses through my knowledge of my skilled ability to access that person or object. As he says, “they are present as absent, but as available to perception through appropriate movement” (Varieties: 58). Similarly, in an improvisation based training model the better I become at skillfully perceiving the various parts of the scene the better I become at making new scenes.

This amodal perception of the whole apple or whole scene develops in part from a sense that it looks like most apples I have seen. Now I will make a leap from Nöe’s work. I argue that perception of the far side of the apple constitutes a prediction. To do so I will draw on Lawrence Barsalou’s work in situated simulation. Barsalou argues that people use embodied simulations to make predictions about their present situation. He writes, “In grounded theories, modal states that arise during interactions with categories are captured and integrated in memory. Later when these categories are represented conceptually, previously captured modal states are partially reactivated to represent them” (Conceptual, 93).

This reactivation creates a predictive simulation. Extending slightly from Nöe’s work on amodal perception, I will call this sense an amodal prediction. When I pick up the apple, and find that the back is mushy and rotten, I experience surprise. My amodal prediction was a bit off. The apple is still present for me. I can move to see all sides of it. Once I have seen the rotten side my perception of that apple incorporates that knowledge regardless of from where I see it. Further, on some level that experience influences my future experience of apples by adding to the skills with which I conceive of them. A similar process occurs in improvisation training. I make constant predictions about what is happening in the scene. When these predictions are correct, the scene proceeds smoothly. When I predict incorrectly, I know it because the scene bogs down.
As Barsalou would have it, “As this situated conceptualization becomes active, its simulated components can be used to monitor perceptions, actions and introspections as they actually occur, assessing whether the situated conceptualization’s predictions are satisfied” (Simulation, 1284). Barsalou also addresses language use an area significant to improvisation, and largely ignored by Nöe, who focuses on visual perception. Barsalou argues that, “Prediction lies at the heart of language comprehension. When processing language, a comprehender’s task is to predict what the language means” (Simulation 1286).

Just as the encounter with the rotten apple improves my future amodal predictions of apples, training in activity specific skills enhances amodal predictions in the contexts to which those skills apply. A tennis player practicing his or her backhand with a coach feeding balls improves amodal prediction through practice. The relationship he or she develops between self, racket, coach, and ball grows from a series of shifts in sensorimotor relationships. As the player practices his or her ability to predict where a ball will go based on the position of the coach on the court, the angle of the racquet, and a variety of other factors improves. This improvement comes from having more correct amodal predictions more often. As Barsalou notes, “Similarly, when reading about a sport, such as hockey, experts produce motor simulations absent in novices” (Simulation, 1287). Thus skilled perception impacts the quality of simulation.

Closer allied in some ways to the tennis game than the scripted play improvisation is a continuous process of amodal prediction. However just like the tennis game or practice when I make a bad prediction I can see it. The form of improvisational scene work gives me immediate feedback on how well I understand the process of acting and scene creation. It is this feedback that is key. In more traditional scene study the student actor often relies on the teacher’s
perception of how the scene is progressing. Also, the focus on line memory and various other technical elements competes with the student’s ability to perceive the actual flow of the scene.

This focus on developing perceptual predictions is why the type of improvisation I want to explore must be separated from the popular idea of improvisation as making jokes. If I just want to say something funny I only have to perceive enough of what my partner has just said to have a clever response. My conceptual grasp of the present moment can remain relatively shallow. If I want to create a scene based on character and relationship, I must pay much more attention to the offers my partner makes. I must consider not just what he or she says, but also what body language conveys about attitude, intentionality, and understanding of the scene in progress. From this deeper listening I must then make a leap from what is there to what is not there. Then my partner does the same. This type of listening is difficult for actors in scripted work, where the path is known. It is even more difficult in improvisation because of the lack of script as guide. This state of active listening and prediction is the state I would like actors to be in even when engaged with a script. Therefore introducing them to the tools in the more challenging improvisation environment increases the likelihood of access to those perceptual tools when operating from a script.

In addition to enhancing acting ability writ large the focus on improvisation creates a constant feedback loop of pressure and development. By shaping improvisations using the practice side of the 3DPP, I believe students could incrementally develop skills while constantly under the pressure to generate performance work. Often exercises allow the students to not consider a performance situation, and rather to focus on the particular activity of the exercise. Building skill training into improvisation exercises allows for there to be a constant low level of pressure on the learning process. Having students begin these improvisations with just a partner;
then with another pair of partners as audience; and finally with the whole class observing also allows the pressure to be slowly increased.

**Approaching the Research Differently**

In addition to the adjustments to the class experience noted above, I also want to suggest some changes to the research and testing methods. In short, I believe an important next step in my application of science to the actor training process is to begin working with trained scientists. This would allow for improvements in study design. Further, my knowledge of the research in the fields of psychology and sports psychology would deepen. That is part of why I limited my application of sports psychology in this project to the 3DPP a tool in which I have extensive training. As a scholar working at the borders of art and science, I want to engage with interdisciplinary research in a robust yet conscientious way.

Interdisciplinarity has become a hot topic in academia. I believe that making connections between the humanities and the arts can benefit both fields. I believe the key to this work is not simply to borrow each other’s research, but to create long term, cross-campus collaborations. I believe this is the next step in my research into the application of pressure in the acting studio.

My belief in this type of scholarly relationship is bolstered by the ideas of Edward Slingerland in his book *What Science Can Offer the Humanities*. Slingerland argues for the value of bringing elements of scientific thinking into the humanities and elements of the humanities broader understanding of cultural perspective and history into scientific research. He points out that, “Cognitive scientists exploring human-level realities need a great deal of help in framing their research questions and interpreting their data and are often hampered by an ignorance of even the most basic history or ‘thick’ cultural background of the topics they are investigating”
(298). As the title suggests the direction of exchange is not one way. In fact most of the book is devoted to arguing that the humanities could benefit from engaging with the more real world practicalities often explored by the sciences. Slingerland points to elements within the humanities that have lost touch with helping students see the connections between theory and daily life.

Further, he encourages humanist scholars to ground their theory in a developing embodied understanding of the human body/mind. As Slingerland argues, “Once we require humanistic levels of explanation to be constrained by the principles of lower levels of explanation, a host of pervasive and foundational theories about the human mind have to be abandoned as empirically untenable” (302). The back and forth exchange of ideas between science and the humanities, while perhaps difficult to achieve, would have broad ranging positive impacts on the culture of universities and the collaborative unity of faculties for a range of research and collective bargaining reasons.

As an example, I can posit ideas about acting based on my readings of scientific literature. I can even experiment with applications of some of those ideas in the classroom. But there is a reason that the recent literature on applications of science to theatre have been largely descriptive to this point. There are many problems with making prescriptive claims without having clear scientific support for the applications, and a viable and credible way of testing those conclusions. I have made an attempt at such a study here. I also think that within the limitations of a dissertation it would have been difficult if not impossible to bring in an outside researcher to handle the scientific testing process.

I do believe that the way forward for me is to start cultivating those connections at whatever institution I ultimately land. Further, I do not believe that this is a one-way relationship.
A partner in the sciences can help me test theories about applications to acting, but I believe that having a practical context “in the wild”\textsuperscript{18} in which to conduct research and applications of research would also benefit the scientific community. For example, studying actors at work, and looking specifically at how they create emotional responses both within themselves and for audience members could provide insight into the way humans process emotion.

Additionally, connecting with researchers in the sciences would help me find ways to move beyond the foundations for this study. The 3DPP is a valuable tool, but I know that working from it has only brought me in contact with a small part of the larger field of sports psychology. I think this was the right choice for this project in that reaching too far beyond the work that I have extensive training in would have diminished the value of the study.

However, moving forward I think that making contact with more people in the sports psychology field would provide new insight into the process, and into the training of actors. There are many points of overlap between athletes and actors. Contact with sports psychologists would help me have access to the best tools for exploring and testing these similarities.

As an example, one simple element that I would like to incorporate into this kind of work in the future is heart rate monitoring. Tracking the change in heart rate over time is a valuable way to study how a given performer manages stress in practical application. As, Carlstedt notes, “because of the ecological validity of physiological responses induced in the laboratory has been challenged, it cannot be assumed that an analysis of HRV in vitro will be predictive of an athlete’s autonomic balance during real competition” (Critical 116). Of course this kind of

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\textsuperscript{18} An allusion to Edwin Hutchins \textit{Cognition in the Wild} where he argues for the value of moving scientific research out of the lab and into real world application.
monitoring can be expensive. Perhaps this is an area where teaming with a scientist as I mentioned above would improve the work.

Even if this more clearly accurate and quantifiable study is not immediately possible training students to monitor heart rate changes via manual pulse checking can be a useful way for students and for myself to at least have some idea of changes in over time. While I do not think this manual self-monitoring would have much scientific validity it could give the students and myself a sense of improvement. I think that one thing that was missing from this study was a way for the students to have any consistent feeling of improvement in terms of their ability to handle performance pressure. It seems clear to me as an observer that those changes occurred. If the students had been able to track those changes themselves they would have felt a greater sense of achievement, and a greater sense of value in the process.

Building relationships across disciplines will allow me to explore these ideas, and to encounter many more that have not occurred to me yet. Theatre is at its heart a collaborative art form. For me reaching out across campus to make connections with researchers with whom I could have a mutually beneficial exchange seems like a natural extension of the work in this study.

**Conclusion**

At the end of this process, I am left with just as many questions as when I started it. The questions have changed. I did not find the quantitative evidence that I sought; on the other hand, there was much suggestive qualitative evidence. I need a clearer research design, and to engage with colleagues in the sciences to support my work more fully.
Most importantly, I have gained much insight into the 3DPP as a tool, the issues within the training of beginning acting students, and the challenges of making connections between the sciences and the humanities. In the next chapter, I zoom in from the more general thoughts about acting pedagogy in this chapter to more specific concerns that arose through the process of teaching the course that forms the basis for this study.
CHAPTER IV

TWELVE THINGS I LEARNED FROM THIS PROCESS

Introduction

In this chapter I reflect on my experience of teaching Acting Principles during the fall term of 2013. As anyone who has taught knows, every time one teaches a course a plethora of lessons are learned. Even when I have taught a given subject multiple times, with each teaching experience I discover new things that shape my approach moving forward. The latter part of the previous chapter focused primarily on more general statements about acting pedagogy, and is largely grounded in the thoughts about acting I have had in the years following the teaching of the course that forms the basis of this study. While the thoughts in this chapter touch at times on similar topics, the reflections here are grounded in the day-to-day experience of teaching Acting Principles in the fall of 2013. Additionally, I approach these topics from different angles, and with the goal of speaking specifically to the concerns I encountered in the course rather than acting writ large.

In the interest of clarity I have broken down the lessons learned with Acting Principles into twelve discreet ideas. Many of the challenges I describe here arose from attempting to strike a balance between the needs of the research and the needs of the students. I believe a class plan must be adaptive to the needs of the students and shift with their changing learning process. This emphasis on adaptation is one of my strengths as a teacher. However, it makes research difficult. Research needs to stick to a clear plan with little deviation. I find that the reflections below all revolve around this central tension between pedagogy and research. Therefore there is some clear overlap in some of the points, but their remains enough difference to make treating each point as
distinct worthwhile. At the end of this chapter I propose a class plan for a two-semester sequence of introductory acting that distills the lessons I learned from this study into a new plan.

**Twelve Things**

**(1) Trapped by the Structure**

By the nature of the research project it was necessary to maintain a strict adherence to the structure of the class. I felt that I had to follow through with the plans I had laid, not only because it was pedagogically responsible, but also because of the nature of HSRB protocols and the prospectus approval process, it was expected that I would do exactly what I said I would. I did not consider in advance that my basic approach to teaching assumes some room for adaptation. I believe, in line with contemporary cognitive science research, that teaching entails helping students construct new neuronal patterns. As James E Zull argues in his book *The Art of Changing the Brain: Enriching the Practice of Teaching by Exploring the Biology of Learning*, “The knowledge in our minds consists of neuronal networks in our brains, so if that knowledge is to grow, the neuronal networks must physically change. This is the change that a teacher wants to create. It is a change in connections” (112). In order to literally change a student’s mind I must engage with what that student already thinks. This means that I have to adapt my teaching strategies to the patterns the students already have.

I have to meet the student at his or her level of understanding. I developed the acting knowledge test that forms part of the testing process for this class a few years ago in order to learn what students already thought about acting. From this data I was better able to shape the class to meet the students understanding. I usually begin the class with the premise that almost everyone in our country has beliefs about what acting is and what makes for good acting. If I can
understand what these beliefs are for each student I can better guide them to the understanding of acting the class intends.

Unfortunately, I felt in this particular class that I was trapped by the structure. There were several points at which I felt the students needed a different experience, but I was unable to give it to them. Most often this manifested at times when it would have been helpful to slow down or back up rather than moving on to the next area of study for the class. Ordinarily I would make these changes on the fly as needed, but whether true or not I felt pressure to continue to move forward because to do otherwise might disrupt the experiment.

I continue to believe in the value of practical experimentation, but in the future I will look into ways to condense the testing phases down, so that the class can adapt around the development of the students without losing the testing component. I suspect that the best way to do this would be to have the testing occur in a different environment and outside the context of the class. Filling out the testing forms took about an hour. I did not anticipate this lengthy testing. It meant that the work of the class came to standstill when students did the testing. Moving forward I would like to work with someone from a psychology department who could facilitate a more streamlined testing process. I think also that this separation of the testing from the course itself would leave me feeling freer to adapt to changes within the course.

(2) Clarity of Purpose

Considering the class structure from a different perspective, I had a clarity of purpose as a teacher that my adaptive teaching style sometimes limits. I knew moment-to-moment and day-to-day exactly where I was going, and what I needed to accomplish. This forced me to pay close
attention to exactly what I was going to do in each moment. Each moment had to build to the
next so as to guide the students through the process.

The class ran with a level of precision that was new for me. The first twenty minutes of
each day rigidly followed the warm-up and training process (most of the time). This section ran
from a timer. The students and I followed the pattern and stuck to the time. This created a
mindset that carried over into the daily work of the class.

The class sessions were clearly laid out and focused. I was able to closely monitor progress. Even if I could not stop to make adjustments, I generally had a clear view of how the
students measured against what they were learning. I believe this created for the students a
comforting sense of where we were and what we were doing. I prefer as a teacher to signpost for
students what we are doing, why, and where we are heading. The tightness of this structure made
that easier.

This suggests an ideal structure for my teaching; to combine the clarity of purpose from
this class with the ability to adapt to student needs. I pride myself on my adaptability as a
teacher, but I need to recommit to the value of adapting within a tighter structure than I normally
create.

(3) Conditioning Is Hard

The one element of the application of the 3DPP to actors that I believe needs to be
significantly rethought is the training side of the pyramid. I discussed this in the Chapter III in
relation to larger ethical concerns about diverse classrooms and the larger question of
departmental curricular goals. Here I consider the value and efficacy of trying to achieve
conditioning results in the framework of a university course.
In a class that only meets for slightly less than two hours twice per week, students would need a high level of commitment to physical training to develop. The ten minutes of conditioning training twice per week did not allow students to progress physically. The students who were already athletic achieved some development, but the ones who were not seemed to just feel punished by the training.

Reflecting on the experience, I can see that I might have a blind spot on this point. I regularly practice intense physical training and have done so for the past ten years. Even before I entered the CST system I was always someone who pursued training of anything I practiced with what others might describe as obsessiveness. It is not unusual for me to go to multiple daylong training camps where I am pushed to the limits of my mental and physical abilities. For me this is just how learning happens.

I have come to see over the years that most people are resistant to this type of training. When I first worked as a personal trainer I often found I had to simplify and lower the intensity of programs to make them manageable by clients. After a few years I became good at creating plans that worked from the beginning. The program that I developed for this course began at a level of conditioning that was achievable for all the students. If there had been students with special needs I might have needed to modify again, but in this particular case that was unnecessary.

The factor I did not consider was that in all of the other situations where I have done intensive conditioning work the group was committed to conditioning from the beginning. Sometimes that was because they had paid me to get them into shape, and sometimes it was because we were engaged in a physical theatre rehearsal process where training was just par for the course. Many students’ views of acting develop from a cultural belief that acting is easy and
something anyone can do. Most of the time when students think about physical conditioning in relation to acting it is about looking better not about being able to move better or improve their command of craft.

I believe there continues to be value in conditioning training, so perhaps the solution lies in how I frame the training for the students. If I introduced it a bit later in the semester after questions of motivation and ignition were addressed, then maybe the students would be more motivated to train. I think in a BA program treating the exercises not as conditioning, but as expanding their movement capacity, and working through a broader range of exercises that are revolved through more regularly, would help prevent the students feeling burnt out or anxious about a consistent conditioning program. Increased variety and emphasizing movement over conditioning might make the physical training more palatable to students with a range of backgrounds and motivations for studying acting.

(4) Motivation

One thing that I consistently struggle to account for in a general education beginning acting course is the wide varieties of motivations that lead students to enroll. At BGSU students are required to take Acting Principles for a variety of reasons. As I have already noted, a small percentage of the students want to pursue careers as actors. Other students study directing, filmmaking, technical theatre, or even animation. A number of students take the class because they think that an acting class will be fun and relatively easy. The students therefore have at least three decidedly different motivations. Each of these motivations influence the way they approach the class.
The students who want to be actors are engaged with the material, and in theory are ready to learn. On the other hand a number of them already believe they know how to act. The thought that they would need to study the craft in detail has not occurred to them. Success in high school theatre leads some of these students to feel that they have nothing to learn. On the other hand some of the students are legitimately better trained than others in the class. They are often highly motivated, but somewhat stymied by the different motivations of their peers. I have success engaging with the students who want to learn more. The ones who think they already know what they are doing are the most challenging group for me. I struggle to show them areas where they can grow without attacking their egos.

Many of the non-acting focused students required to take the class have no desire to perform, and are potentially even scared of it. They are there because they have to be. Some of them have found ways to make connections to the training for themselves. The directors and animators understand the value for themselves of developing better insight into the actor’s craft. Directors will need to communicate with actors. Animators are acting in their own way, although I do wonder if a realist, Stanislavsky based approach to acting is the most useful approach for animators. The non-director filmmakers and technical theatre students often do not understand the applicability of this class to their artistic and career goals. Some of them find acting to be fun and engage on that level, but many of them are just trying to get through a requirement. With these students I try to help them see the value for their own work. The biggest struggle for this group is often being willing to put in the level of work for something they do not want to be able to do. As noted in the last chapter some of these students indicated that the training benefited them. They felt more ready to perform after experiencing the pressure testing process.
Students, who are in the class just for fun, probably bring the broadest range of motivations to the classroom. Some of them genuinely want to learn more about the craft and techniques of acting. Others just want to have a good time and not work too hard. I try when possible to keep class fun, but there are parts of the process that are just work and need to be acknowledged as such. I have had a number of students turn to me at one point or another in class and say some variations of “Acting is a lot of work!” This mental shift towards realizing the challenges inherent in acting is important to me.

My motivations in teaching the course are as complex as any of my students. Actor training, theory, and history are the core of my research. Sharing this research with others is a main goal of my life. As such, I bring a level of engagement and motivation to the classroom that many of my students lack. In some ways this is good; it makes me a passionate teacher. However, it also means that I sometime struggle to understand why students lack interest in things that I find fascinating. The semester of class recounted in this dissertation makes this even clearer. I constantly struggled to balance telling the students what they needed to know about the approach we were taking to training, and the many details I find fascinating about the method. Further the pressures of the connection between this class and my dissertation weighed heavily on me through the teaching process. I was less willing to adapt to the needs of the students because I was concerned about how changes might effect the dissertation. I found this frustrating, and sometimes felt like I was not serving my students as well as I might.

I think this is another area in which the structure was limiting. I created a situation for myself where I was limited in my ability to adapt to the different motivations of the students. Moving forward I want to consider ways to fold the question of motivation more explicitly into the class structure. In Chapter III I suggested some ways to do this.
(5) The Scenes Got Better

As I noted in the last chapter, every time we put scene work under stress it got better. Of course better is a vague concept when it comes to art. Most directors and acting coaches have a sense of what makes something better than something else, but trying to clearly explain the difference is difficult at best. Such explanations are also usually rooted in cultural or at least aesthetic expectations of what has value. Actors in a well-performed scene in a realistic drama in the United States use distinctly different methods from those of a kabuki actor in Japan. However, an astute observer can recognize good work in both.

I believe that the single thing that connects quality performance across cultures is dedicated attention. The Stanislavsky trained actor and the Kabuki trained actor concentrate on distinctly different things, but both systems of training are designed to give the performer a point of focus outside his or her concern with remembering lines, remembering choreography, or worrying about the audience. This is not to say that these things are not important, but rather that being actively conscious of them in the moment of performance tends to detract from the performance. As I noted in Chapter III, several of the students commented on the increased clarity of focus they felt while rehearsing under pressure, and that this experience heightened their overall attention.

I believe that rehearsing the scenes under stress created for the actors in the class an obstacle that had to be overcome. It gave them a level of attention that they were not able to access intentionally. In order to overcome the challenge of the outside stressor they had to focus more intently on the scene and their partner. That experience of concentrating through stress then seemed to carry over into their later work on the scene. It was almost like it pushed them past
some sort of cognitive barrier. I suspect that the struggle of working through the pressure pushed them past worrying about getting things right, and that they discovered that if they just kept going they could get there. Further, later rehearsals and performances probably felt easier after the experience of having to manage performance and distraction or a raised heart rate.

(6) Ignition

In *The Talent Code* Daniel Coyle describes “ignition” as one of the key factors that drives people to pursue an athletic or artistic career. By ignition Coyle means inspirations within a given group or culture that encourage people to believe that such a path is realistically possible. Seeing someone succeed who I perceive as being like my self is a common source of ignition. Coyle discusses particularly the explosion of female Korean golfers after the rise of one specific successful female Korean. Earlier in this chapter I wrote about motivation and how it influenced the way people engaged with the class. That issue comes down to the place of the course in the larger curriculum of the university. Motivation is highly individualized. On the other hand ignition develops from larger cultural beliefs about the nature of acting. These beliefs play a significant role in the way students engage the course. However, while ignition can drive a student forward career wise, specific beliefs, such as a belief in talent, can make learning acting more challenging.

In Chapter I, I noted problems around students’ perception of talent as the source of acting ability. Here, I will delve a little deeper into that problem, and consider they ways it directly impacted students in the course on which this study is based. The genius that leaps fully formed out of nowhere as out of the head of Zeus is one of the most pervasive ideas in American entertainment and artistic culture. The waiter that has never acted before, but who suddenly is
“discovered” to be a great actor. Reality TV shows like *American Idol, Americas Got Talent, and So You Think You Can Dance* reinforce the image that people either just have abilities or they do not. Further anyone can make the leap from obscurity to success. One telling example of this is *American Idol* winner Kelly Clarkson. On the show and in the media she is often portrayed as a waitress who rocketed to stardom due to amazing natural talent. However, Clarkson had spent most of her life training to be a singer. As Linda Septien a famed singing coach based in Clarkson’s hometown noted in an interview in with Coyle,

> They said [American Idol winner] Kelly Clarkson was a waitress, like she never sang before. Waitress? Excuse me? Kelly Clarkson was a singer—We all knew Kelly Clarkson. She had training, and she worked her tail off like anybody else does. She didn’t come from nowhere. (183)

Clearly, Clarkson was not a waitress whose talent suddenly appeared. Rather she is a dedicated and highly trained artist who worked hard to achieve what she has.

The pervasiveness of this belief in talent and genius over training and hard work influences students in university acting classes. I think this problem is especially pervasive in the theatre because it can often be harder to quantify what actors do on stage and screen merely through observation. It is clear from watching a performance that a dancer or a musician learns particular techniques that underpin what they do on stage. This is of course equally true for actors, but beyond the basics of line memorization, standing so the audience can see you, and expressing some sort of feeling the training of the actor is obscure to the audience. Even when an actor effects a drastic character transformation it is often unclear to untrained audience members how this happened. Indeed, good actors are praised for their ability to hide the effort in their process.
For the students in the course that I examine for this study this belief in talent and lack of transparency of technique led many to adopt troubling views. Some students simply decided they lacked talent. Others decided that they had talent and did not need to work. Still others brought confounding ideas of uncontrolled emotionalism and random unjustified character choices as the keys to acting. I do not claim that there are one set of correct answers to the techniques of acting any more than I would claim that jazz piano is the right technique instead of classical or that ballet is superior to modern dance technique. However, creating quality performances in any art requires a grounding in fundamental techniques and craft.

I think one area where I need to improve as a teacher is in helping students to understand the underlying structure of the technique I am teaching, and how it helps them as actors to have consistent work. Further I think that pointing to how the techniques learned in class can be used to achieve similar effects to those created by actors they admire—whether the actor in question uses those techniques or not. This connection to a model that can drive them to pursue training and practice could ignite a passion not just for being a successful performer, but also for the work it takes to achieve that goal.

(7) Embracing the Suck

Anyone who has learned something deeply has experienced failure. Failing at something, thinking deeply about the experience, breaking it down, and trying again and again is a central part of any learning. As I mentioned in Chapter I, science writer Daniel Coyle, drawing on the work of numerous researchers of expertise, calls this “deep practice.” One of the clearest descriptions of this process comes from his book The Talent Code. As Coyle describes it, deep practice involves “the feeling, in short, of being a staggering baby, of intently, clumsily lurching
towards a goal and toppling over. It’s a wobbling discomfiting sensation that any sensible person would instinctively seek to avoid” (94). The key element of this process that I want to examine here is the struggle to learn.

Students are often turned off from learning by the perception of failure. However, in deep practice the student consistently confronts what memory researchers Robert and Elizabeth Bjork call “desirable difficulties.”¹⁹ The Bjorks’ research suggests that sometimes challenges are the key to improvement. It is vital to the learning of any new skill to go through a process of attempting to perform the skill, failing, recognizing that failure, dissecting the error, exploring slowly to improve the point of failure, and attempting the skill again.

In my experience of teaching, students tend to get stuck at a few different points in this cycle. The first is recognizing the failure. There is a belief that just working hard is enough. Students think that if they just keep pushing things will get better, but the reality is you have to be practicing the skill correctly otherwise you are neurologically cementing bad habits. These habits once trained cannot be unlearned. They can be replaced with new habits, but the old ones do not go away they just get supplanted.²⁰

Unfortunately, students are failure avoidant. This is not their fault. The educational system in the US makes students avoid failure. In much of their early educational experience failure has strong emotional, social, and practical costs. Since, failure is not viewed as part of the process students often feel humiliated when they fail. Further, they fear that failure in class will

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¹⁹ This idea is pervasive throughout the work of the Bjorks. For a representative example of the theory see Bjork, E. L., & Bjork, R. A. 2011

²⁰ For more on this Lally and Gardner 2011
reflect poorly on their grades, which can have long term consequences for life and career options.

As a teacher I used to avoid creating situations for my students where they might fail. I used encouraging language to make them always feel like they were doing well. This does not seem to work. The students felt good about themselves, but they did not improve. I am trying to develop a way to help students encounter failure in a less threatening environment. So far this involves talking about the value of failure, and creating opportunities for failure that are not directly tied to their grade. One application of this in the Acting Principles class was having students create draft versions of each section of the Actor’s Workbook as they were learning about it. This way they could fail and get feedback before they had to turn anything in for a grade.

This process is still a struggle. Especially when working on practical exercises I am still trying to find the balance between pointing out failures and making students feel humiliated. At the American Society for Theatre Research Conference in 2015 I had a discussion of this topic with acting teacher and author of Embodied Acting, Rick Kemp. We were discussing the value of the Lecoq pedagogical approach called via negativa. This approach is an extreme form of letting students learn through failure. In essence this approach works by having the student step up on stage to perform an improvisation, and pointing out to them when they are doing it wrong. Students are not told when they are doing something correctly, and they are not told what they doing wrong, simply that it is wrong. I have always found this approach frustrating, but Kemp is a fan of it, so I asked him why. He said that his experience of it was that it meant that when he did finally figure out what worked he knew what he had figured out and why. He also felt ownership of the knowledge, and agency in his learning. That made sense to me, but I was still
stuck on how to apply it in my classes. Given this, I asked Kemp, who also teaches in a BA program, how he applies it in his classroom. He said he doesn’t because in the context of a BA program there is not enough time to work this way. Like Kemp, I am still struggling to find the balance between encouraging students and allowing them to learn through failure.

(8) The Value of Forms

I started my artistic life as a dancer. I followed that up pretty quickly by getting involved in martial arts. One of the things that both of these pursuits have in common is they contain drills that a practitioner can train solo. This allows for quicker development with limited in-class time. I found these solo training drills greatly enhanced my development. When I was seven I started taking simultaneous classes in acting, singing, and dancing. While I eventually developed skills in all three areas I progressed much faster as a dancer and singer than I did as an actor. Classes in all three areas were 45 minutes per week, so I was not getting more lessons in one area than the others. I was also a dedicated and enthusiastic student so I practiced any time I could. This was where the difference lay. The solo drills and exercises I learned in singing and acting classes, just like the solo forms of martial arts allowed me to practice every day even when alone. Thus, I was able to work hard even when not in class.

One of the central problems for solo exercises for acting is that acting is generally a partnered activity. This makes it difficult to practice alone. Of course monologue work can be done, but monologues are a bit of an anomaly in the acting world. They are often pieced together from larger conversations, directed at a partner who is not present, and built more on a pure imagining of the situation rather than being in the situation with a scene partner. Monologue work can develop script analysis and character development skill, but most Stanislavsky based
approaches to acting focus on the interplay between characters. This cannot be practiced alone. Further unless the class one is taking is working on monologues it is difficult to get useful feedback on monologue work. This feedback problem is a larger issue with solo work for actors. Dance or singing practice has clear goals, and if I have been well trained, I know if my foot is in the right place or if I hit the correct note. It is harder from an acting perspective to know if I am conveying character and emotional choices clearly to an audience. It could be argued that actors are just lazy, and prefer to do other things instead of honing their craft. I think that the problem is that actors lack a clear set of exercises they can practice alone, and test whether or not they are improving.

Unlike dance or singing, martial arts are also generally speaking a partnered activity. It is difficult to learn to fight by yourself. Yet, martial artists in contemporary society are rarely able to attend classes for more than a few hours a week. In martial arts this is handled through drills and in many cases patterns of movements or forms (called respectively: kata, hyung, taolu, djuru, etc, depending on the country of origin) These forms allow students to develop many of their skills alone. Of course this solo practice is no replacement for partner work, but it instills movement patterns, rhythm, timing, and mindset skills that can be applied when a partner is present. They are also consistent patterns that can be checked for correctness and improvement when the martial artist works with a teacher. Perhaps a similar type of solo exercise could be developed for actors.

I am of course not the first person to point out this issue. Grotowski, Suzuki, and Bogart among others have all compared their respective training systems to the ballet dancer’s barre routine or to the pianist’s scales (although it is worth noting that both Suzuki and Bogart developed systems that are difficult to practice alone). I believe there would be value in
developing training patterns that actors could practice alone. This would need to include both physical and vocal work. I would argue that just like martial arts forms ignore partner response in forms training the same would be necessary in acting forms. There are some Asian theatre traditions that contain such forms (for example Noh and Chinese Opera). However, these arts are much more rigorously formal in execution. This is another argument for conceptually basing acting forms on martial arts. Ultimately the goal of martial arts training is to be able to respond spontaneously to an opponent. The forms are not utilized in fighting, but rather train movement patterns that are useful.

An argument could be made that this kind of training would lead to actors who all moved the same or who were too fixed. I acknowledge that there would be a time in the training where this would probably be true, but if practiced correctly this could be overcome. Again, martial arts provides a model for addressing this concern. In Japanese martial arts a three part learning process called *shu-ha-ri* underpins forms training. *Shu* is a period of strict imitation of the form. The practitioner in this stage tries to move exactly as the teacher has shown them. This is important because it allows for checking of technique by the teacher to make sure the solo practice is progressing correctly. As the martial artist progresses they reach the *ha* phase. At this point they are encouraged to break the form. This may mean making changes to a form based on instinct or taking apart and recombining aspects of different forms. Finally in the *ri* phase the practitioner whose body has been shaped by the forms abandons them all together. The training still underpins everything the artist does, but they respond spontaneously to the situation rather than being stuck in formal movement.

Particularly in the context of a one semester introductory class giving students tools they can practice at home and continue to practice as they progress would be useful. Not all of the
students would diligently practice outside class, but some would. The form training could also be built into the class in such a way as to encourage practice. I wish I could say I know exactly what these forms should be. At present I am not able to do so, but a project that has come out of this experience for me is to begin to develop such forms and test them out first on myself and then on subsequent classes of students.

(9) To Interrupt or Not to Interrupt

One area where I learned I need to improve or at least clarify my teaching is the timing of giving feedback. The three models I am aware of are giving notes at the end of the work, stopping the work, and side coaching. I have tried all three methods in various situations. I tried all three methods over the course of the Acting Principles course that is the subject of this study.

My current belief is that each of these modes has a place in actor training. Side coaching works best when in the middle of exercises. Short focused guidance can help students make on-the-fly adjustments and hopefully improve. Sometimes exercises actually need to be stopped if students are not able to adapt to the side coaching, and then there is value in giving overarching comments at the end.

Scene work in my opinion follows a slightly different pattern. In the early stages of rehearsal, interrupting to work things can help new students have a better understanding of how to apply skills developed in training to rehearsal. This also gives the students more time to consider and think through what they are doing. As the work progresses, side coaching can help to keep the students focused and on task as they work through the scene. Finally, allowing for full runs of scenes with notes following helps the actors develop flow in the scene. Also at this
point they have enough mastery of the work that they are able to incorporate notes given at the end.

None of this is revelatory. A lot of teachers use a similar approach. The thing that I have never heard discussed, and that is certainly not modeled in the records of teachers like Stanislavsky, Meisner, Strasberg, and Adler, is the need for simplicity of note. In all of these examples the teachers tend to expound at length. I have done it myself on many occasions. For most students, especially new students giving clear, specific directions is much more important.

In the course of my teaching career, I have tried many approaches to giving notes. I have given long detailed commentary, short pithy notes, written notes, and oral notes. Through this experience, I have come to believe the following. First, and in general three notes is about all anyone can process at one time. Second, if one gives a note more than once and the student fails to follow it, the best assumption is that he or she does not understand it. There are students who have no interest in listening, but in my experience usually if someone seems to be ignoring me he or she does not understand the comment. It is too easy to get caught in the trap of thinking students are resistant, but mostly they are confused. Having the patience to let resistant students out themselves rather than assuming that is what is going on is more productive.

I believe notes should have three qualities. Note that the language I use for this process echoes the performance mantra technique described in Chapter II. First, they should be specific to the needs of the individual actor. At the beginning of a rehearsal process, notes may be more general, but eventually they need to be tuned to the proclivities of the particular actor. Second, they should be phrased in the positive. The note needs to be something the actor can do rather than something not to do. “Keep your eyes on your partner” is better than “don’t get distracted.” One can be done, while the other is confusing because it leads one to focus on trying to stop
doing something. Third, notes need to be procedural. In other words they need to be simple to do. “Keep your eyes on your partner” is better than “stay focused”. The first one can be easily done while keeping attention on the other parts of acting. The other is too vague, unless the actors have a trained physiological response to that phrase. While I have yet to find specific research to explain this connection, it does seem to consistently help the students.

This linguistic clarity can be difficult and exhausting to maintain. Especially when frustrated with a student. In my experience, though, the dedication to the process is worth the effort.

(10) Testing and Growth

Significant amounts of research suggest that testing of knowledge not only checks learning it also improves it.\textsuperscript{21} Even when students are tested on knowledge they have no experience with, that testing improves their performance on subsequent tests. Part of the theory is that it gets the students thinking about the material, and aware of what the concerns are even if they do not understand those concerns yet. The testing primes them, and makes them at least vaguely familiar with the material. Further, testing while students are in the process of learning something helps them recognize what they understand versus what they think they understand. This helps them reengage with the material with better understanding of where to focus.

As with failure though students have understandable negative associations with testing. I have for several semesters been having the students take a beginning of class acting knowledge pre-test. This test asks them questions around the topics the course covers. It gives me an

\textsuperscript{21} See for example: Little, Storm, and Bjork 2011, Yue, Soderstrom, and Bjork 2015, and Karpicke and Roediger 2006
understanding of how the students are already thinking about the material. Hopefully it also
gives them some insight into what the course is going to ask them to think about.

The term that is the focus of my study was especially testing intensive. This brings me to
the other challenge with testing; it takes up a lot of class time. Perhaps though if the tests are
simply a way of getting the students to engage with the material than they can be freed from the
constraints of class time. Maybe this is a place where technology can be useful. Students might,
for example, take short tests online in preparation for the in-class experience.

How to grade these tests is a challenge. If the purpose is to simply engage the students
with the material then it makes sense to grade for completion. However, I worry that the students
would pick up on this and stop caring. On the other hand subtracting significant points from their
grade for not knowing material they have not encountered yet seems unfair.

If, as I believe, the purpose of testing is to reinforce a student’s understanding of the
material perhaps there is nothing wrong with giving students the same test twice. Give the
students a pre-test heading into a unit and then give them the same test at the end. Then
somehow have the first score influence the second one. Perhaps better yet just have higher
expectations for the quality of the answers on the final test. The students will spend the entire
unit knowing what to focus on. Also, it would allow me as the teacher to teach to the test in a
good way. In creating the test I would have honed my lessons down to the core things that I
believe are most important for the students to understand. Then I can craft lesson plans that help
them dig deeply into this knowledge, and since they already know what the goals are they would
be better equipped to engage with the material.
(11) Knowing What vs. Knowing How

One question that kept appearing for me in the process of teaching this course was how do I help students bridge the gap between conceptual knowledge of something we were working on, and their ability to manifest practical application of that knowledge. The practice side of the 3DPP is designed to do this, but I now realize that there is a bit of a breakdown here between the often clear mechanics of athletic skills, and the more vague elements of acting skills. I am, of course not the first person to consider bridging this gap, but I think in what follows I have realized something useful about the nature and timing of critique.

Many athletic skills can be clearly broken down into individual component motions. Throwing a boxing jab for example has a pretty clear sequence to it. I can break it down, and teach someone the individual components of the skill. I can check each of those components, and then it is relatively easy to tell at a glance if someone is throwing a good punch. I do not need to understand what they think they are doing or how they are doing it. I can look at the motion, and say yes that is a good punch or no you need to adjust some components. They then have to put the jab into application against a partner to make connections between the skill and attributes like timing, and distancing, but the physical appearance of the skill stays roughly the same.

In the realm of actor training though things are a bit more vague. If I am teaching a student partner connection, I can give them incrementally developing exercises to slowly get further into the work, as I did for the Acting Principles course, but the outward appearance of that connection in application is highly variable. Students might be making connection with their partner with varying parts of their bodies or they might be doing it with no physical contact whatsoever. I believe based on my experience that I can tell when an actor is making contact with his or her partner. I have been able to help actors move from little to know connection to
significant connection sometimes in a matter of minutes. However, unlike the jab, with a skill like partner connection it is important to know not only how the work looks, but also what the actor thinks they are doing to achieve it. What the actor thinks matters because if they have to replicate partner connection another day or even in a different context do they really understand what they did?

I began seriously thinking about this problem after reading the work of neuroscientist Gregory Hickok. In his book *The Myth of Mirror Neurons* Hickok posits a theory of cognitive function that conceptualizes the brain as having two main system. He terms these the “What” system and the “How” system. Other thinkers and philosophers have proposed similar analyses of the learning process. Hickok is, however, the first to propose this division at the level of brain systems, and to study it using contemporary cognitive science methods.

The “What” system identifies an outside stimulus. In this way it draws together information from a wide range of brain areas. In looking at a book on a shelf it identifies sensory features such as size, shape, and color. It recognizes informational features such as the name of the book, its author, and who owns the book. Further, the “What” system engages more abstract processes such as: any emotional meaning the book has for me, what I know about the information contained within, what I know about the author, conversations I have had on the subject with others, etc.

The “How” system on the other hand, processes ways I could physically engage with the book. It directs my eyes to read the writing from left to right rather than right to left or up to down. It knows how to pick up and open the book without me having to consciously think through that process. Though it is harder to conceptualize, it is amazing in its significance for human engagement with the world it knows how to adjust to problems. If I go to pick up the
book, and it starts to slip out of my hand, I do not have to consciously think about how to stop it from falling. The “How” system is able in many cases to simply make the adjustment, and more often than not if I do drop the book it is because more conscious processing came online.

Reflecting on this what versus how distinction in the light of teaching, I am starting to believe that I (and most teachers I have had) elide this distinction. This is not a critique of these teachers. The research on this is new, and has not been brought into the field of teaching, and as with anything I do not know what I do not know.

By conceptualizing the learning process as moving from what to how over and over again, a process begins to come clear to me. I also come to think that this is what I do when I teach a physical skill like the jab described above. I help the student to know what a jab is, to be able to identify it, and contextualize it. Further, I teach them the mechanics which is still a what process, but is starting to blend into how. Most importantly pedagogically, I believe that the active and conscious explication of what helps the student who is trying to apply a skill make the all important self corrections found in the how process. As such, the more they understand what makes the skill the more they are able to identify problems and self correct in application.

If I take this idea into a skill like partner connection then I need to be able to more clearly breakdown the what aspect. To me this means not more explanation, but specific explanation. What I realized is that even though I created incremental learning steps for the students, I was more likely to rely on them understanding the experience from the exercises then to closely analyze and critique their work. This breaking down and pointing out individual moments of failure and difficulty would help them to learn to feel for themselves when something is off, and make adjustments for it.
In thinking about this it is odd for me to realize that I would not think twice about spending twenty minutes picking apart and putting back together someone’s jab. I would tell them concretely what they were doing wrong, and why what I am asking them to do is better. However, in reflecting on the way I teach acting, and the way I was taught acting, this rarely happens. Of course, I often give students concrete and detailed feedback on their performance work, but I rarely pull apart and reassemble their work on skill building through exercises. In thinking back to my training this was rarely done to me either. I think only my Meisner teacher would regularly critique exercises.

I have come to believe that this detailed critique at the skill fundamental level is vital. I have begun to do it with my acting students at SFA, and it has helped. I have taken the position that I need to be able to on the spot correct a student’s work on an exercise in such a way that he or she, his or her partner, and any observers can all see the improvement, and understand how the improvement was accomplished.

While I have had success with this, it is still hard to do. It often feels as if I am spending too much time with students watching each other. It also sometimes feels like I am harassing students. I am not. I am trying to give them clear and direct help, but it is often difficult to tell a student again and again that they are not quite getting. I am not sure why this is. I have never had this concern when teaching a clear physical skill like a jab. Perhaps this feeling results from the seemingly more personal nature of acting. Regardless, I believe the effort to give clear and comprehensive critique before students get to performing scene work is a vital if challenging step.
I have come to believe that another reason students in a beginning acting class struggle is they do not have clear models of what actors who are only slightly better than them do. Watching someone, who is an expert at something, demonstrate his or her expertise can be thrilling and inspiring, but it is rarely informative. Especially with a subject like acting where so much effort is put in to making the final product appear effortless, it can be incredibly difficult for beginning acting students to see how to duplicate it. Indeed the very effortlessness of the expert actor becomes limiting for the beginning actor because it can seem like good acting just happens. The beginning acting student then feels when he or she is asked to work hard in the classroom that this cannot possibly be the right way to do it. It never seems as if their role models do this type of work.

As such, the challenge for the acting teacher becomes helping students come to realize that the work is necessary. Further, that the work will make them better actors, and lastly that the actors they look up to also put this much effort into their performances.

I have begun to consider some solutions to this concern inspired by the work of Neuroanthropologist Greg Downey. Neuroanthropology is a burgeoning field, which draws on research in cognitive science to ground an understanding of encultured behavior in hard science. Downey focuses particularly on understanding the culture of skill training or what he calls “enskilment.” He blends traditional cultural anthropology practices like participant observation with cognitive science research to better understand how the cultural environment in which training occurs influences the impact of the training on its participants.

Usefully for my study, Downey bases his research on his training in the Brazilian martial art of capoeira. He especially explores the cognitive and cultural forces in play in learning new and
complex skills in the cultural context of a Brazilian capoeira school. Briefly, capoeira is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that emphasizes trickery and surprising changes of position. Given its history of concealment in the slave community in Brazil, capoeira when displayed in public generally resembles an athletic and acrobatic dance more than overt martial arts movement. In particular, it incorporates a variety of headstand and cartwheel type inversions.22

Downey’s research into these headstands and cartwheels is particularly informative to theatre practice because these skills require the capoeirista (capoeira practitioner) to change his or her orientation to the world. Downey looks at physical versions of this by examining headstands and cartwheels. Actors on the other hand work to shift their imaginative orientation to the world by taking on scripts that challenge their personal perspective or view.

Further acting students fooled by the appearance of ease of professional actors often have to reorient their understanding of what constitutes acting when they begin to study. This requires an often difficult reorientation of their perspective on the craft of acting. I believe this problem is in some ways unique to university level actor training. Students do not enter art school without understanding the rigors of drawing and painting, and they do not enter engineering school without understanding foundational math, but students often enter university level acting programs without realizing that actors do anything more than memorize their lines and stand where the director tells them. The actual craft of acting requires a much more complex interaction with text, design, director, audience, and most of all fellow performers.

Downey’s research mirrors some the experience of new acting students. While I doubt anyone seeing capoeira for the first time thinks it looks easy, the practitioners strive to perform

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22 For a detailed history of Capoeira by a significant practitioner and teacher see Almeida, 1993.
with great appearance of ease. This leaves new practitioners with little understanding of how to begin to work on the more complex movements. In these movements a practitioner has to learn to be comfortable and adaptable in positions that are far outside daily life. In capoeira the goal is not simply to be able to hold headstands or handstands, but to move in and out of them in a dynamic fashion in response to the movement of a partner. As Downey notes in his article “Learning the ‘Banana Tree’”, “In addition to named techniques, the head is deployed as a fifth limb in a host of dynamic transitions, drills, and unnamed variants”(79). Further he argues this kind of training is not simply learning a technique, but a retraining of the mind/body, “In this exploratory process novices engage in a guided discovery not just of the … [banana tree move] … but also of their own bodies potential, its idiosyncratic condition, and its emerging capabilities.” (80).

I would argue that actors are on a similar journey of self-challenge and discovery albeit with less visually spectacular results. In almost every acting style the actor must take on behaviors and responses that are unnatural to them. Further they must respond to partners and fictional situations using these unnatural behaviors. Unlike the capoeirista though the actor is not learning a finite number of new skills. Rather actors must learn to quickly adopt and shed new behaviors sometimes multiple times within the same performance, and certainly from performance to performance. Therefore what the actor must learn to be immensely comfortable in new situations, and develop the ability to quickly acquire new movement patterns.

There is one aspect in particular of the training Downey describes that I believe could positively change the culture of acting studios and university theatre departments. He discusses the necessity of not just a skilled teacher, but also the presence of more experienced practitioners to help the novice accept the struggles of learning.
Downey emphasizes the value of having not just teachers in the room, but students who are a bit farther down the path of training. It is the presence of these students that can drive motivation by most importantly normalizing struggle. People exposed to new challenges often resist taking on the mental or physical pain of those challenges. Downey provides a concrete example of this in discussing the headstand. It hurts to do a headstand when you first start. Students are motivated to keep practicing it by seeing the skills of not just the teacher, but also the more advanced students. He tells a story of trying to teach the headstand to a large group of completely new students without any more advanced students present. The new students never got past the first attempts because it hurt and there was no motivation for them to believe they could achieve it.

It is more advanced students who make the skills displayed by the teacher seem relevant and attainable. Unlike the teacher advanced students can believably tell the new students that the struggle is normal. As someone with a lot of movement training, I have encountered this issue with my students. Students sometimes see what I can do, and think or say, “I could never do that.” In part because in looking at me they are looking at the output of decades of training. They are unable to see the intermediate steps. Also, because I am the only example I might just be a genetic anomaly. On the other hand, seeing a student just a few years ahead of them do something just a bit better than they can do it themselves makes it seem attainable. It also reassures the new student that the path laid out by the teacher works and can be accomplished.

This is especially true in a University setting where acting students rarely see their professors perform. Students who have not seen me perform may doubt the effectiveness of what I am teaching them. They may also wonder if what I am teaching them is what I do. But if they see slightly more advanced students using the same processes they are being taught then the new
student can begin to see the importance of the lessons and the value of the training.

I do not know quite how to achieve this yet. Perhaps developing an older student to new student mentoring program or having advanced students in current productions come talk about their process. Perhaps making working as a student teaching assistant in a beginning acting class part of the requirements to graduate. I am sure there are a number of viable options and I intend to explore them in the coming years.

**Distilling and Looking Forward**

Drawing on the discoveries I have made through the course of this project, in this section I will envision how I might construct a similar class in the future. For this purpose I will use a bit of an ideal world scenario. I will assume a situation where I have two semesters of sixteen weeks each to achieve the same goals that I set out to achieve in the course described in this study.

I envision the first semester of the course as a period of foundation building. Students would learn the basic skills of acting with minimal text requirements. Additionally, students would have time to develop their pressure resilience initially separate from the requirements of memorization. However, I would continue to meet the goals of Acting Principles by using a Stanislavskian base with an emphasis on realistic situations and behavior. In the second semester, I would bring the students into fuller contact with texts. Additionally at this point I would introduce a textbook. Specifically, I would use Bella Merlin’s *The Stanislavsky Tool Kit*. In what follows, I elaborate the course design for this two-semester sequence in more detail.
Semester One

This semester would focus on improvisation and pressure management. The course would be graded largely on active participation in class work, as evaluated on a weekly basis by the student and myself. Other than participation, the major assignments would include the development of a performance mantra and a list of priming phrases or words. The mantra I explained in detail in Chapter II. I will explain priming in more detail below. Finally, the students would rehearse and perform short scenes (2-3 pages) as their final project for the semester.

One of the elements I most want to retain is the warm-up. In the course that serves as the object of analysis for this study, the warm-up did a good job of giving the students an experience of managing elevated heart rate in an otherwise low-pressure situation. In addition to introducing the course in the first class session of the term I would introduce the warm-up and its built-in recovery tools. One change I would make is to vary the specific exercises that make up the warm-up while retaining the form. This should be more pleasant for the students and also allow me to devote a little bit of time to expanding their movement and vocal capacity without emphasizing it.

Following the introduction, the first four weeks of the course will be devoted to developing improvisation skills. Initially, contact improvisation will be used to develop physical sensitivity and awareness, as well as, a less internally judgmental attitude towards choices. As this work progresses, I will begin to include methods I have been developing for adding a sense of intentionality and action to contact work.

In addition to the contact work I would also begin work on scenic improvisation. I would begin with the basics of who, what, and where while focusing on partner connection and
agreement. Initially, I would deemphasize speaking in this work as it tends to lead students to focus on words and cleverness over listening and playing off a partner. This work allows students to engage in hands-on acting work from the beginning. Also, I suspect a number of students would be resistant to weeks of only contact work.

In addition to this in-class work, I would introduce the mantra and also priming words. I explained the mantra in detail earlier. Priming words or “Loading the spine” is an idea I borrow from martial arts teacher Kevin Secours. Unlike mantras which function to get an actor refocused when something goes wrong, priming words are a way to preload positive goals before the beginning of an activity. Before performing actors tend to think a range of negative or at least unhelpful thoughts. Phrases such as, “I hope I remember my lines,” “don’t mess up,” and “stay focused,” and etc often occupy an actor’s pre-performance thoughts. Priming words replace these with positive active thoughts such as, “I am going to listen to my partner,” I’m going to nail my monologue,” and “I’m going to go out there and have fun.” This kind of priming helps actors begin in a positive and focused mental state. It minimizes self-doubt, and helps prevent perceived errors. Students will be asked to develop their mantras and priming words outside of class.

Around week five and six, once students have developed a comfort level with improvisation, I will introduce the pressure checking procedures I used in this study. Students will engage in an activity designed to raise their heart rates or disorient them, and then will immediately jump into an improvised scene. They will be asked to use the pressure management tools to handle the pressure. This will initially be done with everyone working at once, followed by scene partners being watched by small groups of students. Ultimately, students will pressure check in front of the whole class. I will also ask them to write a short reflection on this experience so that I can better assess what is working and not working and what is not.
After they have gone through this process, which will probably take a week, I will refocus the class towards active analysis. This work will build on the improvisation skills they have already learned, but will begin to shift it towards more coherent scene work. Initially I will do this without scripts. The beginning stages of active analysis are built around silent improvisations of the “event” that is at the heart of the scene. Stanislavsky described the “event” as the reason for the scene to occur: what has to happen for the scene to take place.

Students will make basic decisions as to a character relationship and an event. They will then improvise silent scenes around this event. This will be done with a partner. The groups will also work in teams of four so that they can receive regular feedback on their work from another pair. I will give the students guidelines for the feedback. It will focus on the logic of the through line of actions and the believability of the scenes.

Once these “event” scenes are working well silently students will add improvised words to the scenes. Although these scenes will continue to be improvised my belief is that over time they will get closer and closer to being refined and largely repeated. Once the scenes reach this point we will again pressure test them in the same manner as the previous testing of the improvisations. The final performance of these scenes will serve as the midterm around week eight of the semester.

During the time students are working on the basics of active analysis, they will also be looking for short, two person scenes to perform. The work on these two person scenes will be the focus of the second half of the semester. Scene partners will meet with me outside of class to discuss their scenes and begin to consider the event of the scene.

In class meetings students will now go through the active analysis process on their short scenes. Once we have identified the event, students will begin silent improvisations of the
scenes. As before each pair will have another pair giving them feedback. In addition to considering through line and believability the observing team will now also help the partners analyze the moments when their improvisations diverge from the script and why that might be occurring.

Once these silent improvisations have been sufficiently developed, improvised words will be added. Gradually, the scenes will be refined until they are closer and closer to the scene as written. When students have reached this point class time will be turned over to small group rehearsals with me to refine their scenes. In these small group rehearsals I will also have students pressure check their scenes in preparation for performance. These scenes will then be performed as the final project for the course.

I believe that emphasizing fun improvisation at the beginning of the semester will better help ease students disinterested in acting into the process. Also, by de-emphasizing written script analysis this semester I think students will be better able to embody the basic skills of performance without being too much “in their heads.” As I move into the second semester, I will shift the emphasis more towards script analysis as a basis for scene and character creation while still emphasizing the skills they have learned the first semester.

**Semester Two**

This semester the class will explore more advanced tools of script analysis. Especially, we will use Merlin’s *Stanislavsky Tool Kit* as a basis for script analysis and specific problem solving. Merlin’s book begins with a process of script analysis, and emphasizes the discovery of bits, objectives, counter-objectives, and actions.
The first two weeks of the course would focus on reviewing the previous semester. Students would also spend these two weeks finding the scene they will spend the rest of the semester working on. This scene will be longer than last semester. It will be in the ten to fifteen minute range.

In the third week the class will read and discuss Merlin’s basic tools of script analysis. We will apply these as a group to a ten-minute play I provide to the class. Then students will have two weeks to do an initial analysis of their scripts. During these two weeks we will explore a number of the tools in Merlin’s book including object work and emotional centers.

Once the students have done their initial written analysis, I will lead them through the active analysis process. Again we will begin with silent improvisation and gradually add text. One of the core lessons of this work will be the value of failure. Students will find that they are continually realizing the scene is not working, and they need to start over. This is a vital part of their process. They need to learn to embrace this struggle and realize there is not shame in it.

We will devote about half of our class time each week to this analysis work, and the other half to work on the variety of other tools Merlin discusses in her book. Each of these tools will be discussed, practiced on its own, and then applied to the characters the students are developing.

Throughout the semester at various times I will ask students to pressure check their active analysis improvisations to keep the pressure management tools sharp. At the midpoint of the semester students will perform their developing active analysis for me, and submit for evaluation a revised version of their script analysis. This analysis will also include how they are engaging with the other tools from Merlin explored in class.

During the later half of the semester, as students are continuing to refine their scenes and are continuing to explore additional tools, I will occasionally use class time to work privately
with groups so that they can refine their scenes with more specific feedback from me. About four weeks out from the end of the semester students will be expected to begin off-book rehearsals. At this point groups will begin to have regular rehearsals with me to help them delve deeper into the specifics of the language of their scenes. Towards the end of this time we will pressure check the scenes several times. For the final students will perform their scene, and turn in a final version of their analyses.

**Summative Thoughts**

I believe this two-semester sequence reflects the lessons I learned in this study. The emphasis on improvisation should achieve the goals of both making the class more fun, and asking the students to work under pressure more regularly. The emphasis on improvisation should also increase the pleasure the students experience in class, and therefore temper some of the motivational concerns I raised in the earlier part of the chapter. Additionally, it will be easier to draw explicit connections for the students not interested in acting between the work of the course and the things they plan to pursue.

By retaining the warmup and making it more flexible, but eliminating the conditioning portion of the course, I addressed the excessive physical challenge of the course, while also giving myself more freedom to incorporate additional physical and vocal skills. In general the course is more flexible. It gives me more opportunities to follow the needs of the students.

I also increased opportunities for students to get feedback from me and from their fellow students. This should address some of my concerns about the need for greater feedback. Further these experiences function as low intensity, but regular testing of what the students are learning. I believe the first semester in particular addresses the learning what versus how question by
grounding students firmly in the how before we dig more deeply into the what in the second semester.

I have not yet figured out how to address the question of forms or how to get more advanced students to serve as examples in the classroom. I will continue to consider those issues. I do believe that this two-course sequence improves on the course I taught for this study, and addresses most of the lessons I learned from this experience.

**Conclusion**

One of the struggles I have had in writing this dissertation is measuring my sense of success. As I discussed in Chapter III, there are many unexpected ways in which the results of this study did not meet my original expectations. However, I have found value in reminding myself that this is often how results are in the sciences. Mixed results do not equal failure. They equal an opportunity to learn from the experience, and to refine methods for future work. That is what I have begun with this chapter, and what I will continue to do as I pursue this research into the future. By categorizing and processing the discoveries I made through the work on this study I have set myself clear and specific pathways to further my research both in my acting courses, and in collaboration with other scholars. Finally, by considering class plans for the future, I have given myself an actionable way forward in the classroom.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Introduction

Having arrived at the end of this study, I find that it has achieved something quite different from what I anticipated when I began. This is not a bad thing. Rather I believe it acknowledges the challenges and rewards of interdisciplinary work. I set out to test the hypothesis that Sonnon’s 3DPP when applied to the pedagogy of the beginning acting classroom would help students retain newly learned skills under the pressure of performance.

This hypothesis grew out of years of seeing acting students (both mine and others) fail to make the leap from practicing a skill in the classroom to using that skill in performance. I believe that the reasons for those failures are rooted in the process of how students acquire new information and how that newly gained information interacts with the stresses of application.

From my training with Sonnon I came to embrace his model of developing flow by working along three lines: practice of skills, training of attributes, and pressure testing performance. I have found this method effective in my training as an athlete and martial artist, and I found it effective in the training of other athletes and martial artists.

Further, I believe that Sonnon’s formulation and interpretation of flow state aligns with what many successful acting teachers have sought from their students across time. What I believe Sonnon’s work brings to the table is method for specifically addressing how to achieve and maintain this state. Even more he actively addresses how to learn to better attain this state initially. Therefore it is my contention that applying his methods to the teaching of acting,
regardless of the specific set of acting skills being taught, improves the student actor’s ability to
develop new skills.

**Methods**

In order to test my hypothesis about the applicability of Sonnon’s work to beginning
actors, I designed a course based upon the 3DPP and my understanding of Sonnon’s methods
through my years of training with him. The course developed from an already existing
Stanislavskian course, and I did not modify the fundamental course objectives. Rather, I changed
my approach to how to teach those methods to align with Sonnon.

Not changing the course objectives was a key goal for me. For this course I stayed within
the realm of a generic Stanislavskian approach. By generic here, I do not mean to criticize the
approach. I mean rather that the approach drew on a broad range of elements from Stanislavsky’s
system without purely aligning with any of the major systematized strands of Stanislavskian
methods. So, I was not teaching, Stanislavsky, Strasberg, Meisner, or Adler, but elements from
all of their work make it in to the mix.

Whatever discoveries come out of this research, I want them to be transferable across
widely disparate approaches to actor training. Keeping the changes at the pedagogical level
allows for the possibility that other people can encounter my methods, and apply them to
different approaches to actor training.

To this end, I isolated three specific skill goals, built a training sequence designed to
develop certain attributes, and then applied pressure checking methods. The skill goals were
specific to the Stanislavskian approach, but I believe that I isolated them cleanly enough in my
My attribute training again targeted specific goals that could be seen as predominately related to Western realism. Attribute work is perhaps the area where other acting teachers might struggle to adopt my methods. I believe this is due not to deficiency in other acting teachers, but rather to the foreign nature of the concept of attributes to most acting training. The distinction Sonnon draws and that I build on between skills and attributes is not often addressed in actor training. Further, the concept of incrementally sophisticating physical exercises, while common to some movement teaching methods is not standard in actor training. That being said, I have found it to be a valuable distinction for helping me to isolate and effectively address student issues in the classroom. Increased granularity of insight about where a problem lies makes it substantially easier to address that problem. I hope my description of attributes as a concept, and of methods for training them was clear enough to be helpful to other teachers of acting.

The pressure checking methods I used in this research were intentionally generic. I used simple physical movements either to raise the heart rate or mildly disorient the students. Alternatively, I used distracting music to challenge the students’ focus while working on a scene. All of these means could be generically applied by other teachers. There is no need for special physical conditioning exercises. Any activity that will sufficiently raise the heart rate will do. This can be scalable to the specific needs of different students. In fact within the work on this dissertation there were times when different students would perform different exercises to elicit raised heart rate. These variations were decided on the basis of differing physical abilities, differing energy levels on a given day, and in some cases differences in costuming.
The other side of the methods question was how to test and document that the practices used in the classroom were achieving the expected results. I experimented with a combination of tests. The first, a series of questionnaires that I wrote designed to check students’ thoughts and perceptions about acting over the course of the semester. The second, three separate personality tests intended to monitor changes in Carlstedt’s three Primary Higher Order Factors: absorption, neuroticism, and repressive coping. Surprisingly, this second set of tests, which I had thought would form the bulk of my analysis proved to be of little help. It was the questionnaires I developed that turned out to give me insight into the success or failure of my process.

**Results**

As I discussed in detail in Chapters III and IV, the results of this study were mixed. I do believe there were enough positive results to support continuing this research. I do not believe I have strongly proven my basic hypothesis.

The students in the course had a range of responses to the experience. Some of them seemed to grow, while others remained static. I am pleased that no one seems to have been made worse by the experience. I believe there is room for development in both the pedagogical methods used in the course, and even more significantly the testing methods.

First, I want to consider the key pedagogical changes. As I discussed in Chapter III, I want to reconsider the role of improvisation in training. I believe it provides a training method that combines incremental learning with self correction and a degree of performance pressure. I have been implementing this approach with my Intermediate Acting classes in the 2015-2016 school year at Stephen F. Austin State University. Stanislavsky’s Active Analysis method formed the basis for this work. Briefly, Active Analysis involves actors familiarizing themselves
with the basics of a scene, and then improvising around those basics. The process begins with silent improvisation, and over the course of many repetitions the actors begin to improvise words. Between each improvisation the actors consider what parts of their work matched the original scene and what parts did not. From there they consider changes to their objectives or tactics that might allow them to find the missing elements of the original scene. Gradually, the improvised scene gets closer and closer to the scripted scene until they become the same.\(^{23}\)

The Active Analysis process allows students to gradually figure out their character in an embodied process and in direct interaction with their scene partner without having to focus on remembering specific blocking or words. Also, the actors deepen their understanding of a script through a direct and repeated back and forth between script analysis and performance.

I am just beginning to apply this process, and have not incorporated stress testing into my use of Active Analysis. Additionally, I have not attempted to make any detailed study of the results. The initial anecdotal and observational feedback has been encouraging. This is a route I plan to pursue further in the future.

The other major consideration I raised in Chapter III was the need to make direct contact with fellow scholars in the sciences who might be willing to work with me. I have recently (as of Spring 2016) secured a tenure-track Assistant Professor position at SFA. I am beginning to look for colleagues, who would be willing to research with me. I am in the earliest stages of this process, but I am optimistic.

In Chapter IV, I described twelve lessons I learned from this experience. Reflecting on them now, I am still looking for ways to implement those ideas. I have begun having regular discussions with my acting students about the role of talent versus skill development, and the

\(^{23}\) For detailed discussions of Active Analysis see: Carnickie, 2008 and Merlin, 2007
dangers of believing talent is sustainable. It is an old insight going in actor training at least back to Stanislavsky, but I am discovering that each new generation seems to need to learn the lesson again. I have found ways to include conditioning for my acting students. This conditioning is much more obviously connected to their in-class acting work, so they have an easier time seeing the logic of it for themselves. I am still in search of forms training for actors. I have some ideas for it, but I haven’t had an opportunity to experiment, and implement. I am confident that I will have that opportunity in the future. I have begun to have regular conversations with students about what drives them as performers. As a class, they dig into their motivations and ignition points so that they can retain those motivations in times of difficulty. I have also begun to find ways to more actively integrate the importance and value of failure for the learning process with my students. With my Movement II class at SFA we explore what I call “the pedagogy of failure” into mask, clown, and mime work. The students have started to embrace this idea. The question of dealing with wide ranging student motivations has disappeared for the moment. I am currently teaching intermediate and advanced level acting classes in a BFA program, so the motivations are fairly consistent between students.

**Contribution**

While I do not think this dissertation will turn into a book, many of the ideas and methods that I developed over the course of this project will continue to be explored both in my practical work, and my scholarship. I have a few writing projects in mind built off of work from this study. In particular, I envision developing an expanded discussion of the role of skill training versus attribute development in the acting studio. Also, as I begin to make contacts in other departments across campus, I believe an article discussing the necessary connections and
balances to be sought when working across disciplinary lines would be useful for myself and for the other scholars in the budding scholarship that strives to integrate science and theatre.

In addition to these specific future goals, I hope that my work here, and the articles and presentations, which will stem from it, will help to reshape the contemporary conversation about acting and acting teaching. I believe there are two areas to address here. The first is the consistent mysticism and obscurantism around much actor training. The second is opening the door to serious conversations about how acting teachers are teaching rather than what they are teaching.

I have had many acting teachers in my life. Most of them were wonderful. Most of them were also teaching a mish mash, conglomeration of things they picked up along the way. Even full systems like Grotowski’s and Suzuki’s are filled with incoherent statements about “penetration” and “animal energy.” By bring concrete research on how humans function, and how an understanding of that functioning applies to acting, I intend to wipe away some of that mysticism. Of course, the other side of this coin is that what is known about human psychophysiology is constantly changing and developing. There is still much debate. As for me – and, I hope, for an increasing number of my colleagues – I do not want to ignore that research or stand by and watch those debates happen. I want, as I have done in this study, to dive into the ocean of scientific research on the body/mind, and see what can help me better understand the art and craft of acting.

The other side of this equation is the teaching of acting. A clearer more logical approach to acting is important, but with it must come a well-supported approach to teaching this material to the next generation of actors. It is here that I think this study most contributes to the disciplinary discussion about acting. I have used the training I received from Sonnon to
reconsider how acting is being taught in an effort to address one of the central problems in acting pedagogy: skill retention. This type of work could serve as a model for future studies. No matter what question within actor training scholars are considering or what tools from the sciences they seek to apply to that study, the model I have followed here can help. Acting teachers need to not simply borrow ideas from the sciences, but submit the application of those ideas and their pedagogy in general to rigorous testing and examination. In this study, I have provided an example of that process, which I believe will benefit future scholars in this area of research.

**Conclusion**

I have been considering the idea for this study since the early 2000s. It is good to see the project come to fruition. I believe, as do a few other contemporary scholars I have mentioned throughout this study, that aligning theatre scholarship with scientific research is a fruitful direction for the future of theatre research.

I am one of the first theatre scholars to attempt this interdisciplinary research in an organized study form. I am the only scholar, to my knowledge, to do so in the acting studio. My goal is to take the lessons from this experience, and use them to build a research agenda that continues the development of this practical blending of science and theatre.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

ACTING KNOWLEDGE TESTS

Assessment Forms

THFM 2410

Name_________________ Date________

Thinking About Acting Test

What are the actor’s main tasks in a rehearsal process?

How does the actor learn information about their character?

How does an actor create a character?

How does an actor decide what to do in a scene?

How does an actor convey emotion to an audience?
Define the following terms:

Given Circumstances:

Objective:

Obstacle:

Action:

Beat:
APPENDIX B

THE PRESSURES OF PERFORMANCE REFLECTION

How would you describe your mental and physical experience of performing?

Before you perform:

During performance:

After performance:

Describe, in detail, a time when you felt that you had a great performance. Focus on what you experienced while performing:

Describe, in detail, a time when you felt that you had a poor performance. Focus on what you experienced while performing:
What do you believe caused these states of success or failure?

What could you do in the future to increase the likelihood of success while diminishing the likelihood of failure?

Agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 – 10, ten being strong agreement, one being strong disagreement.

When I become involved in an activity it is difficult to distract me.  ____

I am able to clearly visualize potential or past experiences in my imagination.  ____

When under pressure I rarely experience negative thoughts about my performance. ____

I tend to remember the good things that happen to me rather than the bad. ____

My friends easily guess my feeling based from facial expression and body language. ____

I easily look past problems to focus on accomplishing a specific task. ____
APPENDIX C

PERSONALITY TESTS

Tellegen Absorption Scale (from Tellegen & Atkinson and Rossi)

Check all items that are true for you.

1. ___ Sometimes I feel and experience things as I did when I was a child.

2. ___ I can be greatly moved by eloquent or poetic language.

3. ___ While watching a movie, a TV show, or a play, I may become so involved that I may forget about myself and my surroundings and experience the story as if it were real and as if I were taking part in it.

4. ___ If I stare at a picture and then look away from it, I can sometimes “see” an image of the picture almost as if I were still looking at it.

5. ___ Sometimes I feel as if my mind could envelop the whole world.

6. ___ I like to watch cloud shapes change in the sky.

7. ___ If I wish I can imagine (or daydream) some things so vividly that they hold my attention as a good movie or story does.

8. ___ I think I really know what some people mean when they talk about mystical experiences.

9. ___ I sometimes “step outside” my usual self and experience an entirely different state of being.

10. ___ Textures - - such as wool, sand, wood - - sometimes remind me of colors or music.

11. ___ Sometimes I experience things as if they were doubly real.

12. ___ When I listen to music, I can get so caught up in it that I don’t notice anything else.

13. ___ If I wish I can imagine that my body is so heavy that I could not move it if I wanted to.

14. ___ I can often somehow sense the presence of another person before I actually see her/him.

15. ___ The crackle and flames of a wood fire stimulate my imagination.
16. ____ It is sometimes possible for me to be completely immersed in nature or in art and feel as if my whole state of consciousness has somehow been temporarily altered.

17. ____ Different colors have distinctive and special meanings for me.

18. ____ I am able to wander off into my thoughts while doing a routine task and actually forget that I am doing the task, and then find a few minutes later that I have completed it.

19. ____ I can sometimes recollect certain past experiences in my life with such clarity and vividness that it is like living them again or almost so.

20. ____ Things that might seem meaningless to others often make sense to me.

21. ____ While acting in a play I think I could really feel the emotions of the character and “become” her/him for the time being, forgetting both myself and the audience.

22. ____ My thoughts often don’t occur as words but as visual images.

23. ____ I often take delight in small things (like the five-pointed star shape that appears when you cut an apple across the core or the colors I soap bubbles.

24. ____ When listening to organ music or other powerful music I sometimes feel as if I am being lifted into the air.

25. ____ Sometimes I can change noise into music by the way that I listen to it.

26. ____ Some of my most vivid memories are called up by scents and smells.

27. ____ Some music reminds me of pictures or changing color patterns.

28. ____ I often know what someone is going to say before he or she says it.

29. ____ I often have “physical memories;” for example, after I have been swimming I may still feel as if I am still in the water.

30. ____ The sound of a voice can be so fascinating to me that I can just go on listening to it.

31. ____ At times I somehow feel the presence of someone who is not there.

32. ____ Sometimes thoughts and images come to me without the slightest effort on my part.

33. ____ I find that different odors have different colors.

34. ____ I can be deeply moved by a sunset.
**Eysenck Neuroticism profile** (from Eysenck and Francis, et al.)

1. Does your mood often go up and down?  
   - Yes  
   - No

2. Do you take much notice of what people think?  
   - Yes  
   - No

3. Are you a talkative person?  
   - Yes  
   - No

4. If you say you will do something, do you always keep your promise no matter how inconvenient it might be?  
   - Yes  
   - No

5. Do you ever feel ‘just miserable’ for no reason?  
   - Yes  
   - No

6. Would being in debt worry you?  
   - Yes  
   - No

7. Are you rather lively?  
   - Yes  
   - No

8. Were you ever greedy by helping yourself to more than your share of anything?  
   - Yes  
   - No

9. Are you an irritable person?  
   - Yes  
   - No

10. Would you take drugs, which may have strange or dangerous effects?  
    - Yes  
    - No

11. Do you enjoy meeting new people?  
    - Yes  
    - No

12. Have you every blamed someone for doing something you knew was really your fault?  
    - Yes  
    - No

13. Are your feelings easily hurt?  
    - Yes  
    - No

14. Do you prefer to go your own way rather than act by the rules?  
    - Yes  
    - No

15. Can you usually let yourself go and enjoy yourself at a lively party?  
    - Yes  
    - No

16. Are all your habits good and desirable ones?  
    - Yes  
    - No

17. Do you often feel ‘fed-up’?  
    - Yes  
    - No

18. Do good manners and cleanliness matter much to you?  
    - Yes  
    - No

19. Do you usually take the initiative in making new friends?  
    - Yes  
    - No
20. Have you ever taken anything (even a pin or button) that belonged to someone else?  
   Yes  No

21. Would you call yourself a nervous person?  
   Yes  No

22. Do you think marriage is old-fashioned and should be done away with?  
   Yes  No

23. Can you easily get some life into a rather dull party?  
   Yes  No

24. Have you ever broken or lost something belonging to someone else?  
   Yes  No

25. Are you a worrier?  
   Yes  No

26. Do you enjoy co-operating with others?  
   Yes  No

27. Do you tend to keep in the background on social occasions?  
   Yes  No

28. Does it worry you if you know there are mistakes in your work?  
   Yes  No

29. Have you ever said anything bad or nasty about anyone?  
   Yes  No

30. Would you call yourself tense or ‘highly strung’?  
   Yes  No

31. Do you think people spend too much time safeguarding their future with savings and insurance?  
   Yes  No

32. Do you like mixing with people?  
   Yes  No

33. As a child were you every cheeky to your parents?  
   Yes  No

34. Do you worry too long after an embarrassing experience?  
   Yes  No

35. Do you try not to be rude to people?  
   Yes  No

36. Do you like plenty of bustle and excitement around you?  
   Yes  No

37. Have you ever cheated at a game?  
   Yes  No

38. Do you suffer from ‘nerves’?  
   Yes  No

39. Would you like other people to be afraid of you?  
   Yes  No

40. Have you ever taken advantage of someone?  
   Yes  No
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are you mostly quiet when you are with other people?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you often feel lonely?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it better to follow society’s rules than go your own way?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do other people think of you as being very lively?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you always practice what you preach?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you often troubled about feelings of guilt?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you sometimes put off until tomorrow what you ought to do today?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you get a party going?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale** (from Crowne & Marlowe)

Below are a number of statements concerning personal attitudes and traits. Read each statement and decide whether the statement is true or false as it pertains to you personally.

1. Before voting I thoroughly investigate the qualifications of all the candidates.
2. I never hesitate to go out of my way to help someone in trouble.
3. It is sometimes hard for me to go on with my work if I am not encouraged.
4. I have never intensely disliked anyone.
5. On occasion I have had doubts about my ability to succeed in life.
6. I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way.
7. I am always careful about my manner of dress.
8. My table manners at home are as good as when I eat out in a restaurant.
9. If I could get into a movie without paying and be sure I was not seen I would probably do it.
10. On a few occasions, I have given up doing something because I thought too little of my ability.
11. I like to gossip at times.
12. There have been times when I felt like rebelling against people in authority even though I knew they were right.
13. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.
14. I can remember "playing sick" to get out of something.
15. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.
16. I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.
17. I always try to practice what I preach.
18. I don't find it particularly difficult to get along with loud mouthed, obnoxious people.
19. I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.
20. When I don't know something I don't at all mind admitting it.
21. I am always courteous, even to people who are disagreeable.

22. At times I have really insisted on having things my own way.

23. There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.

24. I would never think of letting someone else be punished for my wrong-doings.

25. I never resent being asked to return a favor.

26. I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.

27. I never make a long trip without checking the safety of my car.

28. There have been times when I was quite jealous of the good fortune of others.

29. I have almost never felt the urge to tell someone off.

30. I am sometimes irritated by people who ask favors of me.

31. I have never felt that I was punished without cause.

32. I sometimes think when people have a misfortune they only got what they deserved.

33. I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.
Works Cited


APPENDIX D

The Actor’s Workbook

For each role that you play you will compile an actor’s workbook. A workbook will include script analysis, character analysis, and a marked or scored script that you have fully annotated for the role you are playing. The workbook will document the evolution of your thinking about the script and the character as well as serve as a record of your rehearsal process. What follows is a step-by-step guide to compiling an actor’s workbook.

I. Read and Re-read the Script:

The script always comes first. It limits what you can do, the choices you can make. Still, remember that it is a blueprint for performance. There is a lot of “white space” to fill in.

II. Script Analysis:

Re-read the text once again and answer the following questions. Cite specific lines/moments in the text to support your answers.

A. Given Circumstances: What are the facts and clues the writer had given to me that I must honor when building my character? If working on a piece with multiple scenes, do this for each scene. When working on a long piece, you do not need to repeat information; rather, create a detailed account of what is given, including information when circumstances change.
   1. Where does the scene take place? (country, state/province, city, neighborhood, house, room, area in room)? What is the environment (animate and inanimate objects, people, pets, plants, furniture, floor coverings, colors, textures)? Describe the surrounding in detail.
   2. What time is it? (year, month, day of week, season, exact time)?
   3. What do I, as the character, know about myself – my attitudes, my background – that is relevant to the scene?
   4. What do I say about myself as the character? What do the other characters say about me? Given what the script tells me, are those things true?
   5. How do the other characters treat my character?
   6. Who are the other characters and what facts do I, as the character, know about them? What are my relationships to them emotionally?
   7. What literally happens during the scene?
   8. What events or conversations have taken place – or have not taken place – that are relevant to the scene? What happens immediately following the scene? What future is implied?

B. Super-Objective: What do I want that drives me from the beginning of the story to its end?

C. Objective: What do I want from the person(s) I’m talking to that drives me from the beginning of the scene to its end? Determine your objective for each scene. In the event it changes (a beat change), note where and why that occurs.
D. Stakes: How high are the stakes? What will happen if I don’t get what I want?

E. Emotional relationship: What is my specific relationship to the person(s) I am talking to? Do any secondary or offstage relationships affect my behavior?

F. Moment Before: What relevant events lead up to the scene, how do they affect my character emotionally and physically, and how am I going to get there?

G. Obstacle: What’s standing in the way of getting what I want?

H. Environment: How does the place affect me emotionally and physically?

III. Character Building:

A. Behaviors:
   1. **Physical**: What physical behavior can I bring to reveal who my character is and what my true motives are? What is my character’s body center? What particular animal embodies the energy and physicality of my character? Do I have any gestures that say something about who I am? What do these things say about me emotionally?
   2. **Vocal**: How does this character talk? Does the character have a dialect or accent? Is there anything I can do vocally to bring this character to life? What do these things say about me emotionally?
   3. **Emotional**: Does my character have any secrets? What is my character's worldview? What song can I use to prepare myself for playing this character?

B. **50 Character Questions** (do your best to come up with answers that trigger you, the character, emotionally):
   1. Where were you born and when?
   2. What are the 5 most common active verbs that you use to get what you want?
   3. What type of humor cracks you up?
   4. What are 3 situations that would bring you to tears?
   5. What do you do for work?
   6. What do you love about each of your family members?
   7. What is your favorite spectator sport?
   8. What is your favorite sport to participate in?
   9. What is your favorite TV show?
   10. What would put you into a rage?
   11. What is your favorite color?
   12. What is your political affiliation?
   13. Do you gamble?
   14. Do you have children? Do you like children?
   15. What religion do you practice and how do you feel about it?
   16. What's the most exciting thing that has ever happened to you?
   17. What is the scariest thing that has ever happened to you?
   18. How are you brave?
   19. Describe your house or apartment or wherever you live?
20. What diseases have you ever had and what were the effects?
21. Have you ever been in love? When and with whom?
22. When and where was your first sexual experience?
23. Do you smoke or drink?
24. Do you take drugs or have you ever?
25. What are your life goals? Name 3?
26. What do you think is your best physical attribute?
27. What do you like least about your appearance?
28. What are your strongest and weakest personality traits?
29. What piece of music would soothe you?
30. Who in this world would you change places with?
31. How do you react to heavily emotional situations?
32. Are you more of an aggressive or passive person?
33. If you could change anything in your life, what would it be?
34. What is your body language like?
35. What are your favorite foods?
36. How would you describe your sex life?
37. What newspapers/magazines/news sources do you read? What section of the paper do you go to first?
38. What is the most recent book you've read?
39. If you could be any kind of animal what would you choose? (This is different from the animal that represents you)
40. How do you dress?
41. How do you hide your feelings?
42. How do you feel about death?
43. How do you get along with people in general (at home, at work, in romantic situations)?
44. What is your secret shame, if anything?
45. Why don't you want to die? Or what do you have to live for?
46. What contribution do you want to leave for the world?
47. What do you feel about your education?
48. Who is your hero from life or history?
49. What is your relationship to money?
50. What is your greatest pleasure?

Two notes: 1) The importance of various factors will vary from character to character and from play to play. 2) This list is by no means exhaustive. It serves only to spark your thinking.

C. Intentions: What are the physical and verbal intentions/tactics/verbs/actions I use to get what I want in the scene? Characters can only be communicated by observable and audible actions. A script will give you an outline of the actions. It is your job as an actor to animate these actions from moment to moment. So, now is the time to take the biography you have worked so hard to uncover and specify and translate it into action: S/he is X, therefore s/he does Y. Every personality trait is expressed to the audience through action. For example, the caregiver nurtures, soothes, and caresses while the troublemaker complains, demands, and interferes. Organize your information as follows:
Biographical Elements
I am, have, was, feel, want
>>>therefore>>> (the intellectual)
My father was a general
>>>therefore>>> (the observable)

Character Elements
I do . . .
I command, I march, I dominate, I play with guns, I confront

And so on . . .

Be aware that you may find contradictions and/or the same character element supporting more than one biographical element. This is a telling clue to you character’s priorities. This process will give rise to many ideas for performance, things you can see yourself doing, and actions that are tailor made for your character.

IV. The Score.
Once you have completed the actions analysis, you are ready to score. Begin by photocopying the entire script (do not merely copy your lines). Then cut and paste each page on a blank sheet of paper. Highlight your lines. Make three columns next to the script. Label each column: Subtext, Objectives & Intentions, and Emotional Triggers & Inner Imagery. All responses on the score should be done in pencil.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Put the script here</th>
<th>Subtext</th>
<th>Objectives &amp; Intentions</th>
<th>Emotional Triggers &amp; Inner Imagery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

A. Column I - Subtext
Respond to each line in one single precise sentence. What are you saying? Do the words you say really express your feelings and thoughts? Stanislavsky was one of the first acting teachers to establish the notion that a play’s text was accompanied by subtext—the undescribed and unspoken desires that lie underneath the literal text. Rarely is the meaning of the line in the literal definition of the words. Furthermore, a line rarely serves to merely provide information. So, even if “yes” means “yes” there is something behind that word, driving the character toward a goal.

To find the subtextual meaning of a line the actor must tie it to his/her objective. Two questions to ask to ensure you are constructing an appropriate subtext:
1. How does that line further your intention or movement toward the objective?
2. How does the line relate to the previous line(s)? - Consider the context - listen and react - a line that isn’t delivered within the context will stand out as a “superfluous wrong”
B. Column II - Objectives/Obstacles/Intentions
State your main objective at the top of this column using the following structure:

- I want to (action verb) so that (result).
- Re-state your objectives, obstacles, and actions whenever they change.
  - Objective – What the character wants
  - Obstacle – What stands in the way of the objective
  - Intention (action/tactic) – How the character attempts to overcome the obstacle

Your number one job as an actor is to find objectives that are based in the givens and to make the most exciting choice imaginable; then play intentions/actions that propel you toward that goal. The script is filled with hundreds of details that can be mined for information. Constantly reread the script to inform your choices.

C. Column III - Emotional Triggers/Inner Imagery
1. Emotional Triggers: Where are the emotional moments and how will I connect to them? What is the event by which I need to be triggered? What might the character be feeling because of the event? How am I going to get there using real life, imagination, or 50/50?
2. As If: This is when you relate to the circumstances in the scene on a very personal level. Begin with, “It is as if I . . . “. This will help give you a fuller understanding of the character’s situation by likening it to something from your own life. In creating this parallel, the character’s risk becomes your risk. No more than 2 or 3 simple sentences. Stay away from things/experiences that are too personal or private, as these will shut you down and work against you.
3. Inner Imagery: What persons, places, objects, and events in this script need to be endowed with specific emotional backgrounds? Images can be used once the actor has clearly defined an objective and specified appropriate physical actions that accompany that objective. Basically, you enrich the objective and action with a striking image drawn from either: (a) your own life -- e.g., emotional response sought--happiness/ contentment - probable image - mom’s kitchen with the smell of homemade bread. On your score you might only need to include the words mom’s kitchen or homemade bread – (b) or from the depths of your imagination – e.g., the attitude at this moment for this character is like a summer storm – perhaps include the words summer storm on your score.

V. Final Notes:
A. Keep all of the materials that make up your workbook in a single folder.
B. Steps II (Play Analysis) and III (Character Analysis) can be either typed or hand-written but must be legible. You may organize this information in the way that is clearest for you—write essays, make lists, use outlines—just make sure you use complete sentences. I must be able understand what you have done and see that you have thoroughly investigated the script and character using this process.
C. Step IV (the Score) is always done in pencil.
D. Always be specific.
VI. Bibliography.

APPENDIX E

COURSE SYLLABUS

Bowling Green State University
Department of Theatre and Film
THFM 2410: Acting—Principles
Fall 2013

INSTRUCTOR
Name: Slade Billew
Office: Wolfe Center 212
Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30 – 3:30, Thursdays 10-11 or by appointment
E-mail: Please contact me through Canvas

CATALOG COURSE DESCRIPTION
Basic techniques of acting applied to creating contemporary characters in realistic situations; imaginative, emotional, and sensory responsiveness.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. Delve deeply into the process of thinking like an actor when working on contemporary realistic plays.
2. Learn to find given circumstances within a script, and to determine the influence of those circumstances on performance choices.
3. Understand how to develop a physical and vocal characterization using movement analysis as a tool for creating specific choices.
4. Use the concepts of objectives, obstacles, and intentions to bring a script to life on the stage.
5. Explore methods of connecting imaginatively and emotionally to theatrical texts and to scene partners.
6. Engage in critical analysis of the work of fellow actors as a tool to enhance the ability to think specifically and clearly about the acting process.
7. Develop a basic understanding of the life of the professional actor.

TEXTS
Harbison, Lawrence, ed. 2008: The Best Ten-Minute Plays for Two Actors. Smith and Kraus.

A NOTE ON COURSE CONTENT
Material written for dramatic performance deals with the extraordinary. Plays often contain situations that include violence, sexuality, power, money, unpleasant family issues, cursing, and ideological or philosophical points of view you may not share, as well as love, triumph, beauty, and transcendence. You may find some material difficult. In performing material that contains difficult physical or emotional terrain, it is crucial that you set your own boundaries.
If at any time you feel uncomfortable, it is your job to say so. I can only help ensure the respect of your personal boundaries/limits when they are made clear to me.

**EXPECTATIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM FROM STUDENT ACTORS**

I expect the following from each student actor:

1. To come to class ready to constructively support your colleagues
2. To turn off and put out of sight during class all cell phones.
3. To participate in all in-class discussions
4. To be thoroughly prepared for all in-class and out-of-class rehearsals
5. To invest yourself vigorously and fully in warm-ups, improvisations, explorations, and acting assignments
6. To never eat, smoke or chew gum in class unless it is part of a scene (you will, however, want to bring a healthy drink)
7. To wear comfortable, non-restrictive clothing and footwear (Note: Your inability to move freely due to clothing or footwear will result in dismissal from the acting studio for that day and will count as an absence)
8. To never bring weapons or any seemingly or potentially harmful items into the acting studio. Props to be used as weapons must be checked and cleared by the instructor in advance of the rehearsal and/or performance. The University weapons policy, from the BGSU Student Handbook states “The University prohibits weapons of any kind on campus.”
9. To contribute a positive energy, one conducive to constructing a safe playing space wherein all actors are free to explore and take risks

**DESCRIPTION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

**Participation, including various assignments and production attendance**

For participation, I will consider your involvement in discussions, your preparation for in-class rehearsals, and your attitude during warm-ups and in class exercises. In addition, your participation grade will include a consideration of the following:

- **a.** The warm-up will open most every class meeting. It is an intensive and extensive physical, vocal, and mental practice combining elements of joint mobility, yoga, dance, calisthenics, breath placement, expansion and support, and articulation exercises. The warm-up is designed to build strength, flexibility, awareness, concentration, and focus. Participation in the warm-up is required. If you have specific medical concerns please let me know so that I can make accommodations.

- **b.** Short writing assignments. Writing about your experiences in class is an excellent way to reflect on your own learning. Also it serves as a way for me to check your understanding of the process in an informal way. This allows me to clear up confusions you may have about the material before you complete substantial assignments. Therefore at various points in the semester I will ask you either alone or in small groups to reflect on some aspect of the readings or classwork in short writing assignments that will be turned in to me.
c. Throughout the semester, there will be times when you will be asked to prepare and/or bring something to an upcoming class session. This might be as simple as jotting down a few thoughts or involved as rehearsing and preparing a short scene.

d. It is imperative that all students have read and be ready to discuss and physicalize the material by the class time indicated on the daily schedule.

e. As part of this course, you are required to attend the two “main stage” productions, produced by the Department of Theatre and Film this term: Clybourne Park and The Liar. A short, one page (250 word), written response is due the class period following the closing of each performance. The week before the play opens, I will provide a prompt that will guide your response. It is your responsibility to check on times and secure tickets. You may also attend either of the two Elsewhere Season performances Red Horse Animations or The Illusion, and write a response for extra credit.

For the various assignments, quizzes, and production responses you will receive a grade of 0-4 (or F-A). At the end of the term, all these grades will be taken into consideration as I compiled your final participation grade.

First Scene
The first graded acting assignment is a short scene from a play TBD. This assignment is your foundation for understanding the Actor’s Workbook process that is the core of the class. It will be broken down into three parts. For each part you will have opportunities to share drafts of your work before the final due date.

Part One – Script Analysis. We will explore how the process of script analysis benefits the actor, and you will complete a draft of the first section of the actor’s workbook.

Part Two – We will examine ideas about characterization and see how the actor’s workbook process benefits our understanding and creation of character. During this period you will complete a draft of part two of the Actor’s Workbook.

Part Three – We will develop an actor’s score for the scene based on the work we have done in the previous parts, as well as an exploration of objectives, obstacles, and beats. At the end of this section you will turn in a revised and complete Actor’s Workbook with score, and perform a final version of your scene for the class.

Actor’s Workbook for Einstein + the Angels
The Actor’s Workbook for Einstein + the Angels is an opportunity for you to enhance your understanding of the “homework” that goes into preparing a role for performance. For this play, you will prepare an Actor’s Workbook, which contains a detailed analysis of an assigned character. You will use the Workbook model again when working on your scene later in the term. The workbook compiled for this assignment and for the final scene will have three components: 1) script analysis, 2) character analysis, and 3) an actor’s score/marked script.

Exam
There will be one comprehensive exam covering all the reading and lecture material covered in the first part of the term (through the end of October). The exam might involve true/false,
multiple choice, fill in the blank questions, short answer and/or essay questions. There will not be any formal, in-class review session. I suggest that you create a study group early in the term as a way of organizing the information and preparing for these exams. No early or late exams will be given.

**Scene**
The culminating assignment for this course will be the scene. You will perform one, seven to ten minute scene with a partner. The evaluation of your scene will involve not only your performance, but also your Actor’s Workbook and corresponding Rehearsal Log.

**GRADING**
- **Participation** (including various assignments, quizzes, and production attendance) 10%
- **First Scene** (7.5% Actor’s Workbook & 7.5% Performance) 15%
- **Actor’s Workbook for Einstein + the Angels** 20%
- **Exam** 15%
- **Scene** (15% Actor’s Workbook, 20% Performance, & 5% Rehearsal Log) 40%

Total = 100%

The following scale will be used to determine the final grade:
- A=90%-100%
- B=80%-89%
- C=70%-79%
- D=60-69%
- F=Below 60%

**CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCES**
- **F** - Failure to show up on the day a project is due, lack of preparation, lack of responsibility to scene partner.
- **D** - Inadequate preparation, poor work.
- **C** - Memorized, evidence of preparation.
- **B** - Same as C grade plus believable, honest characterization/personalization, skill with language, effective physical work, and application of learned skills.
- **A** - Imaginative character choices (risk taking), growing skill in handling of language, actions clear, varied and interesting as well as effective, solid command and control of physical work, facile application of learned skills/tools.

This is to give you a feel of what I will be looking for in your performance. Grades, of course, may well fall some somewhere in-between the points designated, such as a “B+”.

**LATE WORK POLICY**
1. Performance. There is no way to make up a missed performance.
2. Written Work: All written work is due at the beginning of class. For all written work turned in late there will be a full letter grade deduction applied to the final grade for that project for each additional 24 hour period starting at the beginning of class on the due date. This “clock” continues to run over weekends and holidays. In extreme circumstances, non-penalty extensions may be arranged between the student and the
instructor. However, these extensions must be negotiated at the earliest possible date and the student must provide evidence of progress on the project. Having a computer or printer problem at the last minute, having a paper due or exam in another class, being involved in production, or wanting to leave early for most any purpose are not legitimate reasons for late work. Plan ahead.

3. Failure to hand in or perform any part of a major assignment results in automatic failure of the course.

**ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Since this course is participatory in nature, attendance is mandatory. Most of our work relies on the interaction between partners. Therefore when you are absent the entire group is diminished. There is no such thing as an “excused” or “unexcused” absence. Absence (outside of exceptional circumstances) will impact your participation grade.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

It is important that you take every opportunity to present your ideas in both class discussion and in written work. It is equally important that the ideas that you present are the work of your sole study and effort. Please understand that plagiarism in any form constitutes academic misconduct (as defined and discussed in the Student Handbook) and is grounds for discipline. Any attempt to submit the work of another person as though it were your own constitutes plagiarism. Furthermore, if you consult research sources and incorporate ideas or text from them, it is expected that you will properly cite and attribute them.

Cheating: Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise.

Fabrication: Falsification or invention of any information of citation in an academic exercise.

Plagiarism: Representing the words or ideas of another’s as one’s own in any academic exercise.

Facilitating: Helping or attempting to help another commit an act of academic dishonesty.

The instructor and students in this course will adhere to the University’s general Codes of Conduct defined in the *BGSU Student Handbook*. Specifically, the Code of Academic Conduct (Academic Honesty Policy) requires that students do not cheat, fabricate, plagiarize, or facilitate academic dishonesty. For details, refer to:

*BGSU Student Handbook* ([http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/studentdiscipline](http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/studentdiscipline))


**DISABILITY POLICY**

In accordance with the University policy, if the student has a documented disability and requires accommodations to obtain equal access in this course, he or she should contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester and make this need known. Students with disabilities must verify their eligibility through the Office of Disability Services for Students, 413 South Hall, 419-372-8495. ([http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/disability/index.html](http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/disability/index.html))
RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

It is the policy of the University to make every reasonable effort allowing students to observe their religious holidays without academic penalty. In such cases, it is the obligation of the student to provide the instructor with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which he or she will be absent. Absence from classes or examinations for religious reasons does not relieve the student of responsibility for completing required work missed. Following the necessary notification, the student should consult with the instructor to determine what appropriate alternative opportunity will be provided, allowing the student to complete his or her academic responsibilities. (As stated in The Academic Charter, B-II.G-4.b at: http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/file919.pdf)
Course Schedule
(Subject to change)

Week 1 (Aug. 26 & 28)
Introduction to Course; Getting to Know You; Why Take Acting?; Introduce Warm-Up; Trust & Awareness; Work Ethic and Given Circumstances. Initial Testing.

Reading: Intro, Work Ethic, and Given Circumstances in Woolson (pp. i-18).

Week 2 (Sept. 4)
Solidify Warm-Up; What is Acting?; Doing vs. Being; Superobjectives, Objectives, and Stakes; Introduce Actor’s Workbook.

Reading: Superobjective, Objective, and Stakes in Woolson (pp. 19-39); and A Funeral Home in Brooklyn in Harbison (pp. 77-82).

Week 3 (Sept. 9 & 11)
More on the Actor’s Workbook; Emotional Relationship, Environment, and Character Work.

Draft Of Actor’s Workbook Part II Due Monday
Reading: Emotional Relationship, Environment and Character Work in Woolson (pp. 41-49 & 123-156).

Week 4 (Sept. 16 & 18)
More on the Actor’s Workbook; Emotional Relationship and Emotional Triggers.

Draft of Actor’s Workbook Part III Due Monday
Reading: Emotional Triggers in Woolson (pp. 59-78).

Week 5 (Sept. 23 & 25)
More on Actor’s Workbook. Intentions, Obstacles, Strategies, and Beats.

Draft of Actor’s Workbook Part IV Due Wednesday
Reading: Intentions, Obstacles, Physical Behavior, and Destination in Woolson (pp. 89-122).

Week 6 (Sept. 30 & Oct 2)
Pulling the Actor’s Workbook together; Introduce Actor’s Workbook for Einstein + the Angels Project; Inner Imagery’ Performance under pressure.

Lines memorized.
Reading: Inner Imagery in Woolson (pp. 79-87).
Week 7 (Oct. 7 & 9)  Vocal Action and Subtext; The Moment Before, Trusting the Work, and Listening. Testing round two.

**Perform Scenes and First AW Due Monday**

**Reading:** The Moment Before and Trusting the Work and Listening in Woolson (pp. 51-57 & 217-221)

Week 8 (Oct. 14 & 16)  Developing unique character choices through rhythm. Handing out of blank scene

**Reading:** TBA

Week 9 (Oct. 21 & 23)  Character Rhythm continued, Integration work with blank scenes

**Blank scene memorized by Wednesday**


**Actor’s Workbook for Einstein + the Angels due Wednesday**

Week 11 (Nov. 4 & 6)  **Exam** (covering all readings and corresponding exercises and discussions); Directing practices.

Week 12 (Nov. 13)  Tablework Scenes; Opening Group Explorations for Scene work.


Final Meeting – Monday December 16, 3:30 – 5:30
Perform Scene and Submit Workbook and Rehearsal Logs.
APPENDIX F

DATA ANALYSIS

Means, Standard Deviations, Estimates Marginal Means and 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) for Personality Tests

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APPENDIX G

HSRB APPROVAL

DATE: August 6, 2014

TO: Barrett Billew, MFA

FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [376435-5] Holding on to the Basics: Using Sports Psychology to Increase Skill Retention in the Introduction to Acting Classroom

SUBMISSION TYPE: Continuing Review/Progress Report

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: August 6, 2014

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of Continuing Review/Progress Report materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has determined this project is exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. You may now begin the research activities.

Note that an amendment may not be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may change the research in such a way that it is no longer meets the criteria for exemption. A new application must be submitted and reviewed prior to modifying the research activity, unless the researcher believes that the change must be made to prevent harm to participants. In these cases, the Office of Research Compliance must be notified as soon as practicable.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Kristin Hagemyer at 419-372-7716 or khagemy@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.