

A teacher is *passionate*: Passionate about ideas and equally passionate about sharing those ideas with others. As an educator / fight director, I set the stage for actors to embrace the art of theatre as a collaborative, lifelong process by empowering them with the tools they need to shape their individual contribution to the art.

I believe the movement of the human body and vocal expressiveness are primal tools of the theatre artist. I use “primal” because acting is communication and, before the spoken word ever came to be, there was the language of the human body: the most expressive part of the actor. The expressive body, combined with the expressive voice, gives the actor what they need to connect on an emotionally visceral / primal level with a scene partner and with an audience. I teach actors to not only be vocally and physically strong, but also have flexibility, agility, creativity, balance and endurance. These are the foundations upon which expressiveness can be built. Nowhere is that level of storytelling more evident than it is within the discipline of stage combat.

I believe stage combat is just one tool in the actor's “toolbox” but, when well-crafted, it connects us all - like nothing else can - within that heightened moment where mere words are no longer able to resolve the conflict at hand. To that end, actors must become physically, collaboratively daring onstage. I teach them to become confident and comfortable within their bodies while wielding the tools of violence. When teaching a weapon discipline, whether part of a semester-long course or as part of a production's choreography, I not only focus on the vocabulary, safety, rhythm, musicality, spatial awareness, and the requisite techniques, I also make sure my actors understand the martial logic of the weapon, the potential dangers we avoid with proper technique, and the acting elements that make for a successful stage combat sequence – pursuing objectives, navigating obstacles, playing stakes, moments of discovery, broken expectations, playing pain, injury forensics, vocal scoring, and the power of breath as a storytelling element. Through all of this, I continually impress upon them that this moment of violence exists only to further the story, to deepen our empathy for the characters so we may examine our own humanity thru this unique lens – Just how much would we risk if we found ourselves within these circumstances? It is never about the action. It is about the action's risks / outcomes. It's not the slap we care about. Instead, our focus should be, “What did that slap do?”

Within these educational goals, I also particularly want to empower artists with tools to navigate the real world. First, I equip them with those techniques an actor combatant needs to develop the necessary skills for a fulfilling career. Second, I help them develop a notion of what it means to be professional at the craft, while still retaining the wonder of a true “lover” and eternal student of the art. Finally, in the working world as a theatre artist, we are often faced with decisions that must be weighed (personally and professionally) against a backdrop of larger issues. I teach my artists to develop a personal, ethical foundation and self-awareness of their own boundaries to help ground them in making strong choices for their theatre career. With this foundation, they can better navigate the path that will allow for lifelong development, as both artists and as citizens.