

Jesse Galas
Teaching Philosophy

RISK (verb) – to act or **fail to act** in such a way as to bring about the possibility of an unpleasant or unwelcome event.

“Aren’t all good things in life worth a little risk?” – David Wise, two-time Gold Medalist freestyle skier.

As teachers, we walk a constant tightrope of desperately wanting to keep our students’ minds and hearts and bodies healthy, while also pushing them to dig a little deeper, to risk a little more, because that’s what we must do, as storytellers. To find and share their voice as an artist, or indeed, any profession, they have to find the balance between keeping themselves safe and risking it all.

My objective as an educator and director is to create a brave environment in which students realize that to risk failure is to build emotional courage, and with each successive attempt to find their fearlessness, they empower themselves to use their voice in our work, regardless of medium. Whether it be Musical Theatre, Acting and Movement or Theatre History and Script Analysis; no matter how different these may seem on the surface, I want to share with them the varying techniques and solid foundation of each discipline and encourage them to make it their own. My constant opening statement to my students is that “people are polite, characters are not”. My job is to give my students the tools to build a character in which they have complete freedom, learn something about themselves through the process, and step back into their adult lives with fresh perspective and a healthier mind and body. As a scholar, it is then incumbent upon me to document these discoveries through workshops and performance, and then share this with our community at large.

I believe that our work in theatre is essential to developing humanity as a whole, and my mission is to nurture young adults to mature into engaging and involved members of a global society who learn to reason, to imagine, and to believe in themselves.

Academically:

When approaching a class of students straight from a high school drama program, whether they be actors, dancers, or singers, I find that most often these eager young minds, bodies, and voices were allowed to nurture bad habits to achieve product in a short and harried rehearsal environment and have no idea that acting or performing is anything beyond mere talent. I have to teach them to Listen and Respond. Release tension without losing intention. Really talk TO someone instead of AT someone. Build Ensemble. I strive to create an environment in which to try and fail is its own reward, and that talent cannot substitute for hard work. For beginners, I teach them who the great teachers are and were, and help them understand how to break down a contemporary monologue into beats, play an action, achieve an objective, combat obstacles and imagine high stakes...even if they can’t quite do it yet. In an intermediate class, we strive to marry the mental process of script analysis and physical discovery through the body and voice simultaneously, and ideally come to realize that one is not “better” than the other, merely different, which hopefully applies to their entire life. We focus on scene work, where they come to understand that the best performance lies in your partner. By the end of class, they will have surprised themselves, have corrected habitual tension to a neutral state, and have stopped reaching for emotion and instead find something to DO.

In my acting and movement classes, as well as vocal coaching, I have synthesized a combination of Stanislavski, Meisner and Michael Chekhov work in an effort to reach actors and singers across a variety of different disciplines with varying degrees of skill level. My strategy begins with the foundation of Stanislavski, enforcing the belief that talent cannot substitute for hard work and repeatable technique, then progresses into the essential listening and responding skills of Meisner (necessary for successful, imaginative actors), and then culminates in the ensemble-building physical active meanings of Michael Chekhov, which allows for not only an easily accessible emotional life literally from the muscles, but also a well-adjusted actor who can negotiate character development with ease and joy. I have found this methodology to be effective not only for the above classes, but also during audition coaching, stage combat workshops, voice and speech, acting the song, dialect work; anything where the actor and the text must become one. We find ways to learn from each other, because I believe the best teachers are also perpetual students, right there in the trenches, constantly working on a better way to get through. I don't have all the answers, but I'm not afraid to ask the questions. Because I risk, so can they. What fires them up? What pisses them off? What causes the armor to crack open for even a second to allow them to really feel something, and then *act* on it?

Artistically:

As a professional working actor for the past 26 years, I have a deep appreciation and understanding of the challenges facing our students as they go out into the world. Because I was based in New York City from 2010 – 2015, I have firsthand knowledge of the business of acting as it relates to auditioning, casting agents/directors, touring, keeping a second job; anything that is covered in the umbrella of life in the big city and how it can affect the creative work of our students. I can also share strategies on how to avoid some of the pitfalls of this situation and continue to be a thriving artist in a large and competitive community.

I have also taught several workshops on how our community is shifting to allow for and accommodate 21st century technology into our business, and how that could and should be used to our students' advantage, through an updated and professional website, self-taped auditions, etc. I also feel quite strongly that in order to stay current within our profession, one must continue the process of auditioning and booking work with companies with whom long-term relationships may be established, especially with regards to internships for our students, but also for personal acumen.

Conclusively:

If I have provided an open and inclusive community of shared ideas, a foundation of mutual trust and respect, and a brave space to risk in an environment that rewards the attempt, I truly think I have made a difference to anyone who walks into my class or auditions for my show. And that, more than anything, is what I really want. I want to nurture, to push, to cheerlead, to collaborate, and to celebrate the entire process of my students' growth in school and beyond. No matter what profession they choose to pursue, the ability to own their bodies and speak their thoughts with clarity and imagination will serve them in every facet of their personal and professional life. But if they do choose the path of an artist, I feel my job is to teach them how to risk, and in the doing, continue to fail beautifully. Because if they are risking, then they are *trying*, and I can't think of anything more rewarding than to watch a student surprise themselves.