

Mavis Scully Teaching Philosophy

Art in Life for Life

The Theatre is an arena where many lessons for a life well-lived can be learned. Within the boundaries and discipline of the the Arts, there is great potential to experience meaningful and powerful moments that define our lives. As a teacher, I find an incredible freedom in this realm to guide, mentor, grow, challenge, fail, and triumph. All of these experiences translate back to the real world and can foster many wonderful character qualities that are necessary in navigating the labyrinth of the professional Arts realm and our personal lives.

Three components of Art in Life for Life

- **Art** - Harvest/Fruit - lasting benefits
- **Joy** - Life's Blood/Fertilizer - goal of a consistent flow
- **Work** - the Vehicle/Sowing and Tending - a choice and a process

Teaching Perspective

In Merriam-Webster's Dictionary there are over 11 definitions for the word "Work". All include or imply the necessity of a *process*, which requires time, intention, dedication, effort, focus, concentration, and repetition. I believe the boundless benefits lavished upon us through the Arts are most consistently brought forth at the crux of two prime areas of practice:

the Process of the Work and **the Joy in the Work**

Teaching the Process of the Work

It is not about the production. It is about the process. Production, in its definition, is a *product* of the process. Artists must process to produce. Adequate training must be acquired through focused classes and not just in rehearsal and performance. I do not believe that class should be used for rehearsal. Rehearsal time is for rehearsal. What one learns in class is used in rehearsal and performance. It is one's sustenance in the audition process and on the job. With the understanding that not all may choose to "do this for a living", I teach my students the facets of the art form as though they were.

This brings about a level of respect, honor, and admiration (*if not love*) for the craft, the work, and one's class/castmates through:

5 elements of the Process of the Work

Fine Arts Tree of Life:

Trunk - Commitment

Sap - Consistency

Bark - Discipline

Branches - Selflessness

Leaves - Community

1. **Commitment - breeding consistency, discipline, selflessness, unity**

As a teacher/director, I commit fully to creating an environment where students are encouraged to explore, be vulnerable, try, fail, revise, go deeper, *commit* to the work of the craft.

2. **Consistency - breeding a strong work ethic, life habits, endurance**

I try to be consistent in facilitating the students' process by holding them accountable to deadlines, home work, repetition of exercises, finishing, pushing to the next level, and each other.

3. **Discipline - breeding healthy boundaries, freedom, security**

By being disciplined in my work I help students discipline themselves in theirs by maintaining an environment where the artists and the work are respected, nurtured, and exhorted; where they push beyond perceived limits, repeat for growth, improve focus and concentration, self-evaluate, and set goals.

4. **Selflessness - breeding compassion, understanding, patience, healthy world-view**

With truth in the work as the standard, I will do my best to take each student for who they are - to challenge them appropriately, to seek to learn the best way to motivate them, to listen, to encourage, to exhort, to modify (if need be), to allow them to make discoveries and express themselves in their own unique voice and in their own time - so they, in turn will seek to understand and help one another.

5. **Community - breeding relationship, belonging, connection**

Acting, Music and Dance are incredible vehicles to create community through shared work, goals, struggles, experiences, etc. The very nature of the Arts creates Community. I just facilitate.

Teaching to seek the Joy in the Work

My greatest desire is for students to fully reap the rich benefits within the Arts, no matter what their career choice. In class and rehearsal I coach them toward full participation, investment, and commitment; to risk appropriately and fully - even when it isn't easy or "fun". When they do this, there is a plethora of rewards, not only for them, but also those within their spheres of influence: their audience, fellow artists, patrons, friends, family, etc.

As I fully invest in them, I expect their full investment and willingness to sacrifice and struggle in the process. This propagates joy in many facets of the work: persevering through a tough section of text; the elation of epiphany in a scene; starting fresh with a new choice; listening intently to one another to blend complex harmonies; repeating lines until the truth is spoken forth. This is the essence of seeking the **Joy in the Work** and it is worth it!

I have seen the Joy birth some of the most beautiful works of art in the simplicity and rawness of class work and rehearsals, in ensembles and individuals, flowing into friendships, and defining performances, careers, marriages, families - on and on!

The power of Joy lies in the giving away. All the blood, sweat, tears, breakthroughs, triumphs are not for us to hold tightly but must be shared and sown for greater harvest.

Conclusion

My favorite phrase by my acting teacher, Walter Dallas, was, "Make a choice and commit to it." Doing something new or taking what we know to the next level always involves a choice. In order to experience the consequences, we must commit to our choices. This is one way we learn, grow, and mature. The arts are full of opportunities to make big choices in an environment that requires risk: Choosing a song that we are afraid to sing; making an uncomfortable physical choice with a character; walking into a tap class for the first time... The commitment will bring us to a place of greater understanding, realization of truth, improvement, courage, and confidence.

To teach what I love is a great and multi-faceted gift. I realize the responsibility I have to safeguard the minds and hearts of the aspiring artists I guide while also challenging them to take risks. Commitment to balance is essential to my work. The focus points in the **Process** and the **Joy of the Work** combined with the elements of the **Fine Arts Tree of Life** are a wonderful system of checks and balances. Using these tools, I endeavor to teach and live.