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School of the Arts  
Virginia Commonwealth University

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Julie K. Phillips and Jenna M. Neilsen  
entitled

THE ART OF COLLABORATION IN THE CLASSROOM:  
TEAM TEACHING PERFORMANCE

has been approved by their committee as satisfactory completion of the thesis  
requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts.

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April 23, 2007

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THE ART OF COLLABORATION IN THE CLASSROOM:  
TEAM TEACHING PERFORMANCE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Additionally:

Jenna would like to thank her husband, Reid, who reminds her on a daily basis of her worth and purpose. And a thank you to her family, her friends and all those who have shaped her personal and professional views of theatre.

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## Abstract

### THE ART OF COLLABORATION IN THE CLASSROOM: TEAM TEACHING PERFORMANCE

By Julie Phillips, MFA and Jenna Neilsen, MFA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007

Major Director: Dr. Noreen Barnes  
Head of Graduate Studies, Department of Theatre

*The Art of Collaboration in the Classroom: Team Teaching Performance* is a co-written master's thesis which records our research in the field of team teaching as it relates to theatre education at the university level. It is our intent that this text be used as a tool for helping universities and teachers decide if a collaborative teaching model is right for their courses.



A portion of the text is research-based, examining the scholarly writings which have preceded our work. In Chapter 1, we compiled a set of definitions, in the hopes of codifying the language used within this document as well as that used within the field. We establish a hierarchy of terms associated with teaching in collaborative forms. We then describe the various models associated with collaborative teaching, specifically the model which we have employed: team teaching.

Chapter 2 explores the reasons for and against implementing collaborative teaching structures in higher education. Chapter 3 discusses team teaching specifically, and explores reasons for implementing it at the university level, and in artistic disciplines, specifically acting. We also discuss the practical appropriateness for this model in today's classrooms.

The second section of the text is practical in nature. Chapter 4 includes a description of our actual experiences working together in the classroom, including discoveries, failures and successes. Finally, Chapter 5 is a guide for implementing team teaching which covers the basic essentials of starting a team teaching program. This section of the document can be used as a training tool for future co-teachers in the VCU theatre graduate program.

This document was created in Microsoft Word 1997.

## **Definition of Terms**

In order to discuss a topic with clarity and ease, a common set of definitions must first be established. After examining the literature currently written on team teaching, it can be concluded that no consistent set of definitions has been decided upon by the education community as a whole. The term “team teaching” is not even consistently defined among the works we have consulted. As a result, we have created a compilation of the terms and definitions we have embraced and listed them in the section below which give a context for the rest of the thesis.

Authority-Directed Team- A team structure in which all decisions are made by one lead instructor and then carried out by the remaining team members. (Buckley 42)

Block teaching – Two or more instructors working together to teach multiple subjects back to back to the same students, usually in an attempt to link the subject matter of multiple disciplines.

Co-teaching – All teaching that involves two or more teachers serving as instructors for a specific course or class session and sharing responsibility for that class. (Fishbaugh 103)

Coaching Model- One teacher instructs the class while the other observes, later offering constructive criticism on pedagogical practices. This behavior is often reciprocated, but each instructor is primarily responsible for their own class. (Fishbaugh 5)

Complementary Teaching- A second teacher works to enhance the instruction provided by the teacher with the primary responsibility for instruction, often in a different methodology. Both teachers are responsible for the instruction of the class session. (Villa 40)

Consulting Model- A novice instructor utilizes an experienced instructor for guidance and instruction. The experienced instructor may or may not be present during the class sessions, but does not participate in the delivery of information to students. (Fishbaugh 64)

Coordinated Teams- A team structure which is a combination of both Authority-Directed teams, and Self-Directed Teams, wherein members of the team are appointed by the administration but teams appoint their own leaders and often rotate leadership responsibilities. (Buckley 43)

Cross-Disciplinary- An attempt at examining one area of discipline from the viewpoint of another discipline. For example: “the physics of music” (Davis 4)

Interdisciplinary- An attempt at bringing together the expertise of two or more disciplines to create a new perspective. (Davis 4-5)

Multidisciplinary - An examination of a variety of perspectives with no necessity to create a new perspective that fuses them together. (Davis 4)

Parallel Teaching - Teachers instruct different groups of students within one classroom simultaneously. (Villa 28)

Self-Directed Teams- A team structure spontaneously formed by interested instructors wherein all team members are given equal decision making power. (Buckley 42)

Supportive Teaching - One teacher is primarily responsible for the delivery of the lesson, but another member of the team complements or enhances that lesson. For example, a primary teacher might have a special education teacher who supports their efforts as needed in the classroom. In a theatre setting, this could involve a specialized unit on vocal safety taught by a guest lecturer which would enhance the acting course taught by the primary instructor. (Villa 20).

Team – A number of persons associated together in work or activity (Merriam-Webster's 1282).

Team Teaching – An arrangement which involves two or more instructors delivering the same instruction to the same students at the same time. (Fishbaugh 103) (Villa 49)

Transdisciplinary - Ideas that transcend multiple disciplines (Davis 4).

### **Hierarchy of Terms**

For our purposes, we will be following the hierarchy of definitions as follows. It is a combination of the ideas of multiple authors but lends itself to being easily applied.

These are drawn from Martin Fishbaugh's Models of Collaboration and Richard Villa's A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning. All three of these categories of teaching fit under the term collaborative teaching. All of these terms are explained in detail in the next section, Collaborative Models.

1. Consulting
2. Coaching
3. Co-Teaching
  - A. Supportive Teaching
  - B. Parallel Teaching
  - C. Team Observing
  - D. Complementary Teaching

E. Block Teaching

F. Team Teaching

## Collaborative Models and Structures

Since collaborative teaching encompasses a wide variety of methods and styles, the most common types are broken up here into two different categories: Instruction Models and Planning Structures. The *instruction models* address the teaming combinations often used in carrying out instruction to students for courses taught collaboratively. *Planning structures* address how the team is created and who has the planning and supervisory power for the team.

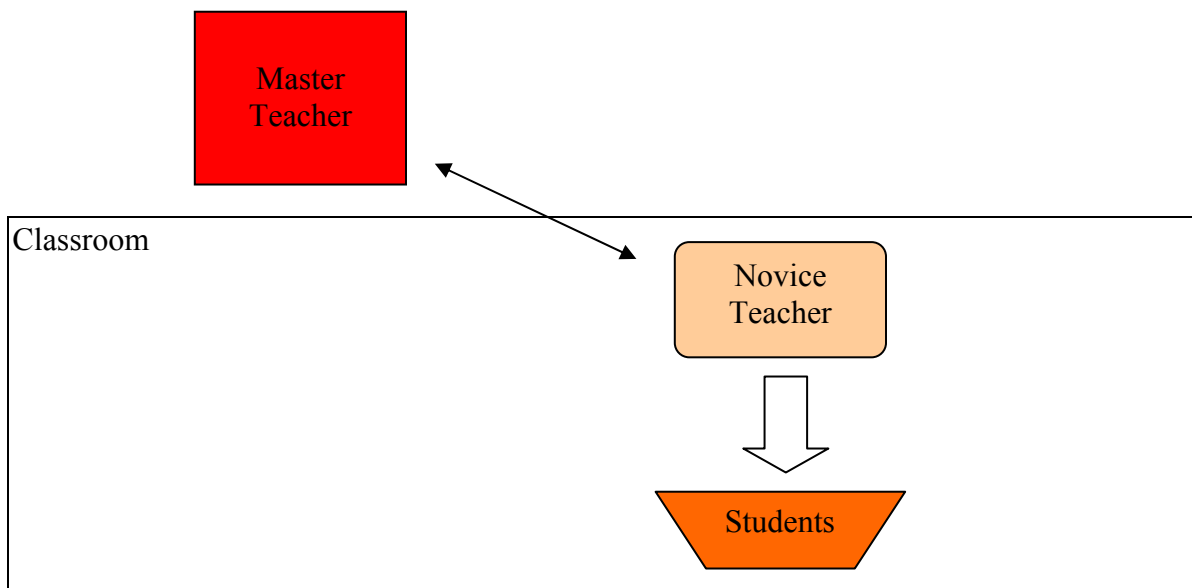
### Instruction Models

Teamed instruction is not as uncommon as it may seem. Most institutions of higher education are already employing at least one of these instruction models in the college classroom, either for teacher training purposes or to cope with large class sizes. The purpose of this section is to expand the awareness of other models that may be able to meet the needs of the University in a different way.

The three basic teaming models are consulting, coaching, and co-teaching. This structure is based on the models of classroom collaboration described by Mary Fishbaugh, in her book Models of Collaboration, and Richard Villa's A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning.

## Consulting

**Figure 1: Consulting**



Consulting teams (see Figure 1) create a union of an experienced teacher educating a novice teacher. This type of teaming can happen either in the classroom or, more often at the college level, the master teacher is not directly involved with the students, but acts as trainer and guide to the novice teacher. The master teacher's influence diminishes as the novice gains experience. Master teachers also benefit from the team since they are forced to re-examine their own pedagogical practices as they share them with others.

This model is an excellent way to ease professors directly from their degree programs into the world of college teaching. Primary and Secondary education employs this model in the student teaching scenario, using the opportunity to work with an



experienced teacher to train prospective educators. It is also frequently used with graduate student teaching assistants and informally in departments with new faculty members.

To some extent, this model is already common in theatre instruction. An acting teacher may consult with a professor who has a specialty in vocal instruction in order to help her students focus in on a particular skill. The voice teacher serves as master teacher in the consulting model, imparting wisdom to the acting teacher.

## **Coaching**

The coaching model is one where professors of equal level alternate coaching and being coached as they assist each other. This type of collaboration allows teachers with different strengths to coach each other in their classes. It is extremely useful for improving pedagogical approaches to the material. Typically, each professor is responsible for the instruction of one course, and then acts as observer during another course. Professors are observed by the coach and then they discuss the problems and benefits of the teaching methods being employed. This model does not directly affect the students since instruction to students is still only carried out by one instructor, though it should improve the education received by future students as a result of the instructor's improved pedagogical practice. Acting professors may be hesitant to employ this model in their courses, as the entrance of an observer may change the performances of the students. It would be most beneficial if the observing could take place over several class periods in order for the observing instructor to have a firm grasp on the class dynamic and the observed instructor's style.

This model is sometimes paired with co-teaching to create a kind of “tag team” alternative to the coaching model. This is the type of collaboration that might happen if an Asian studies professor and a theatre history professor partnered to offer a course on Asian theatre. One’s strength would lie in the cultures of Asia addressed in the course, the other might have an expertise in historical world theatre. By both alternating teaching the same course, students would be offered a well-rounded view of both the theatre and culture of Asia. In this hybrid model, both professors are responsible for separate sections of the same course, and take turns teaching in their areas of expertise. When one is not teaching, she is observing the other and providing consultation on teaching practice and shared content. [See Figure 2.1, 2.2].

Figure 2.1: The Coaching Model Option 1

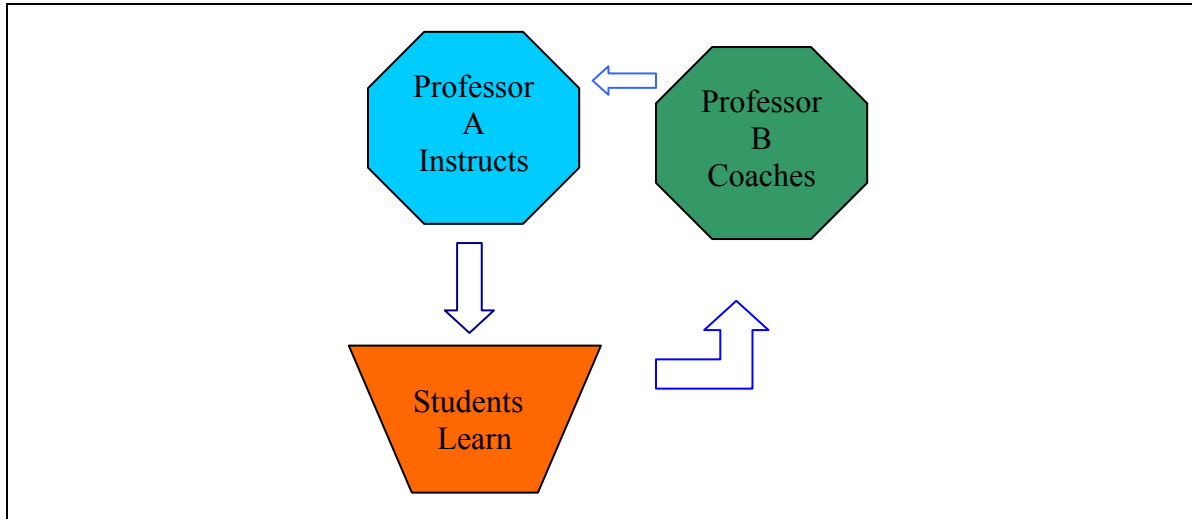
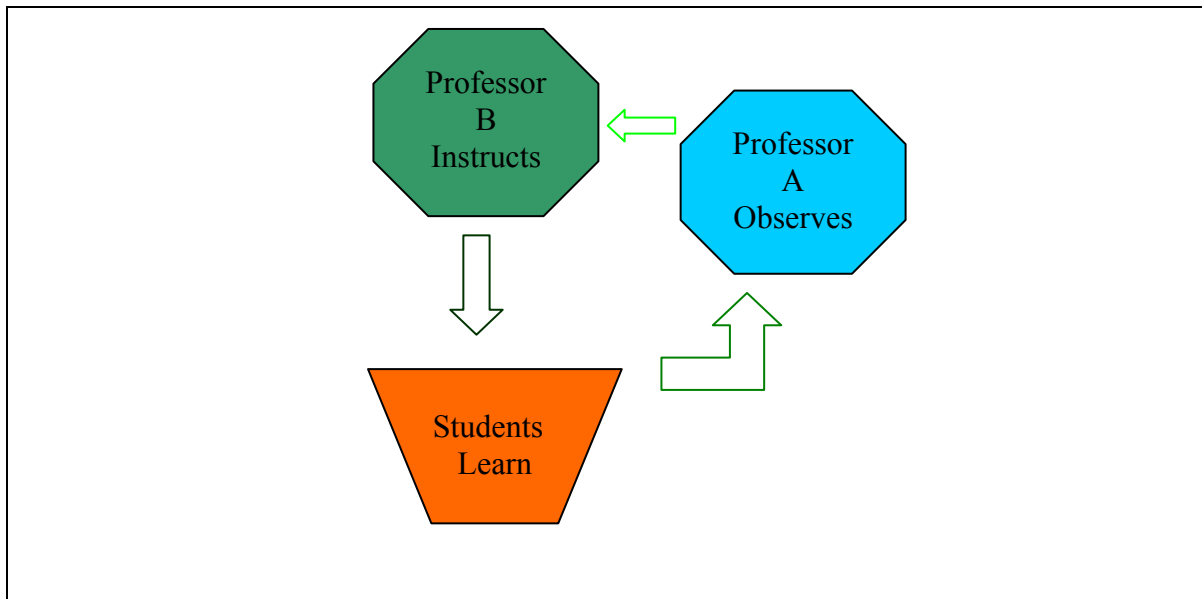


Figure 2.2: The Coaching Model Option 2



## Co-Teaching

In this model, both teachers work collaboratively to instruct the students. This can take on various forms, but always involves the sharing, equal or unequal, between members of instruction responsibilities. Supportive Teaching, Parallel Teaching, Team Observing, Complementary Teaching, Block Teaching, and Team Teaching are all types of this model of collaboration in classroom instruction.

## Supportive Teaching

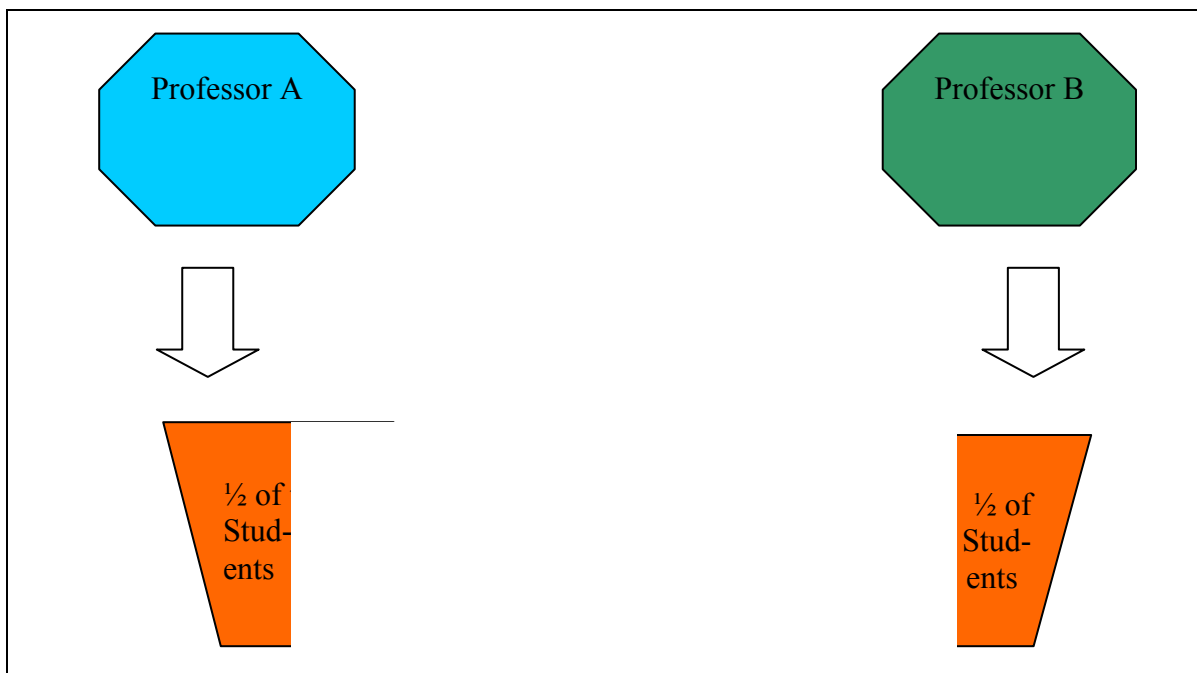
In supportive teaming, “one teacher is assigned primary responsibility for designing and delivering a lesson, and the other member(s) of the team does something that

complements, supplements, or enhances the lesson” (Villa 20). This is the type of model that often employs a TA as the supportive teacher, who assists the primary professor, but is not responsible for creating the main lesson plan or presenting the bulk of the information.

### Parallel Teaching

Parallel Teaching is when teamed teachers “instruct different groups of students at the same time in the classroom” (Villa 28). [See figure 3.1 Parallel Teaching].

Figure 3.1 Parallel Teaching



This method is valuable if the goal is to lower the teacher-student ratio, and involves slightly less group planning. Both teachers would provide the same instruction, but to a smaller section of the whole class. This means that the lesson plans must be

agreed upon by both instructors prior to the class, but that each teacher can have individual discretion as to the delivery of the information.

Station teaching is a specific type of parallel teaching, where students rotate to a variety of physical locations in order to receive a different type of instruction in each area. This is useful if the members of the team have expertise in different areas. Each member of the teaching team could provide instruction on their area of expertise, repeating that instruction until the entire class had received that information. It is also beneficial if the content to be covered is best learned in a small group setting.

### **Team Observing**

Team observing is the methodology by which one teacher is responsible for instruction and the other for observing both the teacher and the students during instruction. This is very similar to the coaching model, [see Figure 2.1, 2.2] but presupposes that both instructors are equally responsible for the content of a single course. This method requires little group planning for day to day instruction, as each teacher is responsible for his or her own lesson plan.

### **Complementary Teaching**

Complementary Teaching is when a second instructor “does something to enhance the instruction provided by the other co-teacher(s)... one teacher often takes primary responsibility for designing the lesson. Both teachers share in the delivery of the information, sometimes with a varied delivery method” (Villa 40). In this model, both

instructors are present and participating in the delivery of information, but the primary instructor carries overall responsibility. This method is most effective if the secondary teacher attempts to use varied instruction styles to meet the needs of more learners. For example, if the primary instructor is responsible for a lecture, which meets the needs of auditory learners, the secondary instructor could attempt to convey that information through visual or kinesthetic means, reinforcing the ideas set forth by the primary instructor.

### **Block Teaching**

In Block Teaching, two or more instructors work toward creating a connection between multiple subjects. The classes are offered back to back in one block of time, and instructors contribute the whole time, though they are primarily responsible for only one section of the class. Usually this is implemented in an attempt to link the subject matter of multiple disciplines. For example, an American Literature course would be paired with an American History course and would follow the two subjects in a parallel manner, so that when a subject such as the Civil War is being taught in history a book dealing with that subject or written during that time is also being taught.

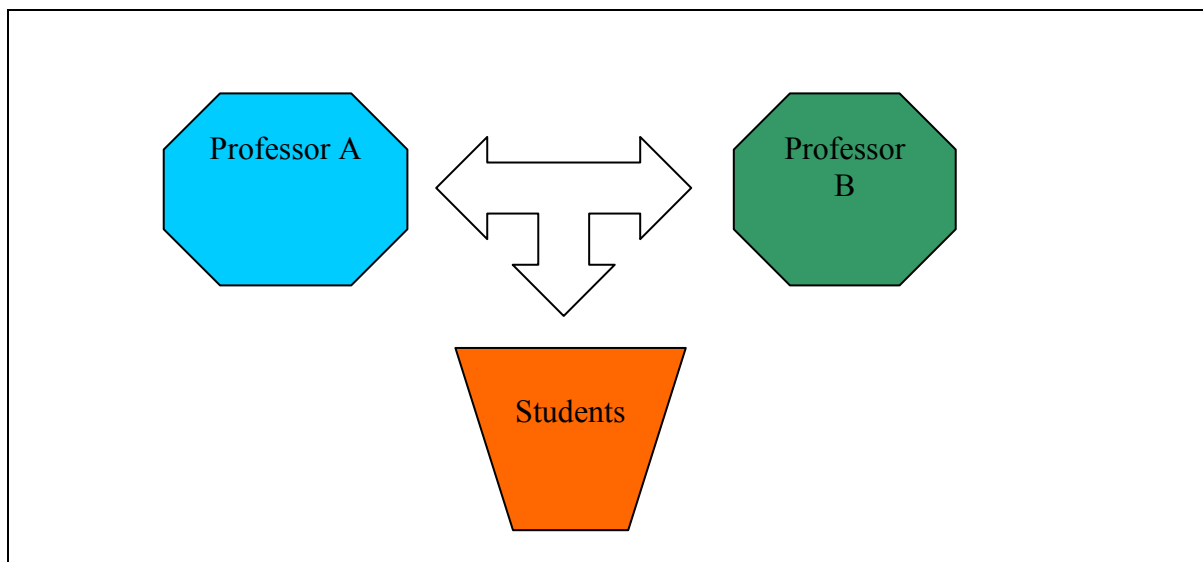
### **Team Teaching**

Team Teaching is the most collaborative model, requiring the largest amount of group planning. In this model, all instructors teach the same material to all the students, simultaneously. Ann Austin refers to this model as ‘the interactive team’. “Team

members collaborate in all aspects of planning the course, preparing exams, and grading, and they meet regularly to discuss the course, the students, and their teaching. Some interactive teams, especially when just two faculty members make up the team, literally co-teach by jointly discussing with each other and the students the day's topic." (Austin 37).

[See Figure 3.2].

### 3.2 Team Teaching



While the team teaching method requires the most group planning, in our pre-planning stage we found this method to be the most satisfying. With this methodology, we would both have a maximum amount of teaching time. This met our personal goals of honing our individual pedagogical skills. With this method, we would also be forced to work together in identifying our goals and praxis. The pre-planning allowed us to try out

new methods and discuss questions we had about each other's ideas. By being physically present during each class session, we were both able to interact with the students on a regular basis. We were also able to use each other as examples, especially when discussing scene work. As professors, we found this method to be most satisfying, despite the longer planning it required.

It is also important to note that teams can easily shift from one model to the next in order to fit their unique needs. For example, team teaching does not preclude the use of complementary teachers. Nor does it exclude also employing parallel teaching or coaching models at certain points in the course. Rather, the models are listed to help identify a basic approach to teaching collaboratively that can be altered and expanded to suit the needs of the particular course.

### **Planning Structures**

Planning Structures allow the university to identify the hierarchical system that will suit the needs of the department and professors involved. The structures are typically more useful at the administrative or departmental level to coordinate teams effectively. Basic coordination of teaching teams will come from the perceived experience level of the instructors involved. There are three basic planning structures: Authority-Directed Teams, Self-Directed Teams, and Coordinated Teams.



### **Authority-Directed Structure**

The Authority-Directed Team is a team structure in which all decisions are made by one lead instructor and then carried out by the remaining team members. “The hierarchical structure [authority directed structure] has several advantages. Decisions can be made fairly rapidly, without endless debate. Direction can be provided, duties clearly specified, responsibilities assumed. But some members may resent not having decision-making power” (Buckley 42). This type of structure can be especially useful if there is a large gap in the experience level of the instructors, or the department wants to have the final word in the decisions made by the teaching team.

Employed in conjunction with a Consulting model, the master teacher would be responsible for making decisions that will aid the novice in learning to take on professorial duties. In this instance, the duties of the novice would grow until a teaming model was no longer necessary.

### **Self-Directed Teams**

More hands-off programs will appreciate the Self-Directed Team structure. “Self-directed, autonomous, or synergetic teams are spontaneously formed by faculty and/or students. All the teachers are considered equal. Decisions are usually made by consensus or by majority vote. Control is not a major issue. But endless discussions can be frustrating” (Buckley 42). As Buckley illustrates, the self directed team can be a problem for those who are not able, willing, or interested in engaging in long discussions. In our classroom, we have employed the self-directed team approach. We were allowed to be

autonomous in choosing the model that worked best for us. This particular structure worked because we are at an equal level of experience and both have a large interest in exploring this type of work.

### **Coordinated Teams**

Coordinated teams combine elements of the two preceding types {Authority-Directed and Self-Directed}. Members are appointed by administrators after consultation with the faculty on their interests and preferences. Team members typically are drawn from several departments that share a core curriculum. Teams may select and often rotate their own coordinators or leaders. Such decisions are best based on the coordinator's experience, leadership qualities, and enthusiasm for team teaching." (Buckley 43)

The coordinated team structure allows the administration to be involved in supervising the work of the team, while still permitting the team to work autonomously.

### **Our Experiences in Classroom Collaboration**

Jenna and Julie have both worked in collaborative classrooms under a variety of models. Most of those have been extremely positive, and a few were not. Below are highlights from our most memorable collaborative efforts in the theatre classroom.

#### **Jenna**

THEA307: Theatre History

Theatre History is generally taught by one instructor, with four graduate student teaching assistants. The instructor does most lecturing, with each of the TAs doing one lecture a semester and leading group break-out discussions and is therefore generally structured in the supportive teaching model. However, the semester in which Jenna assisted in this class was taught by two graduate students, with two additional graduate Teaching Assistants. This course created an Observing Team Model. While both were responsible for the same course, they would take turns lecturing. Both instructors were in the classroom, and they would discuss after lectures what worked or did not work and why. One taught the sections Greek Theatre and Renaissance Drama, the other on Roman Theatre and Medieval Drama. Observing this style, it was apparent that the students enjoyed the lectures of one of the two instructors more than the other. This set up a negative environment in the room on certain days. It is possible that had they chosen a more interactive method of delivery (rather than relying predominantly on lecture) and if they had integrated their teaching with one another, perhaps the atmosphere of the classroom would have been more conducive to learning.

#### South Eastern Theatre Conference 2006- “Yes-And” Improvisation Workshop

In this two-part workshop series (one aimed at educators and the other at students), one presenter acted as lead and the rest of the team (five of us in all) demonstrated and added in comments when needed. This sort of team teaching could be called supportive teaching. This worked well because the lead teacher took charge from the beginning but was receptive to the other instructors’ comments, suggestions and feedback.

**Julie**

## Fox Theatrix

Julie was granted the opportunity to work collaboratively with other teachers and create a team teaching model for an elementary school age after school program. She and one other teacher were responsible for over 80 children in second through fifth grades, although a third teacher was added to the team early in the process. For this team, due to schedule restraints, they chose to utilize a combination of team teaching models. After large group instructions and warm ups which most closely follow the team teaching model, most class sessions consisted of parallel teaching, where the students were broken up into small groups and taught the same topic simultaneously. With a group that large and students so young, it was necessary to lower the teacher to student ratio in order to communicate effectively. This class has continued to meet during the research period of this project. It continues to function under a Self-Directed Structure.

## Richmond Shakespeare Theatre: School Shakespeare Workshops

These workshops travel to various high school and junior high English classrooms, educating the students about Shakespeare. The workshop is team taught by at least 2 instructors, and follows a Complementary Teaching model. One teacher is responsible for the bulk of the material and the other complements with performances of Shakespearean

monologues, demonstrations of ideas, and humor to keep the students engaged and focused.

### **Both Jenna and Julie:**

#### THEA 212 Introduction to Drama

Though we never taught at the same time, both Julie and Jenna have experience teaching this class. The course involves a large team of graduate students and one full time professor. Each graduate student is assigned twenty to twenty-five undergraduate students. In this model, the master teacher creates the syllabus, exams, quizzes, and paper topics. He introduces the students to the small discussion group structure and schedules periodic guest artist appearances. The bulk of the class is discussion based. This model, most closely aligned with the Consulting Team model, was beneficial in many ways, but frustrating in others. It was an excellent immersion into teaching small discussion groups.

Both Jenna and Julie found the experience extremely frustrating as someone who had already taught her own class. The Authority-Directed structure left the instructors very little power over where the discussion group went with the students' ideas, what paper topics to choose, when items were due. Because the structure was not team generated, but passed down from a master teacher, it was frustrating to be so removed from the master teacher's mindset.

This model was certainly not all bad. The small group discussion leaders met occasionally to converse about grading criteria and attempt to make a guide to grading that would be fair for all the students involved. Elements like that are extremely useful for

beginning teachers. Therefore there is some support and communal experience in terms of teaching this class.

If not all of our teaching experience in teams was fulfilling, why would we continue on to research this method? We believe that some models will work better for us than others, and the key to successful teaming is to find the right model and structure to fit the instructors involved. It is our goal that universities will examine the use of teaming so they can utilize the benefits collaborative teaching has to offer. Looking at the advantages and disadvantages of teaching in teams should help clarify which of these pedagogical approaches are worth embracing.

## **Advantages and Disadvantages of Co-Teaching**

Teaching in collaborative models can be both beneficial and detrimental to all involved, and a thorough investigation of the pros and cons is necessary in order to determine whether the advantages might outweigh the disadvantages. In the following section we have examined the advantages of implementing a team teaching model, and how it effects the students, teachers, department, and the university. While we have not limited our discussion to just the co-teaching model, most of our arguments directly affect that mode of teaching. The pros are followed by the potential disadvantages of team teaching, which are also discussed in terms of the above mentioned categories. While we have very strong personal feelings about ways to augment the advantages and reduce the disadvantages, we will not be addressing those within this section. For more specific details on ways to deal with pros and cons listed below, see the last chapter of the thesis, *Team Teaching: A Guide*.

## Advantages

The benefits of team-teaching are numerous for all involved. Each participant can benefit from this structure of teaching. We will focus on the benefits for the teachers, students and administration.

### THE TEACHER

The old adage, "two minds are better than one," certainly applies when teaching. According to Ann Austin and Roger G. Baldwin in the introduction to their book *Faculty Collaboration: Enhancing the Quality of Scholarship and Teaching*,

It is a universally accepted principle in business and industry that the more minds working on a problem, the greater the chance of finding a solution. Researchers of high achievers from Napoleon Hill to Stephen Covey identify the characteristic of working in teams as a major trait of people who repeatedly effect [sic] successful outcomes. The success of the space program in the 1960s would never have occurred without the collaborative efforts of many different intellectual areas. (Austin xv)

Since teaming has proved so valuable in other fields, it behooves us to explore how we can use teams more effectively in higher education. Although learning should be centered on what is most advantageous for the students, professors certainly benefit from a team teaching approach. Team-teaching allows professors an opportunity to share ideas and gain new perspective on their subject matter. When teaching with someone of the



same discipline, the educator is exposed to different ways of teaching the same material and challenged to question her own teaching style. Frequently, successful team-teaching pairs new faculty with seasoned faculty members. This allows the seasoned faculty the ability to observe fresh ways of teaching, and newer faculty members benefit from the experience of the seasoned educator. Lecture was the most common modality in the sixties and seventies when most of today's seasoned faculty members were obtaining their post-graduate degrees. Over the last thirty years, experiential learning has been increasingly stressed in education. Often younger faculty members place more of an emphasis on this type of learning. Pairing seasoned faculty with newer faculty allows the seasoned faculty to be exposed to more types of teaching, in a non-threatening way.

As today's senior faculty are joined, or prepare to be joined over the next decade, by a substantial new cohort of junior colleagues, the prospect of finding the collegueship they have long sought in intergenerational relationships with a new academic generation remains a tantalizing possibility. While a number of junior-senior 'mentoring' initiatives are indeed already underway, first impressions suggest that to date senior faculty have not seen in their junior colleagues such an opportunity (nor have their junior colleagues seen it in them). (Finkelstein 15)

The seasoned faculty is by no means the only part of the pairing who is enriched, as that teacher can mentor the newer member, and will have found ways to deal with problems that have not even been encountered by the new faculty member. There is a great deal that a new faculty member can learn by being paired with a more experienced

professor, both in regard to the subject matter which is being taught and the inner workings of the academic environment.

When teaching with someone from a different discipline, team-teaching exposes how others view one's specialty:

As faculty members team teach or observe in courses outside their specialty, they may gain an enhanced appreciation of the contributions that other disciplines and perspectives can make to the students and to their own work. This appreciation among colleagues is useful if the institution intends to undertake any curricular innovation or reform. (Austin 44)

The way a film professor views acting can enlighten how a theatre professor approaches the subject. An architect will see set design in a different way than a designer. Being aware of how others perceive our discipline can make it easier for us as professionals and professors to discuss our discipline outside the confines of our department. It will also meet our pedagogical needs if students' ability to work interdisciplinarily is enhanced. "Another way in which team teaching can affect the curriculum is by opening an avenue for the establishment of new courses that have no obvious departmental or disciplinary home. Courses in ethnic studies and women's studies have been initiated and ultimately established firmly at some institutions through this route." (Austin 44).

When teaching with someone of the same level and discipline, a great deal can be learned. All the team-teaching models require that each teaching participant examine their pedagogical practices, in order to articulate better the reasons behind them to the partner. It is not humanly possible to avoid questioning the pedagogical practices of the partner

teacher when they differ from your own. By necessity, the two teachers must combine their varied techniques to form a new pedagogical practice, which will most likely influence their future solo teaching experiences. Thus, the team teaching model has the potential to benefit future individual courses from the improved pedagogical practice of both instructors. As Francis J. Buckley states in the book Team Teaching: What, Why and How? when discussing single disciplinary teams,

Team teaching within a department is a relatively simple way to get experience with the dynamics of a team, for many department members already know and trust one another and may be curious about how others approach the material. There is less fear of public humiliation when the limits of their knowledge are revealed. In fact, they can rely on one another to keep the pace of class lively and to supplement data with stories. Just the variety of voices and personalities stimulates interest.

(46)

It is clear, therefore, that teaching with someone of the same discipline, even the same area of expertise, can prove beneficial to professors.

Another benefit of team-teaching for the professors involved is that of mutual support. Teachers in team-teaching situations report a greater sense of belonging and less isolation than teachers who teach alone. There is a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect which can be lost in the traditional structure of solo teaching. According to A Guide to Co-Teaching, “In co-teaching, teachers experience a sense of belonging and freedom from isolation by having others with whom to share the responsibility for accomplishing the challenging tasks of teaching in classrooms of diverse students” (xiv).

Two additional benefits of team-teaching for the professor are intertwined, that of culpability and logistical support. Procrastination is a common problem for all people, and those in the profession of teaching are no different. However, when one professor is accountable to another the urgency of completing each task on schedule is stronger. As long as there is mutual respect between those teaching together, there is incentive to uphold one's portion of the workload. Those who are often guilty of procrastination can find being accountable to another helpful in productively accomplishing tasks on time. One faculty member was quoted in Handbook of College Teaching: Theory and Applications as saying, "Teaching in front of other instructors helped me look at myself the way the students look at me. It made me think much more clearly about what I wanted to accomplish in terms of learning outcomes" (Prichard 128).

Logistical support is the flip side of culpability. As professors are also people, events happen which take them away from the classroom and/or duties relating to teaching. If illness or work takes one team member out of the classroom, there is someone to fill that gap. Again, as long as there is mutual respect, these sorts of interruptions can be worked with and the quality of classroom instruction can remain strong. This can be especially beneficial in a research university that expects the professors to be continuing their professional work alongside their teaching responsibilities. In a team teaching model, especially that of co-teaching, instructors would feel free to pursue endeavors that may take them out of the classroom temporarily, knowing they will not hinder the learning of their students by canceling much needed class time.

## THE STUDENT

Teaching should be focused on that which will allow the students to best understand and apply knowledge. Team-teaching helps us in this pursuit in a number of ways. They can be classified into two categories, those which are specific to the subject and class, and those which are larger life lessons.

In terms of specificity to the subject matter at hand, having multiple instructors in the classroom at the same time allows for smaller faculty-to-student ratios which allows for more one-on-one time with faculty members. Groups can be divided to allow more individual response time. The students are also hearing multiple perspectives each time they, or their classmates, receive feedback. This allows them to have a broader range of areas of improvement than if they were exposed to only one professor's feedback or opinion. Especially in the acting classroom, two sets of eyes on a performance can illuminate two different ways to solve a single problem. For example, if a student is having trouble establishing an environment for their character, both professors may identify a way to help establish the environment, and the student can begin to see that there is a myriad of choices they can make to achieve their goals. Students are empowered to find their own solutions instead of relying on the single professorial perspective.

With multiple instructors, the likelihood of personality conflict from student to professor, also diminishes. Some students and some instructors simply do not get along. However, with two instructors there is a greater chance that the students will connect with at least one of them. In fact, they may feel a greater connection to one instructor over the other, and thus have an easier time expressing themselves to that individual.

Perhaps one of the best parts of team-teaching lies in its broader application in the context of life lessons for students. In a classroom with multiple teachers, the students are exposed to multiple viewpoints. For many college students, they have spent their formative educational years with a single teacher who has given them one perspective. William Perry was among the first to study the intellectual development of college students, and he identified nine positions on the developmental sequence. Students in the position of dualism, which describes many first year college students, “view knowledge as truth – as factual information, correct theories, right answers. They view the professor as an authority who know these truths and believe that teaching constitutes explaining them to students” (Erickson 22). An exposure to multiple truths allows the students to see that there are multiple answers to most questions, not just one. This encourages them to take an active part in their own education, to examine multiple sides of an equation and to come to their own conclusions as to the answer. While students at this level of intellectual development will have the hardest time in a team taught classroom, they might benefit the most from the interaction.

Team-teaching, especially across disciplines, can foster a greater sense of community within the academics and curriculum of the students. It is difficult to relate theater and history to one another if they are taught in different buildings, at different times and by different professors who do not communicate. However, if one is exposed to both of them in the same class, it is easy to see how closely they follow one another. Once a person is exposed to this duplicity of thinking and the idea of interconnectivity between

disciplines is established, students will continue to make these sorts of connections throughout their lives.

Our world is becoming more and more interconnected and dependent on collaboration and teamwork. Team-teaching allows such collaboration to be modeled for students, thereby encouraging it. Also, team-teaching lends itself to the ability to teach with more interactive learning, which generally encourages team-building. Since teaching methods such as lecturing and note taking require less time to prepare, more active learning approaches are often heralded and seldom used. With two professors brainstorming more active approaches to learning, the teaming model is more likely to produce active learning experiences for students. While lecturing and note taking is quantifiably as effective in terms of testing, studies have now proven that experiential models of learning have long term learning benefits that far surpass those of traditional educational models.

Lecture is about as effective as other teaching methods when recall of information is tested. The lecture, however, turns out to be less effective than other methods when instructional goals include retention of information beyond the end of the course, application of information, development of thinking skills, modification of attitude, or motivation for further learning. In short, there is more to effective teaching than lecturing. (Erickson 87).

Learning that lasts beyond the final exam is more likely to be achieved in classrooms that use interactive approaches. Team teaching is a model that promotes interactive methods of teaching and learning.

And lastly, dependent on the make-up of the teams, team-teaching can model healthy diversity. If a man and woman are paired together, and are mutually respectful of one another's place in the classroom, their mutual respect will be noticed by students. If teachers from different religious, ethnic or racial backgrounds are paired and respectful of one another's differences, this will also be noticed by the student.

#### THE ADMINISTRATION

The logistical aspects of team-teaching, particularly in regards to the administrative strain, are often why such projects fail. However, there are certain benefits for a program that implements team-teaching models.

The first benefit has been mentioned above in the teaching section of benefits: improved job satisfaction for employees. When employees are satisfied with their job, productivity and morale improve. Everyone wants to enjoy being at work. As teachers who teach together are happier overall, it can be concluded that the workplace is more conducive to a productive work environment.

Finkelstein reports “in the normal course of business as usual, they [senior faculty] typically find little opportunity – formally or informally – to focus on teaching. Teaching is isolated, and poorer for that isolation. Without periodic opportunities to revitalize their professional lives generally and their teaching lives in particular, faculty members report



that their ‘teaching vitality’ tends to slip.” (25). These are not the words an administration wants to hear about their most experienced faculty members. The data examined was the result of an eleven campus study on senior faculty. Team teaching will allow faculty members to examine their pedagogical skills and prevent teacher burn out from lowering the quality of education for the students.

The second and third benefits, less disruption and larger class-size, are more administrative and quantifiable. If there are two or more teachers responsible for a single class, there is a smaller chance that the class will be canceled or suffer negative effects from teacher illness or inability to travel. This results in more in class instruction and therefore a better education for students. The ability to travel or take time off class for research and creative projects without undermining the quality of students’ education, will be attractive for new and current employees. It will also allow those employees to move into higher ranks which seem to be linked to higher job satisfaction and employee retention. As of 1989, according to the Carnegie Foundation, “77 percent of faculty at 4 year colleges agreed that it is difficult for a professor to achieve tenure if they do not publish. (Tack 11) Additionally, at least 33 percent of full time faculty viewed opportunities for research and creative projects as “quite a problem” or a “major problem”. (Tack 11). By providing team teaching experiences, faculty in theatre departments could experience a renewed freedom to participate in creative projects that call them out of town during the course of a semester, thus allowing faculty to continue to be relevant theatre practitioners as well as educators.

The second is that classes which are team taught can accommodate more students than a class that has an individual instructor. This is a huge benefit if space is a problem, since more students can be put into the spaces currently in existence, rather than having to create more buildings to house them.

There is also the potential positive effect of student retention. According Prichard in The Handbook of College Teaching, “an argument can be made that “frontloading” the curriculum with smaller classes in the freshman year would be more cost effective as far as student retention is concerned since so many students are lost in the first year of college” (132). Indeed, according to the VCU theatre website,

Our retention rate is much like other programs. About 35% of entering students will graduate. Only the most dedicated, talented and serious individuals will complete this program and have a successful career. However, the rewards are worth the extra effort. Theatre is not a career for those who are not willing to continually step up to the plate and prove themselves. (Twenty-Eight FAQ’s)

The first year of college is a decisive year for many students. According to the VCU 2020 Plan, retention is of top concern (Strategic Plan). In essence, putting two teachers into the classroom for first-year students might be worth the added expense if it means more students are retained for future years.

Another major benefit of team teaching for the department is the fusing of pedagogical approaches into one practice. Professors who have created common pedagogical practice in a team teaching model will now be able to create a cohesive vision for the department. Instead of courses being compartmentalized into each teacher’s area of

expertise, the professors would begin to work as a unit in creating a 4 year curriculum that is cohesive and dependent on the skills of all the faculty members. The theatre program will become a unique training institution that offers a system of training different than any other program. This could lead to increased student interest in the program, which again leads to more funding and higher quality students.

## **Disadvantages**

Of course, all pedagogical structures have their faults and team-teaching is no exception. In the next section we will highlight some of the potential pitfalls to team-teaching, as well as some ways to minimize these drawbacks. Again, we will examine this area from the perspectives of teachers, students and administration.

### THE TEACHERS

For teachers, the greatest drawback is the increase in work that is necessary to effectively team-teach. Team-teaching often requires complete revision of lesson plans and curriculum for a given class. It requires increased work in terms of team planning. Decisions must be made in tandem, which means that regular meeting times must be scheduled and attended. This is extra work, especially the first time the class is taught with a teaming model. Evaluation of class content and student performance must also be done in consultation. Teachers, who generally are already over-scheduled and taxed for time, may experience an increase in stress with this added work. The most effective way for this

problem to be overcome is for the administration to acknowledge the extra work and compensate for it by reducing workload in other areas. Of course, that is not always a feasible solution. Team teaching has an adjustment period, which requires careful planning so the experience will be positive rather than negative.

Personality conflict can also be a problem in team-teaching. Not everyone should, or can, team-teach and certainly personality should be taken into consideration when forming teams. Professors with very strong opinions about how their subject should be taught might actually produce negative results if *required* to teach in certain teaming models. The selection of participants for team teaching should be done very carefully, and participants should be honest and informed about which types of models they would be comfortable participating in.

In order to avoid this pitfall, professors and administrators should keep a few of the following ideas in mind. First, all individuals participating in team-teaching should be doing so voluntarily. A lot of friction can be avoided if the faculty is on the ground floor of designing such classes. As affirmed in Team Teaching: What, Why and How, “Poll the faculty to determine their interest and willingness to try it. If forced, most will resist. If invited, many will want to try it out” (20). If team-teaching is to be implemented across a program, it should be done slowly and those hiring in should agree to work in such a program. Teams should generally choose themselves and carefully discuss how they will approach the work of the team prior to entering into the classroom.

Another potential problem with team-teaching, for faculty, is the need for commonality. When working as a team it may be necessary, at times, to agree to disagree.

It may also be necessary to come to a consensus with the other individuals teaching so as to present a united front in terms of teaching a particular subject. This means that those teaching must willingly agree upon what should be covered in order to present the most cohesive and organized lesson plan possible. At times this will mean letting go of personal interests and compromising on content. This does not, however, mean that the teachers should not, at times, give differing opinions or viewpoints as this is one of the strengths of team-teaching. "Disagreements among their teachers about a topic illustrate for the students that interpretations vary, and faculty members' willingness to reveal the limits of their knowledge may show students how intellectual growth occurs." (Austin 43).

Each opinion must be conveyed in a way which respects the other and which does not confuse the students. Teachers will need to be especially sensitive to those students still in a dualism level of intellectual development, who will struggle with absorbing opposing truths.

Though no one likes to admit, apathy and laziness can also be a problem in any communal group. Apathy generally sets in for professors after teaching a course many times in succession. Their interest of the subject or structure wanes. Though this can happen with individual instructors, it is especially disruptive and difficult when only one of a team feels this way. The only real solution to the problem is for that professor to take a leave from the course (Davis 89). Laziness in group settings can also be a problem. As concluded in *Interdisciplinary Courses and Team-Teaching*, "Research has shown that individuals, in general, tend not to work as hard in groups as they do as individuals" (90).

There is no way to deal with this situation besides acknowledging it head-on and using one another to motivate more work, rather than less.

Finally, teachers may have difficulty dealing with professional jealousy. Professors may feel their methods are what make them valuable as an employee. To share those methods with someone else is to potentially risk their own job security. There is also great risk of accidental or intentional professional theft. If a teacher has developed a system that is implemented in a team teaching scenario, the teaming teacher may begin to use this in their work and receive credit if that work is published. This may be a reason newer teachers are interested in this model and more experienced teachers would be wary of teaming with someone who will not bring the same level of scholarship to the table.

This issue will have to be addressed sensitively and all parties involved need to be aware of the risks involved in this sort of work.

## THE STUDENTS

The biggest potential downfall for students is the confusion mentioned above. If the professors do not organize a cohesive and well-structured lesson plan in which differences of opinion are not the main focus, students can receive mixed messages. When differences of opinions are presented well, it gives students a wider range of possibilities and allows them to discover what their opinions are. If it is done poorly, it leaves the students confused about the necessary content of the course and undermines their opinions of the professors themselves.

Team-teaching does not fit the model in which most students have been educated. It can be disconcerting for students to have to switch their understanding of how one is taught. With team-teaching, which stresses experiential learning, it is more difficult for students to memorize and regurgitate. Some students do not respond positively to the added responsibility of active engagement. This is especially a concern when teaching first year students. (see the section on teacher pros about levels of intellectual development). The team-teaching classroom might be viewed as a threat for students still in a dualism level of intellectual development. When we asked the students in our freshman Acting I course, most indicated that they would prefer a course with two instructors over a course with only one, but not all of the students felt that way. A small minority said they would prefer to have only one instructor. It may be assumed this is because the team teaching model violates their model of teacher-student interaction. This can be adequately addressed through the way team-teaching is introduced to the class and showing respect for students.

## THE ADMINISTRATION

The administrative responsibilities for any university program are vast, and team teaching can place additional strains on the administration. It is the opinion of the writers, and several others, that ultimately the pros outweigh these cons. However, for each program they will have to be considered.

The first is the financial factor. “What is all too frequently overlooked, however, is the crucial corollary: senior faculty members’ success as teachers depends on the support

of their institutions” (LaCelle-Peterson 21). Faculty need the full, financial and practical support of the administration. Because of the additional work placed on the teachers, they should be compensated or their other workloads should be reduced. This would mean either paying them more or hiring other individuals to take on the additional work. The Handbook of College Teaching suggests the following in terms of the financial feasibility of team-teaching:

A four-credit class with twenty students will never support two faculty members at most colleges; as a result, each teacher is often given only a half-course credit for team teaching such a course. This solution does not respect the fact that two instructors are, in fact, teaching the class. Team teaching is thereby penalized and the long-run viability of the enterprise depends on faculty voluntarism. If, on the other hand, a team-taught class is offered for eight credits with forty students, it will more adequately support two faculty members. Many colleges are finding that large numbers of team-taught, linked courses can be offered through this approach. (Prichard 132)

The second factor is the logistics of space and time. Because there are generally more students in a team-taught class, the space that they will need is larger. Also, because Coaching and Teaming models of team teaching require all of the instructors present for all of the meetings, they can not have other classes scheduled at the same time. This is not insurmountable, nor is it necessarily more inconvenient than scheduling classes for individual classes, but should be considered.



The third factor is the allocation of administrative time. Many departmental administrators are not currently spending much time working toward creating a learning environment for faculty. A re-allocation of funds and time will have to be made in order to change the prioritized goals for the department. “Senior faculty especially, need multifaceted organizational structures that will encourage them to broaden their horizons, approach their work in different and imaginative ways, and find new opportunities to grow and change” (Finkelstein 17). The administration will need to decide that this is a priority and allocate the amount of planning and time necessary to implement a team teaching program.

The last is the decision of who to pair with whom. This decision often falls to the head of the department. He or she must decide if it would be better to put professors of the same status together to avoid potential clashes in seniority, or if the benefit of potential learning from a professor of a different status would be more appropriate. He or she must also decide if people of the same gender, race, etc. should be paired together because it will create more homogeneity in the teaching or if the diversity of views often gained by pairing people of different backgrounds is important in the team-teaching scenario. In the final chapter of this thesis, we will address ways to help in the formulating of teams.

Attempts to encourage women and minorities to apply for open teaching positions are customary, but university administration needs to do more to meet the needs of these employees in order to retain them. “A common problem many women and minority faculty report is the feeling of isolation and separation upon affiliation with an institution, particularly, for minority individuals, a predominantly white one. Consequently,

institutional officials must work diligently to create opportunities, both on and off campus, where women and minority faculty can interact with their peers both formally and informally “ (Tack 84). Isolation, separateness, and pressure to continue professional performance and research without funding or time to do so, all contribute to job dissatisfaction for professors, especially for women and minorities, according to Tack. Team teaching stands as a model for conquering all three of those battles. Working in teams allows professors to invest in each other and strengthen the faculty as a whole. Teaming can help the department achieve a cohesive curriculum that flows from one instructor to the next. It can also provide that necessary time for faculty to continue their own research and professional development, key to achieving tenure status. According to their interpretation of a compilation of studies, Tack and Patitu, argue that women faculty express much higher job dissatisfaction than men, but that this level of dissatisfaction begins to even between the sexes as tenure, salary, and rank increase. They also indicate that women faculty members are expected to have a much more active role in their personal home lives than their male partners, despite the fact that “Women typically teach more hours than men... and women faculty ‘bear a disproportionate share of undergraduate instruction, have less contact with graduate students, and are less likely to be given teaching assistants’ than their male colleagues.” (tack 36).

“In 1980-81, 49.7 percent of the full-time women faculty were tenured, compared to 70 percent of the men faculty members. Today while the percentage of male faculty members is the same, the percentage for women has dropped to 45.9 percent [according to a study by the American Association of University in 1992].” (Tack 39). The expectation

that a rise in women junior faculty in the 1970's would lead to a rise in female senior faculty in the 1990's has not proven to be the case. This could be addressed through administrative programs that help to eliminate isolation and disproportionate workloads, both of which would be examined or eliminated through the establishment of a team teaching structure.

## **Collaborative Teaching Here and Now**

### **University Level**

Is there a place for collaborative teaching at the university level? Several works are devoted to the study of teaming in the K-12 arena, but teaming models are not as frequently utilized in higher education. In most universities, the first year student is usually enrolled in the largest courses they will encounter in their academic career. In order to support the smaller class sizes of upper level courses, introductory courses are often large, and lecture based. This can be extremely daunting for students who have just left the high school structure, with a maximum class size of between thirty and thirty five students, and ample opportunity for one-on-one attention from the instructor.

Symbolically, the university, represented by huge lecture halls and a daunting campus, creates a large and impersonal view of the university. According to Teaching First Year College Students, when first year college students were interviewed about their past relationships with high school teachers, “more than 40 percent report talking with teachers outside of class [in high school] between one and five hours a week, and a quarter of them indicated they spent time in a teacher’s home” (9). The successful high school student enters college accustomed to high school teachers who remind them of due dates for

assignments and allow them to turn in late assignments for partial credit. For first year students, the larger impersonal class sizes can hinder both learning and satisfaction with college life. A team taught course can help a larger university seem more friendly and personal to incoming students.

However, one-on-one attention for incoming students is not the only benefit for team taught courses at the university level. A university can also benefit from team teaching through interdisciplinary courses. Interdisciplinary learning offers a great number of positives for the students who are taught in this fashion. According to James R. Davis' Interdisciplinary Courses and Team Teaching, there are five compelling reasons why interdisciplinary learning is more important now than ever before. They are:

1. Education should now be focused on teaching students how to “locate, retrieve, understand, and use information”, not simply to transmit information from professors to student (38).
2. The world we live in is increasingly complex. Students today are going to be asked to solve problems that are going to require the use of multiple disciplines and a wide view of issues (39).
3. “Today students increasingly need exposure to cultural diversity, both in its historical roots and in its contemporary expressions” (40).
4. There is an increasing need to prepare students for the practical work world, including offering courses which “develop training settings that more nearly correspond to the context of professional practice” (41).

5. “Interdisciplinary courses better serve the students themselves in their quest for personal growth and the development of a clearer identity” (41).

As undergraduates, we both found ourselves torn between departments. Julie worked with her school to create an interdisciplinary program combining adolescent studies with theatre, and Jenna chose to double major in psychology and theatre. Both attended smaller schools as undergraduates that encouraged interdisciplinary work and more teacher/student interaction. Students who might normally be drawn to smaller universities for such flexibility may find a larger university with cross-over classes appealing.

The reverse would be true in a smaller college or university setting as well. A school which does not have a specialist in “psychology and the theatre” (as few do), could offer a team taught course on the psychology of acting, utilizing a professor of psychology and a professor of acting. By using both professors, psychology students could have a practical outlet for exploring the subconscious and acting students could have a theoretical basis for exploring characters. By cross listing the course, a smaller university can offer a course to students in both majors, which could be an elective for both, and offer a course they could not have otherwise.

Team teaching in today’s university provides benefits for more than the students. According to Katzenbach and Smith, in The Wisdom of Teams:

Teams will play an increasingly essential part in first creating and then sustaining high performance organizations. In fact, most models of the “organization of the

future” that we have heard about- “networked,” “clustered,” “nonhierarchical,” “horizontal,” and so forth- are premised on teams surpassing individuals as the primary performance unit in the company. (qtd. in Davis 77)

The faculties of universities need to work collectively, in order to produce the most cohesive education possible, resulting in the best trained students. Team teaching helps individuals hone their communication and conflict resolution skills, as well as improve their team work and interpersonal abilities.

Based upon data collected by the New Jersey institute for Collegiate Teaching and Learning in an action research project involving eleven campuses, LaCelle-Peterson and Martin Finkelstein discovered that “senior faculty members care a great deal about teaching and experience it as fulfilling.”(Finkelstein 25). Conversely, faculty members found teaching isolating and felt they were given little opportunity to work on their teaching. As a result of these findings they identified two ways for universities to support faculty development: “creating structural alterations in the teaching situation to eliminate the isolation of teaching, and brokering individual opportunities to revitalize individual professors. “ (Finkelstein 25). Team teaching, when used for pedagogical enhancement, is a methodology that meets both of those qualifications.

## **In the Arts**

If team teaching is so desirable at universities, what makes it particularly compelling in artistic fields? Traditionally, arts education was taught through an apprentice/master teacher relationship. Students studied individually with a master of the

craft in the studio or workplace and were taught to copy the teacher. Now students in the arts are taught at universities in classes full of other students. Art education has moved away from emulation of the teacher and toward encouraging individual expression. Students are asked to create something new and unique to them. It logically follows that having a team taught course in an artistic field requires that they receive at least two artistic perspectives, making sure that the outcome of their art is not merely an attempt to replicate what that professor likes or knows. Students at the college level, especially first year students, are prone to producing what they think their professor wants, instead of producing art that is aesthetically pleasing to them. Along the same lines, most professors in the arts have a specialty, an area of intense study and concentration. Either consciously or not, professors teach to their areas of interest. Their students' art often reflects this, as we create based on what we are taught. The double instructor scenario can help to eliminate the possibility of gearing work toward pleasing the professor or recreating the one genre or method taught, and move students toward working for their own personal feeling of achievement. This should eventually raise the level of achievement of students as they become responsible for their own aesthetic. For an artistic field, it is necessary that the pedagogical methods work toward this end in order to create a generation of artists who are able to think "outside of the box."

The arts, on many college campuses including Virginia Commonwealth University, are insular. Because of the vast amount of information the programs wish to impart to their students, coupled with egos and interdisciplinary feuds, there is little to no collaboration or integration of artistic studies. Courses such as *Exploring the Arts*, taught



at Niagara County Community College in Sanborn, NY, help students to bridge the gaps between the different fields of art. According to the course's general description, it is taught by two faculty members from the arts and the "team approach with shared elements enhances the ability to relate one form to another" (Davis 174). By offering a course which exposes students to the performing, and visual arts together, we can begin to encourage students to pursue ventures which cross artistic lines and which will ultimately generate new forms of artistic expression.

### **Why Acting?**

For acting, the benefits are many. It could be argued that theatre is the most interdisciplinary of the arts. Theatre is the art form that requires all other art forms in order to be made. We use sculpture, metal working, painting, and crafts in set making and costume construction. Music and dance are often a part of the production. The ideas of composition, lighting, design are all at work in theatre classrooms just as they are in architecture, photography, and other artistic disciplines. More than any other discipline, theatre benefits the most from having the input of a community of artists with different talents.

Acting lends itself to a well-rounded education, encompassing many disciplines. A trained actor should have a basic understanding of historical time periods, psychology, health, and physical fitness. She should be well read and be familiar with analyzing and interpreting text. These fundamentals of the actor's trade come from history, psychology, physical education, and English. Who is better suited to teach an actor textual analysis, an

acting teacher or an English teacher? What if they had the opportunity to learn from both simultaneously? What if the history class covered the same time period that the movement class was working in? Wouldn't the students have a firmer grasp on the subject matter if the history teacher could teach the history while the movement teacher concentrated on period movement, instead of both trying to lightly touch upon both? And this interdisciplinary learning does not only benefit acting students. Exposure to the performative side of one's discipline (be it history, or English or any other discipline) can change the way a student of that field views both their own work and that of actors.

Aside from interdisciplinary approaches, is there any benefit to having two professors with the same areas of expertise co-teaching a class? Or is this methodology best if the teachers provide different areas of expertise? This question is particularly important to our project, as we are both acting teachers. Should we be allowed to teach an acting course collectively, even though our areas of expertise appear to be the same? While this is a legitimate question, it seems to rely on the presumption that two educators who specialize in acting will still have the same approach to creating a role. But this is an incorrect assumption. In our acting education to-date, Jenna and Julie have been taught from or taught out of the following text books; Acting: Onstage and Off by Robert Barton, Acting is Believing: A Basic Method by Charles McGaw and Larry Clark, Respect for Acting and Challenge for the Actor by Uta Hagen, Impro! by Keith Johnstone, Sanford Meisner on Acting by Meisner and Dennis Longwell, and Sydney Pollack, An Actor Prepares by Constantin Stanislavski, Improvisation for the Theater by Viola Spolin, The Actor Speaks: Voice and the Performer by Patsy Rodenburg, and The Practical Handbook

For The Actor by Melissa Bruder, On the Technique of Acting by Michael Chekhov and No Acting Please by Eric Morris and Joan Hotchkis. There are many ways to teach acting. No two people are the same, nor do we approach learning or acting in the same way. In our case, while we both specialize in acting, we have very distinct approaches to creating a role. Julie works from an outside-in approach, pulling on the tenants of Chekhov and other more physical teachers. Jenna's method is grounded more in Stanislavski's ideas of empathy and magic if, mixed with improvisation and impulse work. Our students benefit from all of our experiences, failures, and techniques. An actor's greatest challenge is to create a truthful performance. We believe that the acting student must experience a variety of methods to achieve that truth, until they find a set of tools they may call upon when they are creating a role. With both of us contributing views of our students' work, the students in our classes have the potential of finding tools that work for them more quickly than if they have the traditional one instructor model. Because we have time to watch and assess their level of learning, we also have the opportunity to quickly recognize when a method is not working for them, and thus we can adapt more quickly to suit their individual needs. An example of this dual teaching happened recently, when we were both coaching a student on her monologue for freshman assessments outside of class. With two of us we were able to use one person as the "other" while keeping a critical eye outside of the monologue to give feedback and side-coaching. We each had a different opinion of what was working and what was not in the playing of the monologue and were able to augment one another's comments with helpful suggestions for improvement.

Students come to college with various levels of intellectual development. Those at the dualism level tend to seek a master who will give them the right answers. (Erickson 22). What we as professors want them to begin to accept is the idea that there may not be only one answer to the problem they are trying to solve. Having a multiplicity of perspectives can guide them into this idea and teach them to seek new answers for themselves, rather than rely on one right answer.

### **For Today (and at VCU)**

But is this idea truly relevant for today? Much of our initial research came from the 1970s, when team teaching was being bandied about as an alternative pedagogical approach. It was a time when people were attempting to change the way education “had always been done”. Why would we choose to revisit this idea in the twenty-first century? The initial response to this question is that what the educational system is doing is not meeting the needs of either students or educators. Only 47% of American high school graduates pursued a college education in 2005 (United States, Census). According to ACT, a national not-for-profit testing agency, approximately 31.3% of all freshmen do not make it to their sophomore year. And the national average completion rate at four-year colleges is 52.3% (ACT). That means that of the 47% who pursue their education, less than half will complete their college degrees. That equals approximately one out of every four American students. We are looking for a teaching method that hooks students on

learning, which creates a safe and effective learning environment. We seek to create better artists and better instructors. Team teaching can do that.

According to Ann Austin and Roger Baldwin, “the growth of collaboration could be part of a major redefinition of academic roles and the way they are carried out” (1). Collaborative scholarship is part of a societal trend towards group learning and discovery. In order to keep pace with the rapidly changing needs of society, institutions of higher education must adapt. This means incorporating teaching methods that encourage collaborative learning rather than regurgitation, especially as the millennial generation moves out of high schools and into colleges and universities. Team teaching has the dual opportunity of encouraging collaborative work and thinking as well as modeling the collaborative approach.

An expanded vision of scholarship is necessary if this country’s higher education institutions are to remain vital and to keep pace with society’s rapidly changing needs. Including teaching and efforts to integrate and apply knowledge as well as the discovery of knowledge into this revised definition of scholarship calls into question the conventional model of faculty practice. Any reassessment of scholarship and academic life generally must devote attention to the phenomenon of collaboration among faculty.” (Austin 3).

Virginia Commonwealth University’s M.F.A. program in Theatre Pedagogy is one of the only programs in the country to offer a Masters of Fine Arts in the art of teaching theatre. This means the graduate program at Virginia Commonwealth University has a

unique opportunity to provide learning experiences that are not found at other universities. By offering graduate students the opportunity to propose team taught courses as a practical outlet for their studies in pedagogy, the graduate students will benefit from the practical discussion and application of pedagogical practice. This method will help VCU stand out at the graduate level as an academy interested in training quality educators in the field of theatre.

Additionally, graduate student team teaching helps meet a departmental need. More students are receiving theatre education in K-12 programs. This means that those auditioning for the VCU undergraduate major in performance are better trained than their predecessors. As a result, more students are making the cut to be performance majors. The outcome is that more performance students every year are accepted, without additional faculty positions created to teach them. Having graduate students work in teaching teams to fill in the extra classes helps meet the needs of the pedagogy graduate students as well as the needs of the growing theatre department.

It is important to note that this method of using qualified graduate students to teach courses does not preclude having full time professors also take advantage of this type of opportunity. VCU could also use this program to attract visiting professors, pairing them with current faculty in a team teaching capacity, for example. In this way the university might be able to attract more prestigious teachers interested in approaching education in a unique way, as well as professionals who may not have as much pedagogical training. The full time faculty members of the VCU theatre program are already utilizing team teaching in some graduate course work as well, namely in the movement track. While the continued

use of this methodology speaks towards the effectiveness of it, the approach is not taken for pedagogical purposes.

Team teaching would also be ideal for creating more block courses, just beginning to be explored at VCU. For example, currently the junior level voice classes are beginning to work on Shakespearean text in their second semester. This is also the same semester the junior level acting class begins to work on classical and Shakespearean acting. The professors for each course work together to help the students use what they are learning in one course when they are working on the other. This type of relationship is only one step away from a block course, where students stay in class for the same time period, but both teachers are present for each other's instruction and can contribute during the whole session. Team teaching in this situation would enable the professors to give the acting students a more holistic approach to their art, reinforcing the need to focus on both voice and body when approaching the text.

## Collaboration in Action

Team teaching originated for us as the means for both of us to gain additional teaching experiences knowing there were a limited number of classes available. Jenna and Julie submitted a proposal to team teach the acting for non-majors course at VCU, *Introduction to Stage Performance*. The proposal was approved by the members of the performance faculty, and we taught this course once a week during the spring semester of 2006. This course worked out so well, that we were given the opportunity to switch to teaching the first year acting course for performance majors, *Acting I*. This began in August 2006, and is a year long course which will not be completed by the time of this writing. This team teaching format will be used in subsequent courses at VCU as a pedagogical method for training actors, pairing graduate students to teach introduction to acting courses.

Both courses taught are introductory, although the second course is taught at a more advanced level, and delves deeper into acting theory based on the Stanislavski system. The first course needed to stand alone, as perhaps the only acting course these non-majors would take. The second course is the first of four years, and needs to fit into the given curriculum of performance training.



## **Beginning Collaboration**

Preparing to teach the *Introduction to Stage Performance* course brought all kinds of new learning experiences. We were initially a bit overwhelmed by the amount of work team teaching presented. We chose very early on to work in a co-teaching format, which would allow us to be present at each class session and take turns presenting and assisting in the presentation of material. There was a tendency for both of us to put off working on the course, perhaps from a fear of failure or concern over being judged. We waited until we did not have much time before the course began and were rushed during the planning period for the first course. Also, because we were approved for the class late in the fall, most of our planning took place over the winter break. This meant that much of our planning was done over the phone and through e-mail communication.

During several e-mail conversations (see the entire text in Appendix C), we discussed the content of the course, the reading materials that would be used and what we wanted the students to learn. We agreed that the course needed to cover the basics of play organization and an introduction to an acting system. We chose to have all of the students read the same play and their first in-class scenes were from this play, so as to be able to discuss structure, and character development as a group. In terms of the arrangement of the course, we discussed whether it would be best to start them off with monologues or scenes. By starting with monologues they did not have to work with someone else, but the fear of being alone on stage would be greater than if they worked with a partner. We settled on them doing two scenes with a monologue unit in between. We also discussed

what other assignments we wanted them to complete, such as a journal of their impressions of class and outside observations of theatre. By e-mailing and exchanging ideas we were able to come up with a cohesive initial plan which we both agreed on in terms of the class assignments and daily activities.

### **Complications**

Due to our time constraints, we chose a text for the course that was recommended by previous professors of the course and that at first glance seemed to serve our purposes. Unfortunately, as the class went on we realized that this particular text did not suit our needs as professors and we regretted its hasty selection. If we had been prepared for the amount of compromise and planning that would be involved in this portion of our work together, we might have been able to find a text more suited to both our teaching and acting styles.

We also did not anticipate the amount of time the planning portion of the course would take the first time around. Beginning course planning, construction of syllabus, assignments, and calendar all took more than twice as long as they would have if we were on our own. The first few weeks we met for long periods of time trying to create a system in which we could both work.

Each of us worked on planning for the class for several hours on our own in addition to these lengthy planning sessions. We spent approximately 10-12 hours per week together for the first few weeks of class to find a system which would satisfy us both.

What we came up with was a lot of compromise, trying to incorporate what each of us felt was essential for learning the beginning skills of acting.

It is important to note here that this was also the first acting course either one of us had been invited to teach at the college level. If we had been more experienced and come to the table with a firm pedagogical stance, we might have been able to cut down on the amount of planning we required. We also would have had more of a cache of prior syllabi and lesson plans, which could have been merged rather than creating both from scratch.

It was in these very early stages of teaching together that our differences and strengths began to emerge. We discovered very quickly that Jenna is very gifted at class discussion. Even after teaching an entire discussion based course, Julie still felt very awkward leading a class discussion. As a learner she has always enjoyed class discussions, but left them feeling as if it had been a waste of time from a learning standpoint. But as a professor, allowing the opportunity for discussion and guiding this discussion to key issues which needed reiteration or further explanation seemed necessary for the retention of learning. Jenna easily filled that role of discussion leader as she was able to use her skills in improvisation to flow the conversation in a direction that would benefit the students.

We also learned in that early period that Julie has great ability in inventing exercises that teach the concepts we decided were important. She has a creative, out of the box thinking which Jenna sometimes falls short in and which allows her to not only adapt acting exercises she had been taught but to create new ones. We fell into a pattern in the beginning of having Julie lead an exercise and then having Jenna lead the discussion. This

method worked very well, and we felt successful at our attempts, however it was not a long-term solution due to our pedagogical interests. Each of us wanted to become proficient at new skills as well as hone existing ones. Had we kept that model, Julie would not have been able to practice the skill of leading class discussion, and Jenna would not have been challenged to create and teach classroom exercises. What we needed was a more interactive method of teaching that would allow us to share all the responsibilities, in order to improve our training as educators. We also wanted our students to have the most dynamic and interactive experience possible. We felt that this organizational pattern, exercise by Julie and discussion by Jenna, was not as dynamic and fluid as it could be. It would, however, take many class sessions and planning sessions in between for us to discover how to truly team teach.

For our *Introduction to Stage Performance* class, we were very careful to delegate which tasks were to be accomplished and create an outline that distinguished our divided roles (see example below). We feared that the students would not know who to listen to if more than one of us spoke at a time. The second professor would act as coach and observer, noting the student response to the activities or discussion and we would converse about our observations afterwards.

Here is an example of the division of activities. It is no wonder after looking at this detailed plan why it took us so long to formulate class lesson plans. We thought that we were being very detailed and precise, when in fact we were not allowing ourselves enough freedom to make the lesson meaningful for the students. This was from January 17, 2006, the first day of class.

*Julie-Attendance*

*Jenna, Julie- Introduction of Instructors*

*Jenna- Syllabus*

*Julie- Questions*

*Julie- Have them introduce themselves and tell why they are in this class and/or what their experience is with theatre*

*Jenna- Name games: I'm going to a picnic and...*

*Julie- Partner exposure: divide them into two groups. Have them face each other and pair off with a partner. Coach: "you look at us. We'll look at you." Those on stage will soon become uncomfortable. Some will giggle and shift from foot to foot; others will freeze in position or try to appear nonchalant. If the audience starts to laugh, stop them. Just keep coaching: "you look at them, they'll look at you."*

*When each person on stage has shown some degree of discomfort, give the group that is standing a task to accomplish. Counting is a useful activity, since it requires focus: tell them to count the floorboards or the seats in the auditorium. They are to keep counting until you tell them to stop, even if they have to count the same things over. Keep them counting until their discomfort is gone and they show bodily relaxation. Then their bodies have a natural look, although at first they continue to show signs of years of held muscles. Reverse the groups. Only give the direction to count after they too have become uncomfortable. [this exercise was borrowed from Viola Spolin's Improvisation For the Theater]*

*Jenna- Circle Time. Discuss each part separately (don't tell them how they felt, get them to talk) "How did you feel when you were first standing on stage?" there will be few answers at first. Some might say, "I felt self conscious" or "I wondered why you had us standing there." Such answers are generalities which indicate the student's resistance to the exposure just experienced. Try to break down the resistance. For instance, ask the audience: "How did the actors look when they first stood on the stage? You will get more answers, although they may still be vague and general. Ask for specifics. Encourage the actors to describe their physical responses to being on stage. "How did your stomach feel?" if a student says "I felt self-conscious" say "I don't know what you mean, how did your shoulders feel?"*

*Then switch to "How did you feel when you were counting the boards?" don't say "when you had something to do." Let the actors discover that activity helped them on their own. Then ask what happened to their fluttery stomach, watery eyes, sweaty palms, or whatever else they said. Hopefully they will say "it went a way" and the why will be "because I had something to do." This something to do (focused energy) is the actor's*

*focus. Explain that this counting will be replaced by a different acting problem each time they do an exercise, and this “something to do” will be called their focus (Spolin 51-55).*

*Red-rover if there is time*

*Assign journal assignment to become aware of themselves and what happens to them physically in different situations.*

*Recommend they begin to read the book.*

## **Class Sessions**

Per Jenna’s resolve, we focused the beginning class sessions of our performance class on trust exercises and activities designed to help the class get to know each other. Julie had traditionally not spent much time in her courses on this type of activity because she felt students would think it was a waste of their time. Other instructors and some students have been surprised at the amount of time we used to establish a safe environment. After watching the way the students in the class began to work more as a unit, and the ease with which we learned their names and got to know them, now we both feel these beginning exercises are key to a successful performance classroom (see appendix B for syllabus with complete class by class breakdown of exercises and assignments).

Students were asked to keep a journal and write specifically about class exercises, their impressions and learning experiences. Several students wrote in their journals about the benefits of trust exercises and a closeness or energy that was present which they enjoyed.

In order to further the group dynamic, we chose to begin the coursework with scenes, rather than monologue work. We felt the students would feel more accountable to

each other in scene practice and that it might ease them into performing onstage if they were with someone else.

This was very successful. We took a few extra weeks with the first scene in order to ensure students had adequate time to prepare and a good understanding of the basic elements we were looking for in a performance. All of the students did very well and many exceeded our expectations of them during this first scene. They were supportive of one another, even though we had a wide variety of cultures and viewpoints represented.

We feel this was partially due to the fact that the first scenes were all chosen from the same play. The students were all required to read the play and then we used class time to delve deeper into each one of the characters. This meant that the audience members also had a vested interest in the performances, as they were all developing their own opinions and character choices for the same characters.

After the initial scene work, we moved on to monologues. We allowed the students to find and choose their own monologues to perform and attempted to guide them. The monologues were not at all on par with the initial scenes. We were disappointed with the student's lack of discipline in rehearsing their monologues and the low energy while they performed them. After reading their journal entries and speaking with the students, we realized that we had not been able to anticipate the high anxiety level non-performers felt over having to perform all alone in front of each other. Even though we had provided a basis of success and trust, they were still not able to conquer their fears successfully enough to adequately practice and prepare for a solo performance.

Because each student was performing a piece from a different play, and some of the monologues were better written than others, they were on an uneven playing field and we, as instructors, had no commonality to do in class work on these pieces. As there were twenty-one students in the class and we met only once a week, it was not possible to give each student much one-on-one instruction. We were disappointed with the process of monologue work and the final presentation, and were determined for the next students we taught to find a more effective way of approaching this unit.

The final scenes were better than the monologues, but still not as well performed as the initial scene work had been. We can only conclude that the class members were not as invested in helping one another when they did not know the play being performed or have any way of relating to each other's characters. It is also possible that as the semester wore on their requirements in other classes preceded their investment in this class, which was an elective for all of them.

If we were given the opportunity to teach this class for non-majors again, we would need to seriously consider assigning them scene work from a common play and working to make individual performance less anxious. It might be that we would not assign them monologue work at all, and do all of our work out of common plays.

## **Results**

Despite some of our pitfalls, we felt our teaching experience was a success. Some of the students went on to audition for the theatre department as performance majors. One



student sent us an email to thank us both personally for helping him feel more comfortable in front of other people, a skill which he will need in his chosen future profession.

Though not all of our students have always liked us, not one student complained about the team teaching structure, or suggested that they disliked having to deal with two instructors. Many gave us honest and useful feedback, some of which can be seen in the appendix: student comments.

## **The Adaptation**

We were afforded the opportunity to teach a year long freshman acting class, which gave us a second chance to adapt our teaching strategy, goals and lesson plans for acting. As we are still teaching the course, our strategies are continually being honed and expanded. This section will explore the areas that we feel have been changed and improved upon since our initial class together.

- Used the required text – still not necessarily our first choice

Our first semester teaching together we were extremely dissatisfied with the text we had chosen. We determined to do a much better job selecting the text for our second course, but this was not in our hands. The *Acting I* course is taught by three different sets of professors and all sections use the same book, Acting Onstage and Off: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition by Robert Barton. So while we could not improve selection of text, we did improve in reading the text more fully ahead of time in order to be better equipped to answer the

questions our students might have. We were lucky in that this text does more closely align with our views of theatre, and, in our opinion, is easier for students to understand and apply. We also took the opportunity to educate ourselves on some alternative texts we might wish to suggest to the department for future years, such as The Actor's Checklist by Rosary O'Neill, An Actor Performs by Mel Shapiro, or Free to Act by Mira Felner.

□ Less planning required

Huzzah! Now that we had a semester of teaching together under our belts, we were able to more quickly and easily put together our ideas for the second course. We did not need to take as much time getting to know each other's pedagogical style because we had previously discussed and observed that. Beginning lectures and activities were very easy to plan because we had an arsenal of activities and exercises we knew would be useful for reaching our desired goals. As the course has progressed into territory that was not covered in our initial class, our planning sessions have gotten a little longer. However, because we now have a common vocabulary and an appreciation of one another in the classroom, most of our conversation is on a deeper level than simply planning. We discuss not only what we are going to do, but the pedagogical benefits and pitfalls of presenting ideas in various ways. Because we are more comfortable in the classroom we do not have to spend our planning time assigning the specifics of who is going to do what.

□ Less nervous in front of each other

Without even realizing it was happening, we had turned into confident teachers who were no longer nervous to be in front of a classroom of students or one another. It is interesting in retrospect to remember how having another teacher in the room made both of us nervous. When the other teacher confirms an exercise was unsuccessful, the sense of defeat had been so much larger than it was in courses we had taught individually (though of course the praise when something did work was nice). By the time we began our second course, we had gotten so used to teaching with each other we no longer even thought about what the other one might be thinking of us.

- No longer required delegating responsibilities to specific people during the lesson

We stopped delegating specific instruction responsibilities in our course planning. We had reached a place where it was easy to flow from one topic to the next without choosing ahead of time who would lead what portion of the class session. This was occasionally frustrating if one instructor moved on from the topic at hand before the second instructor felt they were ready. It also occasionally led to professional jealousy, as a student might exclaim in delight over an exercise invented by one instructor but implemented by the other. Letting that other instructor take credit for a team effort was frustrating. We would then have to remind ourselves that the reason for teaching is not for our edification, but for the learning of our students. Therefore, it is not important who implements the “aha” moment for the students, simply that they have them. Despite these minor setbacks, this system was more successful than the first system rigidly defining who was in charge of

leading each section. The flow felt more organic and each instructor expressed a higher level of satisfaction in taking part of all the activities.

□ Set team office hours for planning and meeting with students

One of the best changes we made for our teaming structure was to schedule team office hours. We set aside one hour after each class session strictly for planning and reviewing course materials. Because we are considered adjunct faculty, the department does not require that we keep office hours to meet with students. As a result, we did not schedule set planning times for our first class, but just met as much as we could during the week. For the second course we wanted to be more available for students as well as have a set planning period, and we scheduled joint office hours twice a week. This has proven incredibly helpful. It meant we were not taking our free time to plan for the class and students could feel free to meet with us privately for help or support.

□ Split up the grading

In adapting what we had done for our second class, we found that a slightly different approach would be more successful. Rather than both of us grading all of the written work, we began randomly dividing the work in half and each grading separately. This cut our grading time in half, since we no longer needed to read every journal and paper individually and then combine our scores. We worked to create a rubric for each assignment, and then consulted each other when an assignment seemed to be on the border of a grade. In this way we could review student work more quickly and return it to them in

a timely manner. The disadvantage to this approach is when a student asks for feedback, only one of us is equipped to answer regarding that particular assignment.

## **Team Teaching: A Guide**

### **Putting together the right team**

#### **Who picks?**

Putting together the right team is the key to successful team teaching. How the team is formed will play a crucial part in team dynamics. It is our recommendation that teams be chosen in a two fold manner.

First, both the administration and the potential instructors have to be interested in the project. Instructors wishing to be part of a team should apply for the opportunity. If individuals are forced or coerced into being a part of the project, then the ensuing work will be frustrating and thwart any benefits the administration is trying to achieve. It is our contention that given the choice, and compensation that matches the investment, most instructors would be interested in trying a team approach. The key is to find a balance between professors who are interested in working collaboratively, and those who would be good candidates for this type of work.

Once teams have applied to the administration for the opportunity of working in a team teaching paradigm, then it is up to the administration to appoint as many teams as they are prepared to support. In this way, team-taught courses will not grow too fast for the department to be able to effectively support them. The administration would be able to

review the proposals and determine which courses might be best taught in a teaming format. It is also possible that the administration can foresee potential problems amongst pairings. These could either be dealt with beforehand, or at least prepared for should they arise.

***Specifically at VCU:***

At the moment, all teams are being chosen by the head of the Graduate Theatre program. As Julie and Jenna were the first to suggest team teaching as a model for graduate students to gain more experience and support one another collaboratively in the classroom, the entire system is new. It is our suggestion that the teams choose one another and then approach the head. This allows the instructors the chance to compare pedagogical beliefs and teaching interests prior to asking to be placed in a specific class setting. Ultimately, of course, the decision should be left up to the head of the graduate program, as well as any faculty committee that must accept class instructors and proposed classes.

**Which classes to choose**

So what classes are appropriate for team teaching? Some courses will be naturally more conducive to a cooperative learning environment than others. For instance, a math course that utilizes visual learning may not benefit much from the kinesthetic approach of having two teachers. This does not mean that the math class wouldn't benefit from a teaming approach, but it may not be the first choice for an administration. Courses that attempt to cross disciplines, fuse multiple approaches, employ hands-on learning or approach the subject from an intercultural perspective will probably benefit the most from

a team of teachers who could provide insight into the variety of perspectives being presented. This is why the acting classroom is so conducive to this format. By layering on multiple approaches, the students will be able to approach a role in a very unique way.

***Specifically at VCU:***

The benefits to the team-teaching instructors, when applied to graduate pedagogy students, are fantastic. You get to explore your own pedagogical style as well as someone else's. You are allowed the opportunity to teach an area that alone you might not have been allowed. You have a support structure built-in and someone who is there in every class for guidance and encouragement. That is why it is our opinion that any course which had previously been taught by a single graduate student would benefit from the team model. The two courses we have taught work very well in this structure. We believe that voice, movement and advanced specialization courses would also benefit.

**Do you have to already know each other?**

We happened to be friends and had worked together on small projects before applying to team teach. This was very important in our choosing the co-teaching paradigm since we already knew we would enjoy working very closely with each other and we felt comfortable enough with our ability to work as a team. While we think this was advantageous, it is not necessary for team members to know each other ahead of time. In some instances, a School or Program may be interested in creating an interdisciplinary team. These instructors may wish to start working together in a less time consuming capacity until they have built up a strong rapport. Perhaps a coaching model would be an



excellent place to start. Even though we had worked closely together, we still felt nervous about teaching in front of one another. We can only imagine that this sensation would be increased in an environment where the two professors have no knowledge of one another in or out of the classroom. This fear should not limit using strangers in teams, but administration and professors should be aware of the challenge this imposes, and work to combat that fear.

Friendship, though advantageous to us, is not necessary for a successful team. Indeed, there have been friendships ruined when mixed with work responsibilities. The most important aspect of the selection is that you compare pedagogical ideology and practices and can agree on a cohesive model for your classroom.

### **Who gets to be the Boss?**

Is teaming better for those who are of equal status? The answer depends on the desired results of the teaching. For our pedagogical interests, we needed to be paired with instructors of equal status, in order to take full advantage of co-teaching for our own learning. Had one of us been a graduate student instructor and the other a professor the dynamic between us would be different. We needed to be of perceived equal status to ourselves and our students in order to team teach in our particular style.

However, this does not mean all teams must be equal. Indeed two of the three structures outlined in the hierarchy of collaborative teaching (see definition of terms section) rely on members not being equal in status. The consulting team paradigm is designed for one instructor to be of higher status than the other. The coaching team

structure, if used in an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary course, generally acknowledges the expertise of each team member in their individual discipline.

***Specifically at VCU:***

This is an area that should be paid close attention to when pairing fellow graduate students in co-teaching situations. We feel that in the context of mutual learning and shared teaching responsibility that it is important that the graduate students who are paired feel that they are equals in terms of status and responsibility. Each needs to feel as though their voice, opinions and objections are as valid as the other team member(s). This means that the team members must respect one another, and value the opinion of the team members with whom they have chosen to work.

## **Initial Planning**

### **What to Include**

Initial planning should include several key elements. First, just as in any course planning, is to determine what is essential to cover in the course. Often the department has very specific learning goals for the course and it is important to start with these. For example, the performance program at Virginia Commonwealth University is a four year program in which each year builds on the previous one. As we were given the opportunity to teach the first year it was necessary for us to understand this year in the context of the others. VCU's program starts students with basic understanding of themselves and an introduction to Stanislavski training, which is continued in the next year. As there are multiple sections of this course taught by multiple instructors, and as the students will most

likely be in a different grouping next year, it is imperative that they leave our class with a certain level of knowledge which is consistent with the desires of the program and the other sections of the same class. If we did not adhere to the learning goals of the class, our students would be significantly behind by the start of the next school year.

Beyond the basics set forth by the administration, you will need to determine what each of you wants the class to know. This is when it is important to voice personal strengths and weaknesses as well as interests on the subject. If the course is team taught in order to diversify student learning, it is important that the curriculum match those goals. Each instructor is going to have slightly differing views about what the most essential components of the course are. The planning phase is the correct time to discuss these and come to a consensus regarding the curriculum.

Next, take a good look at the logistics. How many students will be in the course and what type of space will you need to request (or will be assigned to you)? Being aware of the logistical components of the class in advance will help the instructors determine which model/structure will be most appropriate. Another consideration is the number of class sections being taught. Having the opportunity to teach the same course to more than one group of students at a time may encourage teachers to try different models of teaching. Or, in order to keep the learning equitable, it might cause the teachers to decide on a well-defined model and utilize it in each section.

## **Course Materials**

Next, consider what texts you will use or require. Teams may be surprised to discover they cannot find a textbook which covers both of their methods. In that situation, creating a course packet that touches on both methodologies may help unify the course for the students. In our *Introduction to Stage Performance Class* we had difficulty agreeing on a book to use and ultimately did not satisfy our pedagogical goals.

At other times, as in our second course, the book will be chosen by the program or by consensus if the course is one in a series. It is then your responsibility to read, comprehend and incorporate this book into your plan for the class. For the specifics of an acting class, we have also found that it is valuable to have all of the students read the same script(s) in order to have a common vernacular when defining and explaining acting techniques. We have used both full length scripts and one acts and we have both required the students to buy the scripts and provided copies for them. The importance is not in the specific script and/or way that the students obtain the script, but the use of a common language which saves time and builds camaraderie.

## **How are you going to share the class?**

Now you have enough information to consider what teaching model will work for your situation. If the teachers feel overloaded and want to have the least amount of planning time possible, a team observing model may be most appropriate. This allows each teacher to be “in charge” for a specific amount of time and cast the other teacher as an observer who gives feedback and support after the class. This model can be manifested in

several different varieties, including tag teaching or section teaching. In tag teaching, you would agree that instructor A would teach a section of the class (perhaps the warm-ups), then instructor B would teach a section (perhaps on objectives) and then instructor A would teach again, until the end of the class period. In section teaching, teacher A could be allotted a day or a series of days in which he/she is in charge of all learning taking place in the class. Then teacher B would be allotted a section and be in charge of all of the learning. For example, teacher A might spend two weeks on vocal awareness and then teacher B would spend two weeks on physical awareness. Both teachers would be present for the others lessons but would not be responsible for the lesson planning, teaching, or grading.

If the teachers are both interested in having the most instruction time possible, then a parallel teaching course may be a good option. This is where the lesson plan is decided on by both instructors. The class is then divided in half and each instructor teaches one half of the class the lesson simultaneously. This allows each instructor to teach each course and lowers the teacher-student ratio. However, it does not allow for feedback from the other teacher in terms of pedagogy (what worked or what didn't) and does not allow for interjection from both teachers, which can help with student comprehension.

If both teachers are interested in working a completely collaborative fashion, then the team teaching model should be chosen. As we have discussed throughout this thesis, team teaching is the most time consuming of the teaching models and takes the most willingness to be flexible and accommodating of the other teacher's style and interest. However, the rewards of this sort of teaching, we feel, are worth the extra work.

## **Creating the syllabus**

Once you have established the content of the course, and examined the constraints of the space and time you have been allotted, the creation of the syllabus should not be greatly time-consuming. There are, however, a few areas where a co-taught syllabus differs from a single instructor course.

First, put both instructors' contact information and instruction for contacting both instructors if a request is made or an absence is necessary. This helps to ensure that both instructors receive information from the students, and cuts down on the excuses given by students that they told the other instructor.

Second, build in time for the schedule to change. Especially if teaming is new to you, schedule the course in such a way that instructors will be free to switch models if the one they have chosen does not seem to be working or if something takes a longer or shorter period of time because of the delivery method.

## **Approaching the Class: Initial Contact**

It is important prior to the first class to discuss your personal pedagogical styles and the tone with which you like to approach the class. There are instructors who like to explain everything that is going to happen to a class at the beginning so that everyone is on the same page. There are instructors who like to keep students guessing until the end, at which time the pieces come together and the students find for themselves why the class

was structured the way it was. It is necessary for class cohesion that co-teachers agree on which way they approach the class.

The initial tone that is set is also very important. If you are in agreement, then there is less chance of student confusion or favoritism (see below in Things to Consider). Some teachers like to start with a formal serious tone. Others want to set a casual friendly atmosphere.

There is nothing to say that your pedagogical styles must be identical. In fact it is best if they are not. However, they need to be compatible and most importantly respected by one another. If you appear to respect one another, your similarities and differences, your students are more likely to accept the co-teaching structure and focus on learning, our ultimate goal.

### **Planning:**

Depending on the structure you choose, the amount of planning time you need will vary greatly. When we first started together, we would spend as many as ten hours a week together planning, and more time apart. Who can keep up that schedule? As we grew more accustomed to one another and confident in our in-classroom skills, our planning time decreased. We also made some important discoveries in not just how long we planned, but in how we planned.

First, set up a regular time for planning and discussing. It could be regular office hours, or an evening a week. We chose to meet directly after each class period for two hours. That allows us the time to reflect on the class period that has just been, and plan for

the following class. Choose a place that is devoted solely to academic work and planning if possible. You will work more effectively if you cut down on your distractions.

Next, brainstorm and then edit. We will discuss what concept we want our students to get from the class period or the unit on which we are working. Then we allow the ideas to tumble out with as little censoring as possible. We jot them down as we come up with them and then afterwards go back through and decide what has the most merit.

And finally, ask others for guidance and inspiration. If co-teaching teaches us as educators anything, it is that if one brain is good, two brains are better. Bounce ideas off one another and when that is not enough, ask others in your department and field for their input. There is no failure in asking for other's opinions and advice.

### **Grading:**

Grading is the bane of most teachers' existence, especially in the arts. Because art is so subjective, it is crucial that you discuss how you are going to grade assignments early. There are multiple ways of dividing up assessment, each with their pros and cons.

#### *Option 1: All by All*

This option involves the most work but might be the most rewarding for pedagogical purposes. We started out with this method at the beginning of our team teaching, when we wanted to get to know each other's grading style. In this model, both teachers would grade all the assignments, and then get together to decide on one final grade to give the assignment. This is most beneficial for the teachers if they want to get to know each other's grading styles, or if they are unsure of how to assign grades for this



assignment. Students benefit from having both instructors review their work and decide on a fair judgment of the work. This prevents teachers from biased grading, as both instructors must agree on the grade assigned. The problem with this approach is the time factor. It is time consuming to review all the assignments, since often a class with two teachers is bigger than a class with one, and even more time consuming to evaluate each other's scores in order to reach a compromise.

*Option 2: Taking turns*

With this approach, teachers take turns grading assignments. This might mean Jenna is responsible for grading their first writing assignment, and Julie will grade their second writing assignment, etc. The grading load will switch from instructor to instructor. This is an equitable distribution of work and beneficial if the instructors are busier at opposite times of the semester. However, it does result in one of the two instructor's voice not being heard for that assignment and one instructor not knowing what the students accomplished in terms of the objectives.

*Option 3: Half and Half*

This is the approach we have settled on for grading written work at this point, since we now have a good grasp of the other's grading style. We randomly select half the papers/assignments and grade them separately, then compare the grades with each other. If one appears to be grading more harshly than the other, we compare those assignments with the rubric and alter grades if necessary. The only downfall is that students can only get feedback from one instructor, since the other has not read/evaluated their assignment.

However grading is decided, it must be discussed. Each professor has a different

view on grading and what grades mean. Make sure that you take time to share your views and to come to a consensus for this class. It may mean that each of you has to deviate some from your normal way of grading.

One way to help make these deviations as painless as possible is to implement grading rubrics prior to the assignment being due. Do not wait until the students have turned in their assignments to begin thinking about what you really want to have been included. This allows less debate in terms of what is or is not a passing grade; though coming up with the rubrics can take additional planning time.

### **Top Ten Things to Remember When Co Teaching:**

1. Each team member must enter into the team of their own accord, and must work towards the betterment of student learning in the classroom, and not toward their own edification alone.
2. Students will naturally gravitate towards one teacher or the other. If a certain student appears to like the other teacher more than you, it does not mean that you are an unsuccessful teacher. Chances are good there are students who gravitate towards you as well.
3. Remember to present a unified front (the same principle applies in parenting). If the students believe that you are not communicating, it undermines their view of your authority and their respect for the class. This does not mean that you have to agree on every issue, merely that

you respect one another and when a decision has been made it is upheld by all parties.

4. Respect the opinion of your co-teacher, even when you disagree. Often times we learn more from those who differ from us than from those who are the same.
5. Schedule enough time to plan. Now that you are teaching in a team, you will need more time to plan out your pedagogical approach.
6. Work out grading plans ahead of time, so you will all be on the same page.
7. Share the responsibility as equally as possible. Working together requires each instructor being aware of their commitment level, and making sure no one is stuck with all the work.
8. Get the administration involved and on-board. For some administrations it may take a little while to win them over to your approach, but keep working with them, having their support will make your work easier in the long run.
9. Know yourself and your own philosophy of teaching so you can begin to articulate that to the other members of your team.
10. Don't forget to have fun! If you are enjoying yourselves, your students will enjoy learning as well.

## Conclusion

Teaching that encourages professors to learn from one another and to adopt interactive modes of instruction promotes greater intellectual community and hence vitality among faculty. Although collaborative teaching presents professors with some difficult challenges, it offers a flexible mechanism for enriching academic careers and for responding to the complex instructional tasks professors confront as the new century approaches. (Austin 45)

The decision to teach together came from our shared philosophies about teaching and theatre as a collaborative art. For more than a year, we have worked together creating team taught courses in Introduction to Stage Performance and Acting. Through our experiences in those classes, and our research into the art of team teaching, we feel that this thesis can be beneficial in helping other teachers and programs develop similar practices at their institutions.

Higher education is about more than conveying a set body of knowledge to the unknowing population. Beyond the content of a particular course, undergraduate education exists to encourage critical thinking, and ultimately what we teach students, as well as how we teach them, will change higher education in the future.

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**APPENDIX A****INTRODUCTION TO STAGE PERFORMANCE**

Tuesday 7:00-9:40PM  
THEA 108 section 902

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

Spring 2006

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**Instructors:** Jenna Neilsen  
Julie Phillips

**Office Hours:** By appointment  
Phone: 804 828 1514

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**CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTORS:**

You may sign up for access to this course through [www.nicenet.org](http://www.nicenet.org)

Enter the class key and you can send messages to the instructors, your scene partners, or the whole class.

Code#: Class Key: EZ528Z4X88

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

A Practical Handbook For The Actor by Melissa Bruder

The Shape of Things by Neil Labute

**REQUIRED SUPPLIES**

- Appropriate clothing for rehearsal and performance.
- Notebook which can be devoted fully to journal entries for this class.
- A writing utensil.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is an introductory course for non-theatre majors that will provide a survey and application of basic elements of stage performance: acting; voice and movement; scene study; and character analysis.



**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- To feel comfortable performing in front of an audience
- To develop an understanding of non-verbal communication
- To acquire a working vocabulary and approach to the process of acting
- To acquire script analysis skills
- To learn the skills used to bring to life believable characters
- To work toward personal goals
- To support one another

**ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION/PREPARATION:**

Because this class requires active participation from everyone on a daily basis, and because others in the class depend on your presence, your timely attendance is vital. It's very important that you be present for every class as you will learn not only from the discussions, activities, and in-class presentations, but you learn a lot from listening to and watching others and giving feedback. You cannot learn the art of acting without actually doing it.

- Come to class prepared and in clothing you are comfortable moving in.
- You are allowed one unexcused absence, after that you will lose one letter grade per absence. We highly recommend that you attend EVERY class.
- An instructor must approve excused absences prior to the day of class.
- Two tardies are equivalent to an absence and will be penalized as such.
- **Cell phones must be turned off during class.**
- Create a safe environment. No one is here to laugh at, insult or offend another person. We do not tolerate offensive comments from anyone to or about anyone. We are here to collaborate together. If your speech or behavior is making the environment unsafe for the other members of the class, you will be asked to leave the course and receive a failing grade.
- You will get the most out of this class when you to set goals for yourselves, work to achieve those goals, continually challenge yourselves, and dare to make mistakes!
- Have fun!

**ASSIGNMENTS:**

- Self Analysis 20
- Journal 60
- Scene 1 50 (includes abbreviated character bio/analysis)
- Monologue 50 (includes scoring)
- Scene 2 90 (includes character analysis, scored scene)
- Participation 150
- Three sisters paper 40

- Choose your own adventure Paper 40  
Total 500 pts.

### **ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS:**

**Self Analysis:** Using the information given in class, examine your own past, likes/dislikes, personality, and physical appearance and describe the character you would be if someone wrote a play about you.

**Journal:** Throughout the course of the semester keep a journal of your discoveries. To get the most out of your journal, it is best to use something sturdy but lightweight that you can keep with you. Write down anything you learn from acting class, what you notice or experience watching other actors, and discoveries you make while onstage or in your rehearsals. The journal is intended to help you capture what you live and act. If you are serious about acting in the future you will find being able to look back on your discoveries rewarding in the future. You will need to bring your journal to every class and write in it at least once a week. The journal will be handed in on random weeks to confirm you are writing regularly, so do not get behind!

**Scene 1:** The instructors will assign you a scene partner and a scene to work on. You are required to read the entire play the scene is from, rehearse with your partner outside of class, memorize your lines, and put forth your very best efforts toward creating a believable character.

**Scene 2:** You will be required to meet with your new scene partner outside of class times, prepare for your role, learn your lines, and perform for the class. Part of your grade on this assignment depends on your ability to take notes the class has for you and to improve your scene upon its second performance.

**Monologue:** You will be responsible for choosing a 1-minute monologue from a published play and preparing it for presentation for the class. It must be memorized. You must read the entire play the monologue comes from in order to form your character more fully. Please choose something that is appropriate for your age, does not require an accent, and matches with your gender. Keep in mind that you cannot change any of the words in the monologue, although you may edit the monologue down to fit the time limit. If you do not have any plays, feel free to visit the VCU theatre library in the Shafer Street Playhouse. Open hours are listed on the library door. Remember this is only a reading library so no books may be checked out. Reserve enough time in your schedule to read the play in the library.

**Participation:** This is self explanatory. You should complete this class able to say “I participated in every exercise!” Students who volunteer to go first will naturally earn more participation points than those who wait until the end of class on days we run out of time.

You are responsible for your own learning. You cannot learn to act merely by reading books, you must actually do it!

**Three Sisters Paper:** VCU Theatre department will be performing a production of *The Three Sisters* by Anton Chekhov. You are required to attend a performance and write a 3-4 page paper on the experience, focusing specifically on one actor's performance of their role. We hope to have the opportunity to meet with members of the cast and ask them about their experiences. If you have difficulty paying for the ticket, you may sign up to usher for the show. Be advised that many students take advantage of this opportunity and space is limited, so you will want to check the callboard regularly to have a first chance at signing up.

**Choose your Own Adventure Paper:** For this 3-4 page paper you may choose one of the following options:

1. Attend a performance outside of VCU and critique the performance, focusing specifically on the work of one actor.
2. Attend two Shafer Street Playhouse productions here at VCU and critique the performances, comparing and contrasting methods you saw used in order to make the characters believable.
3. Watch two movies starring the same actor and compare/contrast what the actor does to make each character believable, critiquing the performance as well as their ability to convince you they were a completely different person.
4. A creative idea of your choice with the joint approval of both instructors.

**LATE POLICY:**

Late written assignments may still be turned in by Thursday at noon in either instructor's mailbox in the Performing Arts Center. There will be an automatic deduction of one letter grade. No assignments will be accepted after noon on the Thursday following the due date.

Missed performances may not be made up. Missing a performance will harm all your scene partners and is incredibly selfish and rude. If you miss a performance you will be unable to pass the course. Naturally, we reserve the right to deal with each situation on a case by case basis. If you have any special needs that may result in a missed class (for example, your wife is nine months pregnant) you must meet with us at the end of this class session.

**DISABILITIES:** All documented disabilities need to be submitted to the instructor on the first day of class. All information of a personal nature will be kept confidential by the instructor and will not be discussed with other students or faculty members without a student's knowledge.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

All written assignments must be typed in Times New Roman 12 pt font and be stapled. No exceptions. We will not accept handwritten assignments, or loose pages.

This course should be very fun, but also challenging. If you will not have time for the outside of class memorization, reading, rehearsal, and writing then please drop this course.

Due to the nature of acting, it will be necessary at certain points for appropriate physical contact between students and peers and students and instructors. If you are uncomfortable at any point or feel you are being violated, please let us know immediately. Our goal is to create and maintain a safe environment for us to use our creativity.

**DISCLAIMER:**

All great teachers have the best interest of their students at heart. With this in mind, this syllabus may be altered to better meet the needs of the class.

## APPENDIX B

### COURSE SYLLABUS

Fall 2006

Acting I

Tues./Thurs. 8:00-9:50AM

THEA 113 section 002

Shafer Street Playhouse 201

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**Instructors:** Jenna Neilsen- [neilsenjm@vcu.edu](mailto:neilsenjm@vcu.edu)  
Julie Phillips- [phillipsjk@vcu.edu](mailto:phillipsjk@vcu.edu)

**Office Hours:** T,Th 11-12  
**Office:** SSP 203

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#### **CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTORS:**

You are personally invited to stop by our office, if you have a question, need help understanding an assignment, or would just like someone to talk to. Plan to come into the office *at least* once this semester. With so many students in the course, having a chance to specifically talk about just your work in class will be very beneficial for you, and we would enjoy getting to know you. If you cannot drop by during our office hours, let us know and we can schedule an alternate time.

We may also be reached by email: [neilsenjm@vcu.edu](mailto:neilsenjm@vcu.edu) and [phillipsjk@vcu.edu](mailto:phillipsjk@vcu.edu). Please send any requests to both addresses.

#### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Acting Onstage and Off: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition by Robert Barton

ISBN 0-534-63708-6

#### **REQUIRED SUPPLIES**

- Appropriate clothing for rehearsals and presentations.
- A Notebook, which can be devoted fully to journal entries for this class.
- A writing utensil.

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Your first semester of acting at VCU is aimed at developing your unique personal resources. We will use a variety of exercises and assignments to help you understand who

you are as both a person and an actor, and enable you to share who you are with us. While we may do some improvisational scene work, this semester will not be devoted to scene study. Don't panic. You will have ample opportunity to be in scenes and plays at VCU. We will cover acting as it relates to personal, physical, and vocal awareness.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- To be able to speak effectively in front of a group
- To discover your physical and vocal capabilities as an actor
- To learn to achieve a state of relaxed readiness and focus
- To be able to express who you are as an individual onstage and off
- To approach the artform as a cohesive ensemble
- To learn self discipline in rehearsal and performance

### **ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION/PREPARATION:**

Class begins at 8AM. We will close the door to the classroom signaling the beginning of class. If you arrive after the door is shut we ask that you wait to enter until the current activity has finished, in order not to disrupt the learning of your classmates.

Because this class requires active participation from everyone on a daily basis, and because others in the class depend on your presence, your timely attendance is vital. It's very important that you be present for every class as you will learn not only from the discussions, activities, and in-class presentations, but you learn a lot from listening to and watching others and giving feedback. You cannot learn the art of acting without actually doing it.

- Come to class prepared and in clothing that meets the theatre department regulations for performance majors. A copy of these requirements will be posted in our office if you forget what they are.
- You are required to attend EVERY class. We understand that on rare occasions a situation will arise which warrants an excused absence. In order for an absence to be excused, you must contact and gain approval from both instructors, PRIOR to the class period in question. If you are more than twenty minutes late to class, you will be counted absent, but may still be allowed to participate in the class period according to instructor discretion.
- If you earn more than two absences, your final course grade may be lowered one letter grade for each additional absence.
- Two tardies (being 1-20 minutes late) are equivalent to an absence and will be penalized as such.
- **Cell phones must be turned off during class. Not on vibrate. OFF.**
- Create a safe environment. No one is here to laugh at, insult or offend another person. We do not tolerate offensive comments from anyone to or about anyone. We are here to collaborate together as a community of artists. If your speech or behavior is making the environment unsafe for the other members of the class, you will be asked

to leave the class.

- You will get the most out of this class when you to set goals for yourselves, work to achieve those goals, continually challenge yourselves, and dare to make mistakes!
- Have fun!

**LATE POLICY:**

An assignment will be considered late if it is not ready to turn in when it is collected (if a paper assignment) or ready to perform when requested (if it is a performance). Late written assignments lose an automatic letter grade every twenty four hours after the due date. No assignments will be graded that are more than four days late. Our mailboxes are located on the second floor of the Performing Arts Center, across from the elevators.

Missed performances may not be made up. Missing a performance will harm all your scene partners and is incredibly selfish and rude. If you miss a performance you may be unable to pass the course. Naturally, we reserve the right to deal with each situation on a case by case basis. If you have any special needs that may result in a missed class (for example, your wife is nine months pregnant) you must meet with us at the end of this class session.

**DISABILITIES:** All documented disabilities need to be submitted to the instructors on the first day of class. All information of a personal nature will be kept confidential by the instructors and will not be discussed with other students or faculty members without a student's knowledge.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

All written assignments must be **typed** in Times New Roman 12 pt font and be **stapled**. No exceptions. We will not accept handwritten assignments, or loose pages, unless specifically requested.

Due to the nature of acting, it will be necessary at certain points for appropriate physical contact between students and peers and students and instructors. If you are uncomfortable at any point or feel you are being violated, please let us know immediately. Our goal is to create and maintain a safe environment for us to use our creativity.

**DISCLAIMER:**

All changes to the syllabus will be given to you in writing, to insure accurate

communication to all students. It is very important that you check your VCU email

account daily. Audition notifications, changes in assignments and class location may be

communicated via email and it will be important for you to have all of the information you need in a timely manner.

### Schedule of Assignments:

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#### *Getting to Know One Another*

#### **August**

8/24: Syllabus

8/29: Bring journal to class

8/31: Read all of Chapter 1, be prepared to share your monologue if time allows

#### **September**

(9/1 departmental cattle call auditions)

9/5:

9/7: brush up on basic vocab, final class period to notify us if you intend to observe religious holidays

9/12: Read chapter 2

9/14:

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#### *The Body*

9/19: group 1 warms up the class, Be yourself Assignment, Begin spying on two people

9/21: group 1, Be yourself Assignment



9/26: group 2, Read pages 73-91, continue spying on two people

9/28: group 2, meet with spying partner and observe together, attend opening performance of “Nerd”

## **October**

10/3: group 3, Nerd reenactments

10/5: group 3

10/10: group 4, perform your spy findings for the class

10/12: group 4, perform your spy findings for the class

(October 16 is the Discovery project performance!!)

10/17: group 5

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## *The Voice*

10/19: No class. University Reading Days

10/24: group 6, Read pages 91-101

10/26: group 6

10/31: Halloween! group 7, bring costume pieces and props to class

## **November**

11/2: group 7

11/7: group 8, solo vocal imitation

11/9: group 8, solo vocal imitation, attend opening performance of Medea

11/14: Medea Reviews due, group 9

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## *Personal Awareness*

11/16: group 9, Read pages 101-109

11/21: group 10, monologues chosen and brought to class

11/23: Happy Thanksgiving: No Class

11/28: Mock audition. Class is in the evening. No morning class, Read “Red Ryder”

11/30: group 11

## **December**

12/5: group 12

12/7: group 12

## **Acting I**

Tues/Thurs. 8:00-10 AM  
THEA 114 section 001, Call #16258  
Shafer Street Playhouse 201

## **COURSE SYLLABUS**

**Spring 2007**

**Instructors:** Jenna Neilsen- [neilsenjm@vcu.edu](mailto:neilsenjm@vcu.edu)  
Julie Phillips- [phillipsjk@vcu.edu](mailto:phillipsjk@vcu.edu)

**Office Hours:** T,Th 11-12  
**Office:** SSP 203

### **CONTACTING THE INSTRUCTORS:**

You are personally invited to stop by our office, if you have a question, need help understanding an assignment, or would just like someone to talk to. Plan to come into the office *at least* once this semester. With so many students in the course, having a chance to specifically talk about just your work in class will be very beneficial for you, and we

would enjoy getting to know you. If you cannot drop by during our office hours, let us know and we can schedule an alternate time.

We may also be reached by email: [neilsenjm@vcu.edu](mailto:neilsenjm@vcu.edu) and [phillipsjk@vcu.edu](mailto:phillipsjk@vcu.edu). **Please send any requests to both addresses.**

### **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Acting Onstage and Off: 4<sup>th</sup> Edition by Robert Barton ISBN 0-534-63708-6  
Various scripts for scene and monologue work

### **REQUIRED SUPPLIES**

- Appropriate clothing for rehearsals and presentations.
- A Three Ring Binder, which can be devoted fully to work for this class.
- A writing utensil and paper to write on for every class.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is designed to equip you with the tools necessary to begin exploring the technical and emotional demands of approaching a script. Through a variety of acting exercises, including monologues and scene work, we will explore acting technique as it relates to the Stanislavski system outlined in our text.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- To apply the Stanislavski acting techniques as outlined in the text.
- To more effectively use your physical and vocal capabilities as an actor
- To achieve a state of relaxed readiness and focus
- To be able to express who you are as an individual onstage and off
- To approach the art form as a cohesive ensemble
- To learn self discipline in rehearsal and performance

### **ATTENDANCE/PARTICIPATION/PREPARATION:**

Students are expected to arrive at least 15 minutes early for class and begin warming themselves up. You are responsible for your own physical readiness and need to be relaxed, ready, and AWAKE when class begins. Class begins at 8AM. We will close the door to the classroom signaling the beginning of class. If you arrive after the door is shut we ask that you wait to enter until the current activity has finished, in order not to disrupt the learning of your classmates.

Because this class requires active participation from everyone on a daily basis, and because others in the class depend on your presence, your timely attendance is vital. It's very important that you be present for every class as you will learn not only from the discussions,

activities, and in-class presentations, but you learn a lot from listening to and watching others and giving feedback. You cannot learn the art of acting without actually doing it.

- Come to class prepared and in clothing that meets the theatre department regulations for performance majors. A copy of these requirements is still posted in our office if you have forgotten what they are. If we notice during class that you do not meet the dress code requirements, you will be asked to leave.
- You are required to attend EVERY class. We understand that on rare occasions a situation will arise which warrants an excused absence. In order for an absence to be excused, you must contact and gain approval from both instructors, PRIOR to the class period in question. If you are more than twenty minutes late to class, you will be counted absent, but may still be allowed to participate in the class period according to instructor discretion.
- If you earn more than two absences, your final course grade will be lowered one letter grade for each additional absence.
- Two tardies (being 1-20 minutes late) are equivalent to an absence and will be penalized as such.
  - **Cell phones must be turned off during class. Not on vibrate. OFF.**
  - Create a safe environment. No one is here to laugh at, insult or offend another person. We do not tolerate offensive comments from anyone to or about anyone. We are here to collaborate together as a community of artists. If your speech or behavior is making the environment unsafe for the other members of the class, you will be asked to leave the class. If you are not equipped to work professionally with a wide variety of people, you will not succeed as an actor.
  - You will get the most out of this class when you to set goals for yourselves, work to achieve those goals, continually challenge yourselves, and dare to make mistakes!
  - Have fun!

#### **LATE POLICY:**

An assignment will be considered late if it is not ready to turn in when it is collected (if a paper assignment) or ready to perform when requested (if it is a performance). Late written assignments lose an additional automatic letter grade every twenty four hours after the due date. No assignments will be graded that are more than four days late. Late assignments are to be placed in either one of our mailboxes. Our mailboxes are located on

the second floor of the PAC, across from the elevators. They are not to be put under the door of our office.

Missed performances may not be made up. Missing a performance will harm all your scene partners and is incredibly selfish and rude. If you miss a performance you may be unable to pass the course. Naturally, we reserve the right to deal with each situation on a case by case basis. If you have any special needs that may result in a missed class (for example, your wife is nine months pregnant) you must meet with us at the end of this class session to make suitable arrangements.

**DISABILITIES:** All documented disabilities need to be submitted to the instructors on the first day of class. All information of a personal nature will be kept confidential by the instructors and will not be discussed with other students or faculty members without a student's knowledge.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

Unless otherwise stated, **ALL** written assignments must be **typed** in Times New Roman 12 pt font and be **stapled**. No exceptions. We will not accept handwritten assignments, or loose pages, unless specifically requested.

Due to the nature of acting, it will be necessary at certain points for appropriate physical contact between students and peers and students and instructors. If you are uncomfortable at any point or feel you are being violated, please let us know immediately. Our goal is to create and maintain a safe environment for us to use our creativity.

**DISCLAIMER:**

All changes to the syllabus will be given to you in writing, to insure accurate communication to all students. It is very important that you check your VCU email account daily. Audition notifications, changes in assignments and class location may be communicated via email and it will be important for you to have all of the information you need in a timely manner.

### Schedule of Assignments:

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Monologues

Week 1

1/16: Hand out Syllabus, 3 contrasting monologues due, monologue partners selected,  
Review Stan's First Ten

1/18: Chapter 4 Read

Week 2

1/23: Stan's 10 textual analyses for two monologues due

1/25: Stan's 20 for same monologues due\*

*January 26 is the last day to notify instructors in writing of intent to observe religious holidays*

Week 3

1/30: Monologues memorized

2/1: Rehearsal and practice

Week 4

2/6: Monologues Presented.

2/8: Monologues Presented continued

### Scene Work

Week 5

2/13: A-B Scenes Assigned

2/15: A-B Scene Work. Plan to attend opening night of Red Ryder tonight

Week 6

2/20: Stan's 20 due for A-B Scenes \*

2/22: Red Ryder Assignment due

Week 7

2/27: Present A-B Scenes. Next scene partners assigned.

3/1: Rehearsal and Practice

Week 8 – *Begin meetings with Jenna and Julie*

3/6: Present A-B Scenes. Scene Chosen with partner.

3/8: Rehearsal and practice (SETC)

*Spring Break March 11-18*

Week 9 – *Finish meetings with Jenna and Julie*

3/20: Stan's 20 due for scenes\*

3/22: Scene Memorized. Rehearsal/Practice.

*March 23 is the last day to withdraw from a course and receive a W for a grade*

Week 10

3/27: Initial 5 Guided Writing Assignments Due

3/29:

Week 11

4/3:

4/5: Perform Scenes

Week 12

4/10: Smokey Joe's Assignment due. Perform Scenes

4/12: Perform Scenes

Week 13

4/17:

4/19:

Week 14

4/24: Remaining Guided writing assignments due

4/26:

Week 15

5/1: Exam Review

Thursday May 3, 8:00 am-10:50 am: Final Exam on Stanislavski system scheduled

\* Scoring and Creative mood are not required elements for the Stan's 20 assignment. Scoring is to be turned in the day of your performance. The creative mood is something you will have to find for yourself.

## GRADE BREAK-DOWN: THEA 114

## GRADED ASSIGNMENTS:

Ten Guided Writing Assignments	200
Monologues Memorized	50
Monologue Written Work	100
Monologues Performance	100
Red Ryder Assignment	25
A-B Scene Written Work	100
A-B Scene Performance	100
Scene Memorized	50
Scene Written Work	125
Scene Performance	125
Smokey Joe's Assignment	25
Written Stanislavski Exam	100
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TOTAL:	1100

REMEMBER ATTENDANCE WILL EFFECT YOUR GRADE!



## Guided Writing Assignments

These writing assignments are to be typed and kept in the same three ring binder in which you keep your scripts, and Stanislavski written work. These assignments are in lieu of your journal this semester, though we are still encouraging you to write in journals. Each of these assignments should be given thought and effort. They should be at least 2 pages, and some of them will be considerably more. Have fun with them but use them as a time of serious work. Label each writing assignment at the top with the title of that assignment, date completed, and your name, as you may be turning them in without your notebook.

1. Empathy Assignment- List three people (or types of person) who you do not identify with (see exercise 4.1 for examples). Now examine their lives/motivations until you find something that you can identify with. How would you play this person? Tell us what it will take to help you empathize with this character so you could play them.
2. Magic If Assignment- Look at the given circumstances of one person you really admire and one you really dislike. How would you play each of these people? What do you have to do to put yourself in these people's shoes? How would these people look at the same thing (a movie, a book, a piece of music)?
3. Super Objective Assignment- Identify your own life's super objective. Why is that the one you chose? Is it the objective that you clearly tell people or a secret objective only you know? What are the other objectives that are strong but did not make the top objective? (see exercise 4.5)
4. Through Line of Actions- Take any moment you choose and pay very close attention to what you do (see the examples in exercise 4.7). Break your action down into the tiniest bits and identify your victories and defeats. Next observe someone else doing a similar

activity (preferably when they do not know that you are observing them). Break their actions down into the tiniest bits. How did their bits differ from yours?

5. Scoring- Using what you have learned about scoring from the book and class, score the third monologue you brought the first day of class but are not performing this semester. Make sure to include super objective, beats, inner motivations, bits, etc.

6. Endowment Assignment- Choose an object which is very important to you. Write as much as you can about it. Why is it important? What does it feel like, smell like, look like? How long have you had it? How does it make you feel when you see it or look at it? Now, choose an object that does not have any significance to you. Then write about it, endowing it with memories and qualities.

7. Recall Assignment- Choose four of the images in exercise 4.10 and write about the feelings, and memories associated with them. If there are not four which speak to you, come up with ones that do.

8. Image Assignment- Choose a significant moment from your past. Write the screenplay to this moment for a silent film, with still shots, zooming, panning, etc. Describe the soundtrack, the colors, etc. This movie should tell a story through images, instead of dialogue.

9. External Adjustments- What tempo do you usually live in? Think back to the physical spying exercises. What did people say about you physically? Vocally? Now choose a character who you would really like to play who is decidedly different than you in one or more of these ways. How would the character be perceived if you didn't change your physical/vocal traits? How would you physically/vocally change your mannerisms to play this character? Why do you feel this character is different than you?

10. Creative Mood- Experiment over a few days. What gets you into a creative mood? Experiment with different settings for yourself. Find where and when you work best and write about it. Be as descriptive and perceptive as possible.

## APPENDIX C

This is a sample of some of the e-mails sent during this planning phase. Julie's e-mail came first and is in regular type. Jenna's comments are in bold italics and were then sent back to Julie. By e-mailing and exchanging ideas we were able to come up with a cohesive initial plan which we both agreed on in terms of the class assignments and daily activities.

### Sample Discussion of Pre-planning in the form of E-mails back and forth during the winter break of 2005-2006

Maybe instead of the book, we could just put together a course packet with the type of information we want them to have. Of course that is more work, but then we don't have to order books, just take a set of copies to uptown copy, or make them ourselves.

*I agree that this might work better, but what do we want them to know/have? If we were to do this we could theoretically put it together the first week of school so that they would have to buy it during week two, right?*

*I also really like the idea of at least one set of scenes or monologues all coming from the same play so that like Lisa we can have a discussion about the play. We can talk about play structure, beats, character arcs, etc. Also, they will be able to critique one another when it comes time to perform. Any ideas of plays? There is a Tennessee Williams' play (I know, your favorite) called "The Two Character Play" but I think it might be a little too non-realistic for their first piece. Any ideas?*

I just sent you Lisa's syllabus from my other email, in case you don't have it. I think we should require them to see some shows. We could do one VCU mainstage (like 3 sisters) and one Shafer show, and an outside performance. Is three too many? If they complain about money we could try to find shows they could usher for in exchange for a free show in the area.

*I think some will complain about money and some will complain about having no transportation to get to a show. I think if we ask them to see something off campus it should probably be as extra credit... I agree they should definitely see a Shafer and a mainstage.*

We may want to have a vocabulary quiz so they will know the terms we use all the time.

*This is a good idea. We should brainstorm on this and make sure that it is either in their reading packet or that we go over it well prior to the quiz.*

We could have them keep an acting journal, or an observation journal.

*I also like this idea. It gives us something tangible to grade (well, you got a B because you never wrote in your journal). I think that they should be required to write in it at least once a week. We can give them assignments in the beginning, and maybe some suggestions as well so that they know what they are supposed to be writing.*

There will probably be 15 classes:

1 intro to class, getting to know each other, being silly in public,

imagination

-homework - observe someone they know all week. Journal observations about how they move, what they do when they are upset, etc.

*(This could also be an assignment about themselves, if we want them to start looking at themselves. Maybe comparing observations of someone else with themselves?)*

2 knowing self/body

*(what will we do on this day? Chekhov type work? Morris type work?)*

-homework - look for a monologue from a published play they have never done before *(do you think they can do this? I guess we have to expect them to but I know first year performance majors who can't find a monologue. Also, would it be better to start them off with a scene so that they are not on stage alone or is a monologue the best place to start because they don't have to rely on someone else?)*

3 improv and imagination

-homework - select 2 monologues to bring to class and choose between *(so, they have to have the monologue for week 4 right?)*

4 character analysis

-homework - do character analysis worksheet for monologue, memorize monologue *Are we going to spend any time on objective, motivation, action, etc prior to the character analysis or is this the day that we covered all of that stuff?*

5 monologue preliminary performance

-homework - work on notes from class to improve the monologue

6 secondary performance

-homework - meet with scene partner to do preliminary work on first scene

7 scene work

-homework - meet with scene partner to rehearse, run lines, block scene

8 scene work practice continued

-homework - polish scene

9 scene 1

-homework - meet with partner to improve based on class notes

10 scene 1 second chance

-homework - write observation paper on play observed

11 scene work

-homework - meet with partner to block scene, do character analysis

12 scene work

-homework - practice with partner

13 scene work

-homework - polish scene

***Do you think that they will use three weeks of work on a scene? I am sure that some will but I am also sure that like speech class most probably won't. How do we "get them" to work on these? Is this too long of a time period, since they get a do-over (so, basically 5 weeks on one scene)***

14 last scene-homework - meet with partner to improve class notes

15 last scene

## APPENDIX D

### Grading Rubric Samples

#### **Stanislavski's Ten System Steps Grading Rubric Monologue Work**

1. Given Circumstances
  - 2.5= Thorough description of events/what is happening up to this scene
2. Magic If
  - 2.5= If they include how they will approach the character.
3. Super Objective
  - 2.5= To, active verb, encompassing for this character's life at this point in the play
  - (.5= To)
  - (1= active verb)
  - (1= encompassing for this character's life at this point in the play)
4. Through Line of Action
  - 2.5= Have attempted to answer
5. Endowment
  - 2.5= Identify a specific object or person in the play and endow it with qualities other than what it has. Need some specificity in definition to get full points.
6. Recall
  - 2.5= picking something specific, with useful content
7. Images
  - 2.5= Describe something specific, identify whether it applies to the whole monologue or a particular moment and have it not be a rehash of what is in the scene (what they say or see)
  - (1= whether whole monologue or a particular moment)
  - (1= describe something specific)
  - (.5= not having it be what is in the text)
8. External Adjustments-
  - 2.5= Identify one specific thing about themselves they are going to change
  - 1.5= Identify physical traits of the character that they want to embody



**AB Scene Grading Rubric**

45 points per scene

- 5pts Given Circumstances – clear atmosphere, situation, etc. Get full points if we can figure out what was happening, based on what we saw
  - 5pts Relationship – clear, well defined relationship between the two characters. If we could tell just by watching
  - 10pts Activity – chose a playable activity for each character, or series of activities that grounded them in the here and now.
  - 10pts Subtext (not small talk) – did not try to justify each line, but worked to create an inner meaning beyond the lines.
  - 5pts Presentation – Not fumbling for lines or blocking. Well rehearsed. Did not keep back to the audience the whole time or some sort of problem like that. Took the scene seriously
  - 5pts Physicality – appropriate for situation
    - Specific choices
    - Got away from personal habits
  - 5pts Vocal – volume
    - Pitch
    - Appropriate levels of dialogue
    - safety
- 10 points: Contrast
- 4pts Story Contrast – characters and story lines contrasted from each other
  - 3pts Physical contrast between characters played by this actor in each scene
  - 3pts Vocal contrast between both characters played by this actor

## VITA

### **Julie K. Phillips, M.F.A Virginia Commonwealth University (May 2007)-**

On November 14, 1978 Julie Kay Locke (now Phillips) was born in upstate New York. She grew up in New York, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, where she earned her High School Diploma from Quince Orchard High School. While there, she was awarded the title of Honor Thespian, All-State Thespian, and received a variety of peer reviewed acting awards. After graduating high school, Julie moved to Minneapolis, MN where she attended North Central University. At North Central she was able to personalize an interdisciplinary degree (generically titled Christian Studies) combining Youth Ministry and theatre. She was listed in “Who’s Who in American Colleges and Universities” in 2000.

During these years Julie was seen onstage in several mainstage productions, and was also hired by the Outerbanks Theatre Production Company, the Emmrich Theatre Production Company, and the Morris Park Players. Her senior year she was selected to travel for 6 months with Eternal Act, the university premiere touring theatre troupe. After leaving Minneapolis, Julie and her husband travelled back to Binghamton, NY where she worked as a photographer and studio assistant manager for Oakdale Images Portrait Studio.

Since coming to Virginia in August of 2004, Julie has worked as an educator, actor, and director. She has been granted a Graduate Studies Assistantship, a Virginia Commonwealth University Graduate Thesis Fellowship, and been nominated for the Irene Ryan Acting award for outstanding performers at the college level. Her research has been presented at several conferences, including the South-Eastern Theatre Conference 2006, 2007, and the Mid America Theatre Conference 2007. Julie has been an adjunct professor for the past three years at VCU, teaching courses such as Acting I, Introduction to Stage Performance, Introduction to Theatre, and Effective Speaking through the theatre department.

Jenna M. Neilsen, M.F.A. Virginia Commonwealth University-

Jenna Neilsen (née Doty) was born in Dayton, Ohio on April 17, 1979. She resided for most of her childhood in the Midwest, with the exception of two years spent living in Grenoble, France. She graduated from Carmel High School in Carmel, Indiana in the top 10% of her class. She earned her BA in communication arts: theatre and psychology from Ohio Northern University (ONU) in Ada, OH in May 2001 with the top GPA of graduating theatre majors and top GPA of graduating psychology majors. While at ONU, she spent a semester studying at Queen Margaret University College, an acting conservatory in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Upon graduation, she worked for three years in the Indianapolis area at various professions including juvenile probation officer and human resources specialist. During this time she also acted, and costume designed for theatres in the Indianapolis area.

In August 2004 she began coursework at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) to earn her Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy: Acting/Directing. During her time at VCU, she had the opportunity to direct several productions, act in multiple pieces both at VCU and in the Richmond community as well as teach. Amongst her teaching experience at VCU were courses in Introduction to Performance (acting for non-majors), Acting I (for freshman performance majors), Introduction to Drama, Theatre History (assistant taught), Introduction to Public Speaking, and Public Speaking for Business Professionals. While in graduate school, Jenna has received a VCU School of the Arts Tuition Scholarship, VCU Graduate Teaching Assistantship, and VCU Graduate Thesis Fellowship. After graduating in May 2007, Jenna plans on securing employment in higher education and continuing her artistic endeavors as an actor and director.