



## **ACTING TEACHER RESEARCH**

### **What should you be looking for when you research acting teachers?**

It is very important to know exactly what you are getting when you sign up with a particular teacher or training institution. If you do not do your homework you can end up paying a lot of money for advise and instruction that is not based in any type of established method or approach and then find that when you try to enter the entertainment work force you do not have the necessary skills to work successfully as an actor. This part of my website is dedicated to helping you understand what questions to ask and what to look for in an acting teacher.

First let me say that there is a short list of teachers whose approach and technique of acting training are considered established, proven methods of creating the work. This is important in that when you approach an acting coach you should always ask them what school of thought they teach, what their own training entailed and who they studied with. Before I go into what I will call my “red flag” area, let me list for you the teachers whose methods you will want to know and train in if possible, when you are developing your craft. Look for teachers whose training has involved work or study in the methodology of Constantin Stanislavski, Stella Adler, Uta Hagen, Lee Strasberg, and Sanford Meisner or descendants of the Group Theatre and its philosophy about acting. These are the standard “classic” teachers whose approaches have been accepted as the most established and proven methods of acting. Do your research before you interview a teacher. Know some basic facts about what these teachers thought and taught. Don’t be afraid to directly ask a teacher candidate to tell you what they know about any of these teachers’ approaches to acting. If they are unfamiliar with these names I would consider that a bad sign. Now there are a number of reputable teachers who studied with these people or under others who studied directly with these people. A few names I am familiar with who are great teachers are; Larry Moss, Ivana Chubbuck, Sandy Marshall, Seth Barrish & Lee Brock of the Barrow Group, Terry Schreiber, Michael Howard, David Mamet, Gene Frankel. There is a long list of good instructors out there and you will have to research anyone who you speak to and find out more about them.

That is the most important question you can ask a prospective teacher – who did you study with and where did you study? If they answer with any of the following educational institutions then you know their training included all these techniques, brought to them by people who actually studied them with the originators of the approaches or with direct teaching descendants of the great classic teachers. The following schools will let you know your prospective teacher is highly qualified.

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Julliard School

The Barrow Group

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Yale	Circle in the Square
Actor's Studio/New School	Guildhall (London)
ACT (San Francisco)	HEB Studios
American Conservatory Theater	LAMDA
American Repertory Theater	Actors Theatre of Louisville
Berkeley Repertory Theatre	San Diego Globe
Brown University	Atlantic Acting School
California Institute of the Arts	
Columbia University	
Florida State University (Sarasota)	
Herbert Berghof Studios	
The Neighborhood Playhouse	
New Actor's Workshop	
New York University	
Northwestern University	
North Carolina School of the Arts	
Stella Adler Conservatory – New York	
Carnegie Mellon (Pittsburgh)	
Purchase College, SUNY (Purchase, NY)	
UCLA	
UC San Diego	
The Old Globe & USD (San Diego)	
University of Illinois-Urbana	
University of Washington	
University of Houston	
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	
USC (Los Angeles)	
SMU (Dallas)	
ACT in San Francisco	
RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts)	

I am sure I am leaving some great programs off this list but this is a good start. This is only a list of what I know. There are obviously other places to study with great programs that I have not listed. I can only speak about what I know and have researched myself. If someone gives you a name not included in this list go to the University's/Conservatory's website and research their theatre department and find out who is training their actors and what their experience is.

What you are hoping to find here in any city is an acting coach who has lived, worked and studied in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles with protégé's of the great acting teachers above. When you are interviewing a teacher candidate ask them to give you their methodology and where they developed it from. If they cannot answer that questions specifically and clearly and do not know the basic information about the approaches of the great teachers above then they are not selling you actor training they

are selling you actor impersonation skills. I like to use the following metaphor in describing what a poor acting teacher is doing; anyone can spend a few weeks with you practicing and rehearsing how you should act, speak and look if you go into an accounting job interview. They can instruct you in the “jargon” you should use to sell yourself and make yourself sound professional and skilled in that profession. You can be taught to “sell” yourself in such a manner that you will eventually land an accounting job based on the interview alone. BUT, once you get the job and you sit down at the desk – if you have not been taught how to do the “math” you can’t *do* the job. You are looking for an acting teacher who can do the “math,” and subsequently teach you to do the “math.” Because after all, if you show up on a set, or at a theatre and cannot take whatever adjustment the director tells you and turn it into an action and realize the product they are looking for, you will be fired - no matter how charming and qualified you *appeared* in the interview.

All that being said, I am going to give you a set of questions you should ask teachers you are considering working with. You should write down their answers and go home and check their answers. Because remember the metaphor above – if their strength is in teaching you how to “sell” yourself without any real skill, then they can probably do it for themselves as acting coaches. I have provided some links on my methodology page which will direct you to information about the teachers I have listed above and their approaches. I have also included information about some of the most prominent teachers who studied with the greats and what they are doing to pass it on, and what their approaches are. Immediately following the suggested question section I am including my “red flag” section which is some things you should recognize as signs that you are dealing with someone is under qualified. Please note that these are my opinions and are based on the last 25 years that I been a working actor, constantly training and/or teaching in both New York and Los Angeles and with my theatre company and studio in Houston.

### **Questions you should ask anyone you are considering training with.**

- Where did you study and with whom? What is the method or approach you take to acting?
- What acting work have you done? Have you worked in all three mediums – stage/film/TV?
- How do you approach script analysis? What do you think is the most important part of script analysis and how do you teach it?
- What is your definition of character work? How do you teach character development?
- What is the approach you teach an actor to use when breaking down a scene?
- What is your definition of what it means to “act?”
- What tools do you use to help an actor get to the emotional place they need to be in any given scene?
- How did you get started in the business?
- What do you hope a student leaves your class with?
- Can you provide me with references from both students and industry professionals?

They should be able to answer these questions easily and specifically. If they give you general answers that do not include applicable tools then they can not give instruction in a class that is based in action and things the actor can do to tackle and fix a problem.

**Red Flags to look out for in interviewing a potential acting teacher.**

- If a teacher has never studied with anyone who has actually trained with one of the great teachers, or those who trained directly with them – then they are teaching what they *think*, not what they have actually done.
- If they have never performed in the theatre or been trained in the theatre. This is not an absolute as a bad thing, BUT – it tends to put them in the category of the “can teach you to get through the accounting interview but can’t teach you the math.”
- Any one who does not tell you that you need to be going to as much theatre as you can to watch actors work. The reason theatre is vital is because it is live acting – not canned like film. Film is a director’s medium and what you see on the screen could be the 40<sup>th</sup> take, or adjusted in such a way that it is not a great representation of the actual performance in the studio.
- If a teacher will not let you audit a class to see if you like it (watch and not participate).
- A teacher who makes it a point to notify everyone whenever someone they have worked with at some point is “famous” or getting awards etc. as a way of trying to gather more students or take credit for the accomplishment as it stems from their training. The actor should be crediting the teacher (if they are so inclined) - not the teacher using the actors accomplishments to credit themselves. Someone who is trying to establish themselves above others through the accomplishments of their students tends to not have the background or training in the field to sell their services through their abilities or knowledge.
- If a teacher guarantee’s that if you study with them you will book work in any field. There are a lot of factors that go into booking work on TV and Film.

These are a few of the things that might tip you off to do a little more research about your prospective teacher. A teacher should always be able to provide you with past student references as well as references from professionals in the business.

This is only a beginning set of ideas to help you start your search. If things come up I have not covered and if you want to talk to me directly you can e-mail me and I will get back to you.