



TaPS MASTER CLASS RESOURCE PACK: The Stanislavsky experience.

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October 2010, London TaPS

Stanislavski - Nick O'Brien
ISTA TaPS master class – London TaPS, October 2010

Outline

Introduction

The Stanislavski master class will take you through a series of practical exercises on the main areas of Stanislavski's system. The best way to understand the Stanislavski system is through practice. By practically exploring and experiencing the different areas of the system you will be able to build an understanding of how you can use the Stanislavski system to create believable and truthful characters.

The master class is a step by step approach to the main areas of the system using exercises that enable you to experience, as an actor, what Stanislavski wanted you to experience.

The exercises you will experience during the master class are taken from the post 16 textbook *Stanislavski in Practice*. Below I have outlined the exercises that you will be exploring in the master class and have included in detail a sample exercises on Communication as it appears in *Stanislavski in Practice*.

This master class is about you experiencing Stanislavski's system as an actor, giving you the tools that can then be used throughout your IB studies when examining *Theatre in the making*, *Theatre in performance* and *Theatre in the world*.

The objective

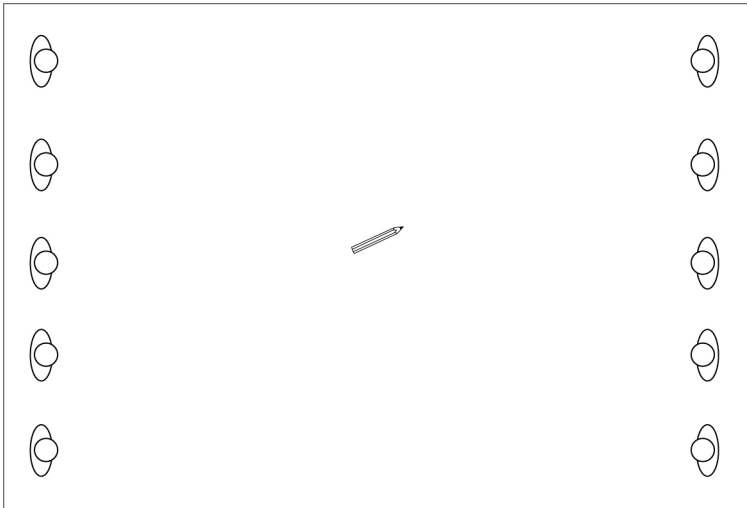
I want to be the winner

Example of a teacher led exercise

Aim: to understand what an objective is and how to have an objective within a set of given circumstances.

Instructions for the teacher

Students sit at opposite sides of the drama studio on chairs facing each other. Turn to one side (Group 2) and tell them that they are to observe the other group both mentally and physically – what they are thinking and what they are doing with their bodies. Turn to the other side (Group 1) put a pencil on the floor in between both groups and tell them that you are going to say “1” “2” and on “3” they have to run and pick up the pencil. Tell the group that the point of the exercise is that they try to be the first one to pick up the pencil.



Allow the students to prepare themselves and then countdown “one” leave a pause of about five seconds allowing the tension and excitement to build “two” leave a pause and then say “and relax”. Turn to group two and ask them what they thought. Usually they will say that for much of group one the individuals were preparing themselves to run and this was evident in what they were thinking and their physical preparation. Comment on the energy coming off the group and how the audience got a feeling of how the race was going to pan out. I usually pick out one student* that looked like they were going to win and analyse what they were doing, so the class has a reference point for the next stage of the exercise.

Tell the whole group that on stage we never have any “three”, for as actors, we have read the play and rehearsed it for a number of weeks and know exactly what is going to happen next. Somehow we have to act in a way that the audience believes that we, as characters, do not know what is going to happen next. Tell group one they are going to do the exercise again but now they know that they don’t have to run but they have to somehow make the audience believe that they are going to run.

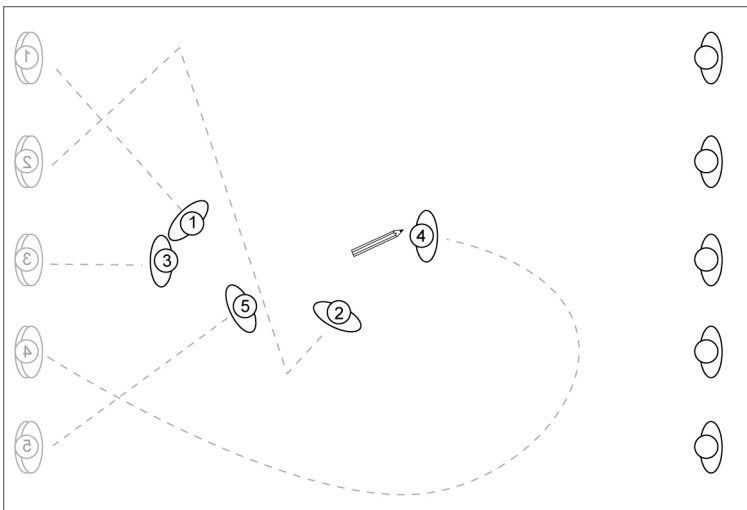
Do the exercise again with group one, saying “one...” “two...” “and relax”. Ask group two what they thought. Often they will say that the second time it seemed exaggerated and fake, missing the realism that was present the first time. You as the teacher can comment on the difference in the energy levels and how the first time the energy seemed to come from the students clearly wanting something, where as the second time, this energy was missing. I usually go back to the student* I’d commented on earlier and ask group one to compare the student’s two performances.

Instructions for the student

Group two you are now going to do the exercise again but first read the instructions below to help you.

Give yourself the objective ‘I want to be the winner’. That means within these circumstances, the race, you want to be first and beat all the others.

Using your imagination work out step by step how you will achieve that objective .i.e. will I go straight for the pencil or will I go around everyone and then dive for the pencil, will I skid in for the pencil or run and try to scoop it up? Concentrate on the actions that will help you to achieve the objective. For example, with reference to diagram two, Imagine you are student two, as you are pushing yourself off the chair you may nudge student one so they are put off balance, you can then cut in front of student three to block them. You now have a clear understanding of the actions you will use to achieve your objective. You have walked your path to being the winner. If you are student four, instead of heading straight for the pencil and getting caught up in the scrum you decide to go on the outside and cut in at the last minute.



Imagine yourself after the race with pencil in hand, breathing heavily and victorious.

After the exercise

Group one having watched group two, decide whether having the objective 'I want to be the winner' gave the students focus?

Did you find the exercise easier to do when you had an objective to focus you?

Without an objective an actor could take any path on stage, in any direction, but with the objective our path is clearly laid out in front of us. All we have to do is imagine how we are to get to the end of the path. ⁱ

Action

Exercise two will explore having an action within a given set of circumstances. The first three exercises are improvisation based to give you an idea of how the action and actions work in practice. To practice using actions within different circumstance as a group we will do the action corners exercise which helps you the student to identify the psychophysical nature of actions.

Imagination

Stanislavski wanted us as actors to use an active imagination as opposed to a passive imagination. This exercise - the beach- will focus on how we as actors can move from using our imaginations passively to using them actively within a given set of circumstances. As with all the Stanislavski system exercises it is for you, as the actor, to experience and discover a true point of reference for what works for you and what doesn't.

Free body

Having a free body is essential to using the system effectively. This exercise – relaxation- will highlight the tensions an actor has on stage and then will give you a technique to relax them to help you then be active on stage.

Communication

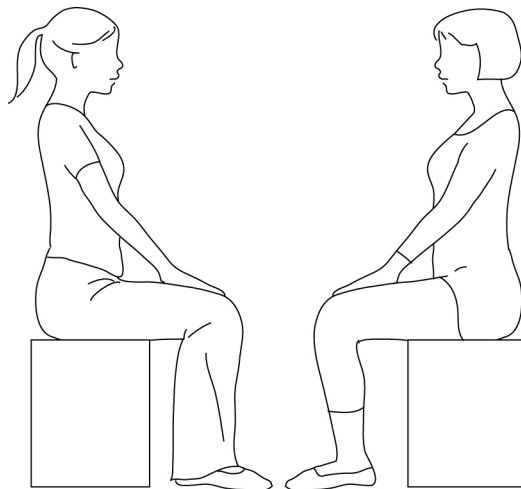
Sending and receiving rays

Student exercise

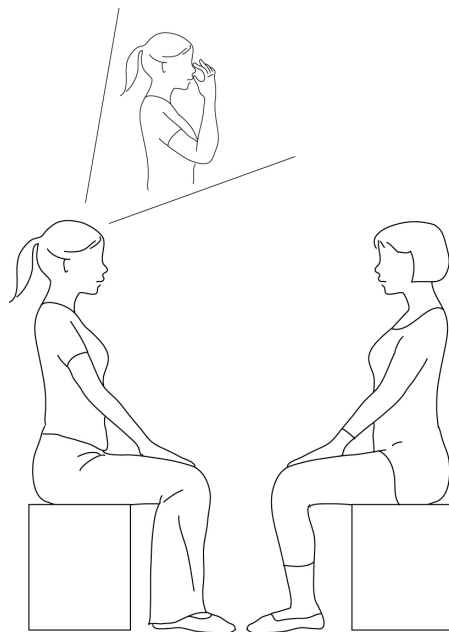
Aim

To practise sending and receiving rays in preparation for developing stage relationships.

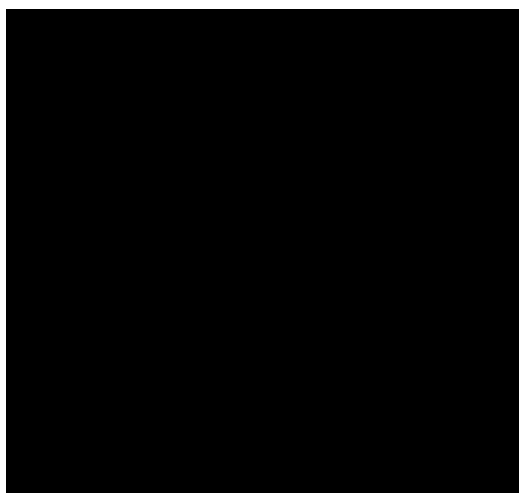
- Choose a partner, someone you feel relaxed with, and sit opposite them. Sit so your knees are level and about 6 inches apart. Rest your hands on your thighs and look at each other. Decide who is to be the sender and who is to be the receiver.



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- The sender goes first. Think of a physical act for the other person to do e.g. scratching an ear, smiling, touching their nose. You then need to transmit this to the receiver using rays and without forcing or tensing. Allow the rays to flow and don't try to show anything physically to your partner.



- Allow yourself to relax and open your mind to sending or receiving, don't try to push, and keep the physical acts simple to start with.
- The receiver will receive the transmission and perform the act that the sender wanted you to perform.



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- Now swap over roles so the sender now becomes the receiver and the receiver becomes the sender, remembering to decide on a new physical act.
 - Try it a few times each and see if you start to build up a relationship with the other person.
 - Now change partners and see if there is a difference with another person.

The super objective and germ

This exercise – what I really want - will examine the importance of the subconscious within Stanislavski's system and how we can use the subconscious to create our character's future and our character's past.

The final exercise will be a Life in art exercise which will allow you to bring together the areas of the system you have learnt to create a piece of theatre.

Stanislavski and the Soviet censors

When we look at the Stanislavski system it is always important to remember the political circumstances in which Stanislavski worked. For the latter part of Stanislavski's life, Stalin was in the Kremlin and Stanislavski had to walk the tightrope of being truthful to his ideas while not offending his political masters. Much of what Stanislavski believed, his focus on the actor experiencing the character, creating the 'life of the human spirit of the role', communicating through invisible rays and the power of yoga was either lost through mistranslation or covered up by the censors eager to paint Stanislavski as a man of 'physical action'.
Further reading

All the exercises you have worked through in the master class are in my book *Stanislavski in Practice* which is available through Routledge books- [Stanislavski in Practice: Exercises for Students \(Paperback\) - Routledge](#) . Each area of the system is covered with the exercise, student notes explaining the exercise, notes for the teacher, extension exercises for you to use at home to further cement what you have learnt in class and a series of audition, rehearsal and performance tips for the post 16 student.

Stanislavski in practice - Nick O'Brien

An actor's work - K. Stanislavski

An actor's work on a role - K. Stanislavski

My life in art - K. Stanislavski

Stanislavsky in focus - S. M. Carnicke

Stanislavski and the actor - Jean Benedetti

Practitioner's pathway

When I think back I always enjoyed 'getting up in front of people and doing something' which meant I invariably ended up involved with plays at school and university and that led me eventually to drama school. I remember in my 20's

wanting to go to drama school and had decided that if you are going to learn acting you need to learn it from a Russian. That Russian was Sam Kogan who was principal of the Academy of the Science of Acting and Directing in North London. Kogan had trained with Maria Knebel one of Stanislavski's last associates and he taught acting in the Russian tradition. After drama school I worked in theatre, television and film and also taught at various drama schools. A few years ago I set up a company The Stanislavski Experience which runs workshops in Stanislavski, Berkoff, Lecoq, Artaud etc to A level, BTEC and IB students across the country. I realised that in many schools and colleges Stanislavski was being explored theoretically rather than practically and approached Routledge about writing a practical step by step approach to the Stanislavski system which they then commissioned.

For more information you can go to:

www.stanislavskiexp.co.uk

or add us on facebook 'Stanislavskiexp workshops' and join our group '*Stanislavski in Practice*'

Stanislavski in Practice is available at www.routledge.com by clicking on the link below.

[Stanislavski in Practice: Exercises for Students \(Paperback\) - Routledge](#)