

I want you to be a Mad Scientist Artist!

"Everybody's a mad scientist, and life is their lab. We're all trying to experiment to find a way to live, to solve problems, to fend off madness and chaos."

-David Cronenberg

"No it's pronounced Fronkensteen."

-Mel Brooks

The atmosphere I create in my classrooms is one of a "Mad Scientist's Laboratory". I foster an environment where students learn by experimentation and fearlessness. I want them to focus less on their education in terms of right and wrong and more on their own thought processes. A "Mad Scientist" student will seek their own answers, ask questions, and be unafraid of any potential "failure" in that experiment.

In art, it is often said we must risk, and to risk we must feel inspired, comfortable, and supported. In order to do that, I create an environment of encouragement, empathy, and triumph in all things. This begins with the simple act of throwing fear and anxiety out the window and saying yes. I refer to this as a "brave space". "I don't know" is always an acceptable answer in my classroom as long as it's followed up with "Let's find out!" Once we learn to embrace this curiosity as opposed to fearing a wrong answer, we can unlock greater potential. We may not always succeed, but each failure is a lesson that we can grow from. Learning is after all a process and not a product. Therefore, I strive all students to embrace this ideal.

In terms of acting this means that I encourage my students to connect with their own artistry by focusing themselves through the lens of the character, and by connecting their inner life with their physical life. In teaching musical theatre this means exploring the music through musical and

textual analysis, and embodied physical exploration. When devising original work it's great to explore their individual interests, questions, and artistic expression. My classroom never loses its role as Laboratory. Experiments, however, must also be evaluated and assessed, and we do that through structured feedback from myself and their peers. After spending time in one my classes students have learned that applied artistry involves the synergy that occurs from inspiration to visualization to embodiment. Students have said their favorite aspects of my class were "The push for us to be creative and express ourselves" (*Anonymous Student Feedback*) and that the class "felt like a family." (*Anonymous Student Feedback*)

I want to train mad scientist students who think for themselves and are not simply told what to do or think. This is a quality I would value in anyone. Instead of rejecting things offhand, they will experiment first and analyze later. I encourage my students to come up with their own ideas or guide them to trust their own curiosity. I recognize that bravery comes in many forms. In my classroom I have witnessed that bravery may be as simple as raising your hand to speak or in some cases making simple eye contact. Through their bravery, commitment, and experimentation my students learn and grow.