

Project title: The Physical Actor: A book on Physical Acting in Training and Performance

Investigator: Michael Costello

Department: Theatre and Dance

Project summary:

In my proposal for the research enhancement grant, I outlined two primary goals: 1) to continue my research for the book by working with a group of undergraduate students trained in physical acting to further develop training exercises and explore physical techniques for creating experimental performance pieces; 2) to write a complete draft for 3 chapters based on existing research notes and material gathered during the work sessions with my student collaborators. Since I was awarded only part of the grant funds requested, I narrowed the scope of my research to the first of my two goals. At this point in writing the book, examining the practical methods and applications of the training to performance is of the utmost importance. The opportunity to work with a group of actors trained in this approach, while using only the physical acting techniques in the rehearsal process, was imperative to evaluating and defining the significance of the training.

The idea was to use the physical techniques from the training to develop a new work, rehearse it, and perform it for an audience. I selected 7 student actors (5 women and 2 men) who had studied with me in the physical acting training for a year. They were well versed in the approach and very skilled in using it effectively. As a vehicle for this exploration, I chose to create an experimental piece constructed from parts of 3 Greek plays. In early December 2005, this work, *Electra in Pieces*, was presented in 2 performances.

Performing arts activities:

On the evening of December 3, 2005, *Electra in Pieces*, having been created and rehearsed with physical acting techniques, was presented in 2 performances in the Studio Theatre at the Department of Theatre and Dance. Rehearsals and work sessions began at the end of September and ran through October, and November. Seven actors, a dramaturg, and a stage manager worked on the production. Approximately 150 people saw the performances. For supporting material, there is a video tape of the performances, a program, letters of response from participants and, also, from faculty who saw the performances. Discoveries and observations from the process are being integrated into the book.