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Jennifer Schulz, Spring 2019

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Jennifer Schulz, Department of Theatre Arts, Jennifer.Schulz@csusb.edu, Spring, 2019

Conference: National Alliance of Acting Teachers, 2019 Teacher Development Program

Dates: May 20-31st, 2019

Location: University of Southern California (USC), School of Dramatic Arts, Los Angeles, CA

Teaching Strategies/Methods Studied:

This 12-day, 90-hour program of fully integrated instruction was created for established acting teachers and professors of theatre. Students on the program ranged from adjunct instructors to tenured professors and master teachers in their own right. The program incorporated Clown/Mask with David Bridel, Dean of the USC School of Dramatic Arts, Scene Study with Gregory Wallace, lead acting teacher at the Yale School of Drama, Viewpoints with Alexandra Billings, USC School of Dramatic Arts, The Pedagogy of Scene Study with Kenneth Noel Mitchell, Head of Musical Theatre, USC School of Dramatic Arts, and Michael Chekhov Technique with Hugh O’Gorman, Head of Acting, Cal State Long Beach.

Impact on Current Teaching

This program was one of the richest experiences of my academic life. When I applied to the TDP I was excited at the prospect of examining my own practices in the classroom, learning about new methodologies, and enriching my coursework with fresh ideas and exercises. All of this occurred and more. In his article, “The Michael Chekhov Acting Technique: A Versatile Approach to Actor Training,” Hugh O’Gorman states, “Teaching acting, truly teaching the detailed minutiae of imaginative self-transformation, is an art form. At the very minimum, the teacher must be able to solve acting problems themselves in order to effect positive development in an acting student. They must be able to solve the acting problem from inside the experience” (2018). Working from “inside the experience” was at the heart of this program. We learned in the doing and explored the work as theatre artists. In this way, I was forced to let go of what I thought I knew about teaching acting and was asked to begin, once again, at the beginning. I was invited to reignite my imagination, a passion for deep play, and invite myself to sit in one of the scariest places of all for a teacher: the place of not knowing.

How This Information Will Be Applied

Everything I learned is directly applicable to the classes I am currently teaching, the classes I’m scheduled to teach in the fall, and new performance-based courses I would love to create moving forward. My first day back in my Oral Interpretation of Literature course, I took my students through Viewpoints work that stimulated the student’s imaginations, encouraged teamwork, and enhanced listening skills. In Acting II, I introduced a new warm up that incorporated elements of Clown, which immediately created a more generous and welcoming energy that the students were able to take into their scenework.

Most importantly, the TDP provided context on current trends in training, including theatrical intimacy and diversity/inclusion in the both the academic and professional acting world. Discussions on shedding obsolete ideas and embracing the needs of a new generation of artists was at the forefront of the program. I am thrilled to return with questions and thoughts that may enhance and support our students’ learning environment so that CSUSB alum are more well-rounded, supported, and even more qualified to enter the workforce.

Date Submitted: June 4, 2019

References

O'Gorman, Hugh. "The Michael Chekhov Acting Technique: A Versatile Approach to Actor Training for the 21st Century." *Parodos*, National Alliance of Acting Teachers, 6 Sept. 2018, parodos.actingteachers.org/journal/2018/09/the-michael-chekhov-acting-technique-a-versatile-approach-to-actor-training-for-the-21st-century/.