

## **Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance: A Practical and Phenomenological Approach with Long Island Classics Stage Company's Classic Kids**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This is a self-study of the philosophy and processes that comprised the foundation of our theatre company focusing on the inaugural summer theatre intensive program, "Classic Kids." Approaching this account as an Artist/Scholar, this study includes a chronological account of the articulation of a mission statement, workplace values, and questions for inquiry. Further, this documentation then describes selected practices and outcomes that demonstrate the heuristic and phenomenological interchanges that occur during and as a result of these exercises. This self-study further seeks to focus on the transferrable skills developed in performance study to self-actualization in everyday life.*

As a director, actor, playwright, and scholar, I have always been focused on the intersection of performance and everyday living. Much of my practice and theory in performance pursues the question, “How can performance in theatre enhance one’s quality of life?” To that end, I created my own performance enterprise called Long Island Classics Stage Company which came into being in the summer of 2012 when I was allowed to use the Community Room on the lower level of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, a Catholic Church in Centerport, New York, United States of America. The artistic staff included Gina Salvia (a graduate of the New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, who would teach Voice), Rebecca Kupka (Broadway actress, who would teach Dance), and myself (MFA in Acting from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Ph.D. in Theatre from the University of Colorado at Boulder) who would teach Acting and Direct the final showcase for an invited audience. The administrative staff included Rebecca and me.

This essay will examine our approach and execution of select aspects of our youth program that existed during the summers between 2012 and 2019. Generally, the narrative will be presented in a chronological order. The essay begins with an account of our founding principles, philosophy, workplace values, and strategies of inquiry. A sample of our exercises incorporated into daily lessons is discussed and parallels between performance pedagogy and living one’s everyday life are illustrated. The findings and conclusions include results from a student-centered survey and my own reflections.

To begin, we wanted to devise workplace values and guiding principles that would focus our approach to performance and teaching. After much conversation and deliberation, we articulated how we wanted to recognize our organization by devising our workplace values thusly:

We are:

1. A performance organization: We seek to house a superb ensemble company while frequently soliciting ideas and energies from new members.

2. A teaching organization: We share our knowledge generously.
3. A learning organization: We continually examine and reevaluate our practices to better serve our mission.
4. Collaborators: Partnership is a core business practice, both internally and externally.
5. Inclusive. Ideas, opinions and perspectives are valued in our work.
6. Committed to excellence. We persistently strive for high standards in our work with artists, audience, schools, teachers, students, and each other.
7. Proud of our efforts. We celebrate our successes and take pride in making a difference with our work.

Our guiding principles would determine how we would conceive ideas, content, and lay the foundation upon which we would characterize our company. With our observations and intentions, we tried to encompass all aspects of daily activity and instill a culture of integrity and professionalism. Our guiding principles included the following affirmations:

1. Best performances engender connections that encourage the audience and community to continually reconsider and reevaluate their own perspectives and opinions.
2. Best practices in cultural and community education include the arts as a core component of every person's ongoing learning.
3. Quality comprehensive arts instruction includes opportunities to create, present, and respond to the work of art both individually and collectively.
4. Engaging, empowering, and supporting all stakeholders (the term "stakeholders" is meant to include but may not necessarily be limited to students, classroom teachers, arts specialists, administrators, parents, partner artists, the community) leads to sustained commitment, investment, and learning in and through the arts.
5. At its best, arts instruction is delivered through collaboration among classroom teachers, parents, artists, and art specialists.

6. The most powerful learning occurs when participants are guided toward self-discovery.
7. Ongoing data collection and analysis enables us to recognize, capture, apply, and share our learning amongst ourselves and with others.

With the articulation of both our workplace values and guiding principles, we hoped to convey the seriousness with which we took our work. As many of these points demonstrate, we aimed to connect with a broader constituency than our own institution so that we might become embedded in the community. We were aware of the necessity to connect with area schools and educational professionals, so we developed a focused inquiry question that was inspired from inquiry-based learning and student-centered learning. We determined that education at Long Island Classics Stage Company would be crafted to further educate students and the community about classical plays and Shakespeare, but as a multi-disciplinary art form, it also will serve as a locus for cross-curricular integration. We used the term “multi-disciplinary art form” because we anticipated using visual artists and musicians among our creative team in the conception of performance. Following inquiry-based learning models, we initially constructed our research inquiry as: “To what extent can an instructional program of a performance organization (Long Island Classics Stage Company) intentionally designed to engage the formal curriculum (math, language, social studies, history, science), meta-curriculum (cognitive and learning processes), and the hidden curriculum (social-personal development) leverage increased student learning?” Our hypothesis was that cognitive development increases when explicit connections are made between fundamental concepts and processes shared by performance and:

1. Social/emotional development (hidden curriculum): Self-discipline, self-esteem, tenacity, empathy, self-assessment, peer and parent collaboration, motivation, focus, a love for learning and the stimulation for students to become life-long learners.
2. Math (formal curriculum): Measurement, proportion, patterns, logical thinking, hierarchies, computation.
3. Language (formal curriculum): Character, theme, voice,

decoding of text/performance text/set design, inference, syntax, composition, setting, writing, sequence.

4. Learning processes (meta-curriculum): Memorization, problem finding, problem solving, divergent thinking, self-reflection, systems thinking, analytical thinking, creative thinking, aesthetic awareness.

We set high goals for ourselves. But to determine if any of this was possible, we needed an inaugural class of students or an institution and a teacher with whom we could collaborate.

Our first efforts to develop programming involved many meetings to determine how best to begin. After a number of ideas were presented, a three-week summer theatre intensive program seemed to be the most strategic means to create a lab to implement our ideas and pedagogy while drawing interest, and recruiting young talent and prospective investors. We resolved that there would be no audition-for-acceptance process; rather, any student between the ages of seven and seventeen would be admitted so long as they accepted and endorsed the philosophy of our organization as iterated here:

It is the Mission of Long Island Classics Stage Company to present meaningful performances and entertainments not only to delight but to explore pertinent ideas and questions that may build and strengthen our community with an awareness and incorporation of the multicultural people that make up our families, our community, our country, and our world within an environmentally sound and sustainable context. The Long Island Classics Stage Company will conduct itself in ways that promote respect for everyone and provide a safe platform from which artists, educators, and instructors may creatively and uniquely express their views and ideas. The Long Island Classics Stage Company will provide opportunities for underrepresented groups to utilize our facilities for their performance purposes within the parameters of this, our Mission and Vision Statement. The Long Island Classics Stage Company will strive to inspire the desire for learning, for the exploration of ideas, cultures, and community through Educational Outreach programs. Our classes will be designed to motivate students toward the pursuit of truth and artistic excellence, to prepare them for future artistic opportunities

and service to the performing arts and the world. The faculty within the Long Island Classics Stage Company will teach in ways that empower, enable, encourage, and understand the wants, needs, and challenges that face today's people of all ages.

As conceived, our Mission and Vision Statement was meant to exist as a living document; that is, it was created with the understanding that it would be subject to continual revision to best meet the needs of our students, faculty, community, and all other constituents.

Next came the question of content. As inspiration, I drew from Harold Bloom's bestselling book (1998), *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, wherein he asks, "The answer to the question 'Why Shakespeare?' must be 'Who else is there?'" (p. 1). We wanted a well-established, venerated playwright and Shakespeare was a logical choice to us. We considered Lope de Vega (1562–1635) who wrote more than 1,000 plays. His themes of love and romance, honor and reputation, fate and fortune, power and politics are indeed worthy, but the general body of his work tends to have limited representation, formulaic construction, and a lack of complexity. We also considered Molière (1622–1673), whose plays with their social commentary, humor and wit, was certainly a consideration, but also lack psychological depth, have limited representation, and repetitive themes and plots. By our estimation, a professional in theatre need only review a few of Shakespeare's plays to surmise that his language, his ability to empathize and take on differing perspectives, opportunities for creative embodiment and imagination provide both breadth and depth for exploration and discovery. Indeed, we felt that working on Shakespeare's plays would offer a multifaceted learning experience that might enhance language skills, foster critical thinking, promote cultural understanding, nurture empathy, develop performance skills, encourage interdisciplinary connections and more. By choosing Shakespeare, we felt secure that the strongest possibility for a transformative journey seemed to await the student.

Coupled with my own appreciation for Shakespeare and education, I had to agree with Bloom, and so began crafting the first classes that our company would present under the heading we called "Classic Kids." Within Classic Kids, we would offer classes in Acting, Dance, and Voice focusing on material that could be considered "classic" within its context. This proved awkward for the Voice and

Dance sections since the material that would be considered “classical” (e.g., opera, ballet) would be unsuitable for the beginner or novice student. We therefore used the term ‘classic’ in a relaxed context in those two arenas so that the material would include songs and styles of dance from Broadway musicals of the middle part of the twentieth century. By doing so, we allowed ourselves material that parents would be familiar with, and students could be successful in performing. However, with Acting, I resolved the term could be more strictly applied since Shakespeare and the Greek playwrights could be made accessible to the young performer, especially since the intention all along was to use excerpts from plays and musicals rather than attempt a fully conceived production. Further, Shakespeare and the Greek playwrights would add a level of integrity and credibility that we wanted to be connected with our theatre. Since this determination regarding the Acting component most closely embraced the mission and vision of our program, this study will focus on the articulation of this aspect of the program.

While the students were placed into three groups by age (7 to 9, 10 to 12, 13 to 15), the approach to my teaching was consistent in content but varied in delivery. The first guidelines that were applied universally to all the Acting classes came by way of my experience with numerous teachers of improvisation who, of course, learned these guidelines from their mentors. According to Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow’s findings (1989), these rules may have originally come down from Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Viola Spolin, Jacques Lecoq, and many others, but the precise credit for their origin is impossible to ascertain. Regardless, the three guidelines were as follows: 1. Say the first thing that comes to your mind. 2. Always say, ‘Yes! And...’. 3. Make your partner look good. These guidelines provided an effective foundation for all the work we would do in our classes and in the showcase. However, it was the ability to apply these guidelines in everyday contexts that made me realize their real value. For, as I came to learn, these guidelines, when applied to everyday contexts, could exponentially impact the positive development of one’s own personal development and interactions with other people.

Consider the application of these guidelines in class during the first days through improvisation. With each class separately, I had the students sit in a circle so that we might begin introductions and facilitated a sharing session. After I explained the guidelines, I asked

the students to share three aspects of who they are by sharing their name, grade, and something about themselves of which they are proud. By remembering guideline number 1 (to say the first thing that comes to your mind), the student was required to say whatever sprang to mind. The first two aspects of what they were to share were readily given, but students would often pause before sharing something that made them proud. Whenever this occurred, I reminded the student to share whatever initially sprang to mind. I offered that it could be that they are proud of having perfect attendance at school, that they got an A in Math, that they executed a cartwheel, or anything whatsoever that put a smile on their face. Occasionally, the student's response would be simply to try to elicit a laugh, but rather than call them out on that approach, I waited until everyone had a chance to speak. After we had completed the circle, I gently drew the students' attention to the times when certain students gave a response that was intended to provoke a laugh. I warned the students that this kind of approach is not an effective way to develop as a performer or a person in everyday life. Just as the audience will identify what you did as a deliberate attempt at humor—and thus disengage from the performance—so, too, will other people see the flatness of what you're offering and not think highly of your contribution.

The second guideline was employed whenever we worked within improvisation and a person was given an opportunity to respond. The response should always be, "Yes! And..." meaning that if someone asks you about your daily bicycling routine, you are to respond, "Yes, and I cycled twice as far and picked up milk!" rather than, "No, I don't cycle" which negates the first person's offer and shuts the scene down. Borrowing from Husserl's (1913) idea of "bracketing," this type of approach acts on a phenomenological level and prompts students to abandon preconceived notions and/or prejudices (unfortunately, there is no positive Husserlian definition of "bracketing" or "epoché" as it was originally articulated). In the mode of "bracketing," the student temporarily suspends their natural attitude towards the world, including assumptions, beliefs and preconceptions, and is encouraged to focus solely on the immediate phenomena as they appear in consciousness. The intention is to create a context wherein the student becomes more able to contribute quickly, honestly, and in a manner that is genuinely truthful. When, on the other hand, an actor has a moment to think about their response, the outcome tends to be calculated, flat and



uninteresting. One of the aims was to encourage a kind of creativity in expression in the moment that could be transferred to most people in everyday situations. In retrospect, it was this kind of transaction that seems congruent with the way that the Creative Thinking Framework distinguished between “Big C” creativity and “little c” creativity (OECD, 2019). “Big C” creativity demands that “creative thinking be paired with significant talent, deep expertise and high levels of engagement in a particular area” (OECD, 2019, 8). On the other hand, “little c” creativity “does not relate to masterpieces or genius inventions, but is the kind of everyday creativity [that] can be achieved by nearly all people capable of engaging in creative thinking” (OECD, 2019, 9).

The third guideline that was to be used whenever someone appeared to simply go blank or appeared to be struggling in an exercise: make your partner look good by creating more offers, providing more information, or addressing the context. No one likes to feel embarrassed or uncreative and by employing all of these guidelines, all participants in any acting exercise should feel successful.

After the icebreaker exercise, we tried improvisational exercises. These particular improv exercises were fundamental kinds of arrangements so that even the most inexperienced student could participate and make connections. They were to pretend they were moving through water, fire, air, mud, slime, spider’s webs, and as heavy, weightless, and so on. All of the classes experienced this approach so that they were all brought to a common understanding of how they might use their voices and bodies in performance. It was in the afternoon when all the students were together that I could review the lessons with everyone and go further.

To begin, I simply had all of the students walk around the space which was very large; about 14,000 square feet. I played music by select artists including Steve Reich (*Music for 18 Musicians*, 1976), Philip Glass (*Glassworks*, 1981), Michael Torke (*Tahiti*, 2011), and similar composers. As the students walked, I initially had them focus on their breath then drew their attention to various parts of their body to try and identify any tension they might be holding; to simply acknowledge it, breathe into it, and don’t judge. “Notice what you notice, see what you see,” I’d say. Next, I asked them to notice objects around the space. There was no lack of items to choose from since the students had piled their backpacks and lunch boxes along a wall. After

they had examined the space, I had them begin noticing each other as they walked. Again, “Notice what you notice, see what you see,” I’d say. The approach was deliberately heuristic, and whether the students could discern this or not was inconsequential. I urged them not to make faces or try to laugh or pass any sort of judgment as they looked at one another. Talking was disallowed. Every now and again, I would remind the students that they were looking at other people saying aloud: “These are other people in this program. They have some of the same interests you have. They are just other people on the planet sharing space.” The idea was to engage with other people in a non-judgmental, neutral manner. After a few minutes of that, I had everyone stop where they were, close their eyes, and take a deep breath. I had them repeat after me: “Here we are (students repeat). We are here (students repeat). Are we here (students repeat)? Indeed, we are (students repeat).” One more deep breath, and then I instructed them to continue walking.

As they walked, I explained aloud in a steady, measured fashion, that “performance is a collaborative endeavor. Performance is a way of understanding the larger world around us. Performance transcends the ordinary and allows you to be extraordinary. But first, you must make connections with yourself and with others.” With those words, I instructed the students to make 2- to 3-second eye contact with as many people as they could as they walked around the space. After a few moments of this, I had students give each other “high fives” then “low fives,” then fist bumps. I instructed the students to drop that part of their connecting and simply walk, then walk faster, then to come face to face with a partner in “10, 9, 8...” until I reached one, and “freeze!” They froze and they all had at least a hint of a smile on their face. It is natural for students to seek out other students with whom they have a connection or relationship—which in many cases only occurred earlier that day—and many used this opportunity to get with a ‘familiar’ partner. But this, of course, was not the goal. I allowed the students to call this arrangement, “partner 1.” As they stood face to face, I told them, “Smile at one another! Introduce yourself to your partner, even if you already know them. Wave goodbye and begin walking again.” They did so.

It was obvious that the students were enjoying this simple exercise and when I began talking and using some of the same language, they readied themselves for what they thought was coming.

I modified my instructions stating, “This time, I want you to find a different partner in 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and freeze!” They froze, but this time, they weren’t quite as sure. “Notice what you notice, see what you see,” was my mantra. The fact that they were not quite as comfortable with their current partner didn’t go unnoticed by the students. Like before, I told them, “Smile at your partner! Tell your partner your name! Say, ‘I’ll see you again!’” They repeated the last part of my instructions, and I sent them walking again. I continued to get them to connect with as many of their peers as I could. The point became clear that they were to take risks, get out of any comfort zone, and accept people for who they are, as they are.

All of the exercises were concluded with a debrief. To begin, I had all the students sit in a large circle. I then asked them to take a deep breath and think about the exercises we had just completed. One by one, I asked students to share how they were feeling or what they were thinking using only one word. Again, this goes back to the first rule of saying the first thing that comes to mind. I am always reminded in these moments how efficient the students become in articulating with greater precision how they feel and/or what they are thinking. The students were, in effect, teaching one another through the heuristic learning they had been exposed to.

In preparation for the next classes in the coming days, I gave all of the students a short quote by Shakespeare that they were required to memorize. For example, some quotes (all taken from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition) included:

“You that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young.”  
(*Henry IV, Pt. 2*)

“Sit by my side and let the world slip. We shall ne’er be younger.”  
(*The Taming of the Shrew*)

“How many goodly creatures are there here!” (*The Tempest*)

“You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things!” (*Julius Caesar*)

“Take note, take note, O world! To be direct and honest is not safe!” (*Othello*)

“The night has been unruly.” (*Macbeth*)

On the second or third day of this kind of “walking around the space” exercise, I asked students to begin developing a character. To do so, I had them lead with different parts of their body, such as their jaw, elbow, ankle, even buttocks; first subtly, then grandly. Along with the physicality of their new-found character, they were instructed to speak aloud the Shakespearean line they had been assigned to learn. I called this an “embodiment.” Suddenly, the students realized they had created a character on their own.

On a phenomenological level, the students were experiencing anew their own physicality and embodiment of a character. In the moment, they were heuristically developing their character independently. This is to say that insofar as the students are able, they experimented with their own body free from presuppositions or premeditative outcomes. Of course, I instructed the students to consider tempo and pacing both with their physicality and their delivery of text which further enriched their one-person performance. To free themselves of the character they just created and to bring them back to a more neutral state, I had them drop the character and walk as themselves.

When I surmised that they were ready to experiment with another creation, I had them lead from a different part of their body, to find a partner in “5, 4, 3, 2, 1, and freeze!” The students’ odd, contorted shapes elicited giggles, of course, but their focus was excellent. I then told the students that they were going to have a conversation with their partner using only the Shakespearean text they had been assigned. I assured them that it doesn’t necessarily need to make sense; in other words, after one person speaks, the ensuing response may not seem appropriate but to think of their conversation as rhetorical observations. One can imagine an eight-year-old boy saying, “These are not natural events; they strengthen from strange to stranger,” and a twelve-year-old girl using as a reply, “Why are you grown so rude? What change is this, sweet love?” and the exchange working as a micro-scene. Indeed, the students were delighted with their exchange coupled by the shape of their bodies that they had created.

The next goal was to be able to bridge this work on a heuristic level with scene work and eventually a full production, but a full

production of any one Shakespearean play was not the focus of this program. To that end, we revisited improvisational work. One of the most valuable and directly relatable improvisational exercises is one called “The Bean Scene” which is an improvisational game that probably has its roots in Viola Spolin’s work but has been modified and amended by many theatre practitioners (Spolin, 1963). It is an effective tool that acts as a heuristic device for student learning. This exercise involves one chair and three people who use the following dialogue as a script for their performance.

PERFORMER A (*seated in the chair, stirs with an imaginary spoon a giant pot of beans*): Oh, it’s a lovely day and I’m making beans.

PERFORMER B (*knocks at the imaginary door by pounding on the floor*): Hello? Is anybody home?

PERFORMER A: Oh, yes! Come on in!

PERFORMER B (*enters*): What have you got there?

PERFORMER A: Beans! I’m making beans!

PERFORMER B: Can I try some?

PERFORMER A (*offers a spoonful of beans*): Why, yes! Of course!

PERFORMER B (*eats*): Mmmm! These beans are tasty! (*dies*)

PERFORMER A: Oh, no! She/he’s dead! Is there a doctor in the house?

PERFORMER C (*enters from other side of stage*): Why, yes! I’m a doctor! What seems to be the trouble?

PERFORMER A: She/he’s dead!

PERFORMER C (*examines PERFORMER B*): Yep. Indeed she/he’s dead. Wait a second! She died of bean poisoning!

END SCENE

The dialogue need only be approximated; the sequence and the sense of the story having a beginning, middle, and end are more important. If anyone every forgot a line or appeared unsure, guideline number three was to be employed: Make your partner look good! To get a sense of how the scene works, I had three volunteers go through the scene. Of course, as it is written (or repeated), it's not very interesting. The goal was to take the one of the embodiments they had created in the "walking around" exercise and apply it to the scene. To ensure that the scene would take on a grander sense of performance, I had the students perform the scene using a variety of contexts and genres which might include doing the scene as if you are underwater; as a spaghetti Western; in gibberish; as if you are ninjas; secret service agents; intoxicated; and so on. For an added twist, I occasionally had students perform the scene backwards. This exercise proved invaluable as a means to quickly access a variety of characters. Although they all used the same material, each improv exercise was unique.

The extent to which this kind of work can be applied in other arenas, whether they be artistic, managerial, conceptual, and beyond, is virtually limitless. Isn't this what we, as directors, do whenever we conceive of a new production by Shakespeare or the classical playwrights? While directors and dramaturgs often make cuts to Shakespearean and classical texts, we are still essentially 're-skinning' each production with different actors, costumes, sets, and other design elements. This is not unlike what happens when businesses compete with other similar businesses. Consider the restaurateur who wishes to create a chain of restaurants with Mexican inspired offerings. There will likely be tacos, burritos, enchiladas, and other foods typically associated with Mexican restaurants. Here, the "text" is "Mexican food"; but it's how the food item is prepared, delivered, and in what context that sets each Mexican restaurant apart from Chipotle, Moe's, Qdoba, and others. The structure of the improv game becomes apparent and here we have a bridge between conceptualization in the arts that is not unlike conceptualization in business. This structure can be seen in any number of other businesses who offer similar material. Consider the practices of Google, AOL, Yahoo, Hotmail, and any other email provider. Each platform is delivering a similar service or "text" and yet they have their own unique characteristics in the execution of those services. But again, it's in the delivery of similar texts that sets

them apart and makes one more desirable than the other. While this pedagogy is hardly the kind that will produce nuanced performances and actors-as-artists, it is an efficient and direct means of accessing creativity in varied contexts with inexperienced performers.

I decided to apply this concept to scene work using a scene from Shakespeare's *Richard III* when the two murderers are sent to kill Clarence who is lodged in the tower in Act I, scene iv. While this scene is often played seriously, the ability to push it into comedy is easy; but of course, in order for it to be comical, it must be played seriously. Just as we performed the Bean Scene with a variety of genres and contexts, we did likewise with the two murderers' scene. The students developed strong characters with believable physicality and the realization that their words must be clear in order for the comedy to work. Perhaps more importantly, the students' focus during the exercise was heightened to such a degree that they were able to transcend any self-consciousness that would have otherwise inhibited their performance. Under these conditions, states of "flow" and creativity emerge. Moreover, through the utilization of heuristic approaches, students can access the mental and creative latitude necessary to serve as a catalyst for their transformation into Artists. This is not to discount the utility of systematic, highly structured, or algorithmic approaches. Instead, it argues that freedom and embracing failure positively facilitate a type of growth that may mitigate judgment, criticism, and other impediments. The intentionality of the exercise does not necessarily need to be articulated before beginning the work. Indeed, intentionality is achieved simply by the students' acute interest in the exercise itself which leads to a more meaningful experience overall.

During the summer theatre intensive, there were many other improvisational exercises and lessons, but they are too many to enumerate and describe. The goal, as mentioned earlier, was to empower students to use skills developed in performance and transfer those skills to everyday life. The guidelines used for improvisation were readily transferred to everyday life. For example, when students were asked to help around the house, I urged them to say to their parents, "Yes! And..." which would include, "Yes, and I'll take out the garbage on my way to the bus stop!" However, I warned that guideline number one—of saying the first thing that comes to mind—might have to be modified to "say the first *constructive* thing that comes to mind." One

student remarked that she had to stop herself from replying to her father, “Yes, and you don’t forget to go to the gym today and lose some weight!” which, she admitted, was certainly the first thing that came to her mind. The third guideline, to make your partner look good, meant that the student should consider members of their family and other loved ones in the ‘partner’ role. When, for example, a brother, sister, or parent asked the student to be patient, they were to do so and, as the guideline states, “Make your partner look good.”

To assess the effectiveness of skills transferred from performance to everyday life is extremely difficult since it would be unrealistic to try and track students’ decisions and actions from day to day. Still, we drafted a survey seven years after our inaugural summer theatre program to assess the effectiveness of our program which included five prompts focused on the students’ confidence in engaging with Shakespeare’s text and five prompts focused on their interpersonal skills (data from our survey, 2019). Approximately 200 students were surveyed and 120 surveys were submitted. For each prompt, responders could select one of six options: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree, or not applicable. These were the prompts:

1. As a former student of Classic Kids, I look forward to studying plays by Shakespeare.
2. As a former student of Classic Kids, I am more confident when approaching texts by Shakespeare.
3. As a former student of Classic Kids, I find that studying Shakespearean plays is more enjoyable.
4. As a former student of Classic Kids, I am able to more fully describe characters in Shakespearean plays.
5. As a former student of Classic Kids, I am able to more fully understand the plot in Shakespearean plays.
6. As a former student of Classic Kids, I feel more confident speaking within group situations.
7. As a former student of Classic Kids, I am more confident leading within group situations.
8. As a former student of Classic Kids, I am able to respond more empathetically to other students.
9. As a former student of Classic Kids, I am able to contribute positively within my family.



10. As a former student of Classic Kids, I am able to interact with other adults more confidently.

Of the 120 students who responded, more than 90% selected either “Strongly agree” or “Agree” for all questions.

Our hopes for Long Island Classics Stage Company to find investors willing to build a replica of The Globe Theatre came to an end when COVID-19 caused a global lockdown. All performances and classes were canceled, and basic necessities became everyone’s focus. Creativity and self-actualization—levels that appear in the highest realms of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943)—could no longer be goals under these conditions; rather, humanity was collectively constrained to the lower regions of Maslow’s pyramid (physiological and safety needs). These conditions were unsustainable for our theatre enterprise and the project has since been indefinitely suspended. Still, our philosophy and goals remain intact. We maintain our belief in the transference of theatrical performance principles to the cultivation of a poetics for everyday life—a pathway towards improved behavior, disposition, and experiences.

While there are many other summer theater programs conducted annually, we believe that ours is set apart from the others because of the philosophy and approach that we used. Other summer theater programs tend to focus on the end-product, something that parents can see and use as confirmation that their money was well-spent. Summer theater programs that produce a single performance piece at the end of their programming like *Grease* or *The Wizard of Oz* have the advantage of being able to advertise a professional looking end-product by using a licensed poster with which most parents will be familiar and thus curb possible dissatisfaction in the overall experience. Indeed, the students who attend these kinds of summer theater programs enroll in the hopes of landing the role of Sandy or Danny in *Grease* and Dorothy or the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*; but there can only be one Sandy or one Dorothy and thus dozens of disappointed students will be relegated to the supporting roles of High Schoolers or Munchkins. These sorts of systematic and structured approaches are antithetical to our intention of an heuristic approach to actor training.

In the end, learning and understanding are about widening the scope of relevancy for students. Art-making as research inquiry is

notoriously ambiguous and ephemeral. Still, applied practices such as those employed in performance-making can be made more appealing when they are successfully connected to real-world application, but to quantify the degree of success is notoriously difficult. The pedagogical and philosophical approaches outlined in this article are intended to be reproducible and adaptable across cultures and identities. The dialectic exchange between performance-making and an actualized self requires an ongoing dialogue between one's creative expression and personal development. Subsequent documentation and quantifying such data require long term study beyond the scope of this examination. Nevertheless, through the process of creating and embodying characters or narratives, individuals can engage in crucial self-discovery and reflection, which allows individuals to explore different facets of their identity, confront internal conflicts, and evolve their understanding of themselves and the world around them. Learning that endures requires refresher courses and professional guidance supports the idea that learning is a continuous journey that extends throughout one's lifetime. It is worth re-stating that knowledge acquisition is not static but dynamic, requiring regular reinforcement and support to maintain proficiency and relevance. Ultimately, theatre practitioners must identify their purpose or purposes for intentionality to occur such that empowers all participants and constituents toward the creation of inclusive and equitable spaces, and by extension, reaches in to real-world application.

## SUGGESTED CITATION

Overton, D. (2024). Pedagogy, practice, and performance: A practical and phenomenological approach with Long Island Classics Stage Company's classic kids. *ArtsPraxis*, 11 (1), pp. 64-82.

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