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Trust and communication in the director/voice coach collaboration: a case study of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the University of Kansas

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The esteemed theater director Stephen Hollis claims that communication and trust are essential to a productive relationship between directors and vocal coaches, as he stated in an interview with Peter Zazzali on 9 January 2014:

> It is no different than working with an actor. It is all about shared trust, communication skills, and working together towards the same product. Working with actors, whether you are a voice coach or a director, is all about communication.

Having staged well over 100 productions at such institutions as the Alabama and Oregon Shakespeare Festivals, Hollis is especially adept at collaborating with voice coaches on classical texts.[1] His comment likewise indicates that acting and voice work are linked, especially when performing Shakespeare, in which case a director would do well to have a trusted and communicative voice and text expert at her/his side.

The intelligibility of the actors and manifestation of their speaking as action is the responsibility of both the director and voice coach. In email conversation with Zazzali, from 15 April 2014, Andrew Wade of the Royal Shakespeare Company argues that the "willingness to work as a team" is crucial to this relationship. While acknowledging that he "must in all things support the vision of the director," Wade contends that the "text coach is something of an acting coach as well," who works in concert with the director to "help the actors in their journey to realize the play." This point is likewise underscored by the venerable Cecily Berry, who locates "discovery" as quintessential to the "mutual collaboration with [the] actor and director that defines the art of the vocal director" (Quoted in Watson 2001, 198). Via email to Zazzali on 23 June 2014, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's vocal director, Rebecca Clark, stresses the importance of "being with a production from beginning to end" while "taking the attention and time to develop trust" with a director. The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama's Kara Tsiaperas echoes this claim in an interview with Zazzali from 20 May 2014:

> As a voice coach I need to trust the director's vision and hopefully this will win their trust. You cannot pull in the opposite direction. Communication is fundamental to the process. Without a director's trust and shared communication, I would not get the time that I need to work with the actors.

Thus, the director/voice coach collaboration is as significant as the director's partnership with her/his cast.

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This article offers a firsthand account of the director/voice coach relationship as seen through the University of Kansas' 2014 production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. With Zazzali as director (in his debut KU production) and Meier (his final voice coach assignment at KU before retiring), we argue that a successful collaboration must be constituted by trust and communication in support of a shared artistic vision. While we were working within an educational setting, recognizing that a professional situation is different in many respects, we contend that a collaboration founded on these values is crucial in either context. Indeed, we were able to execute our vision precisely because of mutual trust and open communication, an approach that we likewise bring to our professional work. Ultimately, we were committed to a production that featured Shakespeare's language as action toward telling the story with clarity, nuance, and expressivity. Thus, our roles were inseparable when working with the actors, thereby counteracting the all too common tendency to shunt voice coaches to the periphery of the creative process. On the contrary, Meier was fully involved in casting and rehearsals, with considerable time allotted for him to work with actors both individually and in groups. Recognizing the necessity of Meier's collaboration, Zazzali embraced this ethos and made it clear to the cast from the outset that Meier and he would be working in tandem to accomplish the same outcome: clear and powerful speaking as human action toward telling the story.

The preproduction phase of our collaboration

We began our collaboration three months before the auditions over the course of numerous meetings, two of which included attending performances together, when we discussed our shared interest in the plays of Shakespeare. We first attended a "fringe" production of *Romeo and Juliet* staged by a group of KU alumni in Kansas City. Meier suggested the outing as a way for the two of us "to feel each other out" and "to see whether or not we shared enough of the same artistic values" to justify working together. After the performance, we discussed the production at length, during which time we identified numerous similarities in our approaches to performing Shakespeare. We both privileged Shakespeare's language, thereby making the speaking foundational to any production of his work. The next evening, we reinforced our shared artistic values by going to see the Kansas City Actors Theatre's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, and then by critiquing it afterward as part of a discussion envisioning Meier's role on *Much Ado*. Some of the emerging criteria included allotting ample time for him to work with the cast individually and in groups, an understanding that he would regularly attend runs of the performance and be afforded the opportunity to give feedback, and that his coaching be allowed to include acting notes. With respect to the latter criterion, we agreed that any such notes had to be clearly related to a given actor's speaking, and on the rare occasion that our opinions about a choice differed, Zazzali—as director—would make the final decision, a point that we also underscored with the cast. This distinction has, of course, been the source of friction between stage directors and voice coaches in the past. Indeed, Meier recalls more than one occasion when, without adequate advance communication about the division of responsibility, his role as coach has clashed with the director. Meier said,

> I have learned that even when a director begs a coach to ensure the actors speak Shakespeare's verse both metrically and with clarity, when they hear you doing precisely that it can make them apprehensive that the coach has begun to 'direct' the actors. It takes a lot of groundwork to make sure such a collaboration does not provoke this kind of friction.

Zazzali has often experienced the opposite, with voice coaches choosing to play it safe by not actively connecting an actor's speaking with building a character and creating a performance. While we recognize the gray area between voice/speech and acting notes, we suggest that an actor's speaking is integral to his work, and therefore, the voice coach must be given a reasonable degree of flexibility in providing feedback towards supporting the director's vision. Of course, the success of such an arrangement is contingent on the director and voice coach sharing a collaboration that is communicative, mutually respectful, and trusting. After our weekend of theatergoing and conversation, we happily concluded that we would indeed work well together and agreed to collaborate as part of a process dedicated to speaking *Much Ado's* rich palette of prose and verse with clarity, nuance, and power.

Though our collaboration was under the auspices of a university, providing working conditions and challenges different from professional theater, we submit that communication and trust are as essential to the director/voice coach collaboration at a college, where academic politics may come into play, as at a LORT theater, where directors and voice/speech coaches may come into conflict for professional reasons. With Meier as a senior member of the faculty and Zazzali having recently joined the department, there was ample opportunity for the balance of power to be askew in our process. In many such instances, a junior faculty member in Zazzali's position might feel obliged to acquiesce against his better judgment in favor of satisfying someone with Meier's status. Likewise, the politics of academe being what they are, someone in Meier's position of relative authority could have easily asserted his artistic opinions at the expense of Zazzali's role as director. None of these unwelcome possibilities ensued however, precisely because we remained professional in handling all aspects of our working process. In a professional situation, it is understood, of course, that the director is the artistic leader of a given production and therefore makes all the final decisions regarding acting choices. Moreover, he is charged with organizing the rehearsal process towards creating a context within which the work is explored. In order for Zazzali to execute these responsibilities, he had to have Meier's clear and public trust, which, unfailingly, he did. This is not to suggest that we were in complete agreement on every artistic choice, or even every choice pertaining to the speaking. We did differ at times, albeit rarely. Because of our unmistakable commitment to privilege Shakespeare's language as the basis for telling the play's story, an approach that underscored everything we did, we were constantly reassured of our working relationship. One would hope that such a bond would be firmly in place in any director/voice coach collaboration, professional or otherwise.

With powerful speaking as the benchmark for our approach, we encountered a number of challenges throughout our process. Our production was slated for KU's Crafton-Preyer Theatre, a proscenium space seating nearly 1200 and acoustically difficult given its size and susceptibility to echoes. To address this problem, Zazzali insisted that the set design allow for the playing to occur downstage of the proscenium. Thus, a beautiful façade of an Italian villa stretched across the stage at the proscenium, thereby effectively cutting its depth in half to facilitate a closer proximity between the players and our audience. In this position, the set likewise functioned—quite literally—as a sounding board reinforcing the actors' voices. Zazzali also requested that the production's set designer—our KU colleague, Delores Ringer—construct a ramp that functioned as a forestage that descended to the floor of the orchestra to provide entrances and exits from a pair of side doors located house right and left off the front row. This architectural choice benefited us in two ways: in addition to giving us more options for entrances

and exits, it allowed for *Much Ado's* numerous asides and soliloquies to be intimately shared with the audience, a choice that was consistent with our overarching vision of featuring the play's language.

Perhaps the most significant challenge we faced was working with a cast of 22 relatively untrained actors. While some had previously worked with Meier in class, given that KU's is a BA program, our students do not receive the rigorous conservatory training that in many ways is necessary to tackle a play like *Much Ado*. Indeed, the text's elevated language—particularly its use of wit—makes it one of Shakespeare's most challenging to speak with clarity and distinction. This point is readily evident at the outset of *Much Ado*, when Beatrice and Benedick engage in the first of their three battles of wit:

Beatrice:	I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick; nobody marks you.
Benedick:	What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?
Beatrice:	Is it possible Disdain should die, while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert Disdain if you come in her presence.
Benedick:	Then is Courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted; and I would I could find in my heart that I had not but a hard heart, for truly I love none.
Beatrice:	A dear happiness to women—they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor (Shakespeare, 157).

The two actors playing these roles must deliver their banter as human action that is comprehensible to a modern audience, a skill best developed through a regimen of coursework such as that found in conservatory programs. Since our BA actors were not undergoing such training, we had to find ways to build these skills during the rehearsal process. Given that Zazzali's previous experience directing classical dramas had either been in professional theaters or conservatories, the task at hand seemed rather daunting to him. Meier reassured him that "we [have] the talent pool and work ethic among our students to pull this off." And pull it off we did, though not without a modest degree of difficulty. For example, one of our actors in a significant role struggled with his speaking in many ways: his consonants were weak, his vocal production lacking energy, and his expression of the text's ideas was often indiscernible. With Meier working with him during the day and Zazzali at night, however, we eventually managed to measurably improve his speaking—and, by extension, his performance—to a point of clarity that kept the action flowing and the story being told. We had regular meetings and email exchanges to address this matter, a shared strategy that further exemplified the trust and communication constituting our collaboration.

Throughout the preproduction stage of the process, we shared work to demonstrate our artistic values and define the parameters of our collaboration. In addition to Zazzali observing Meier's coaching sessions, he detailed his directorial vision for the piece, which included an explanation of his working process. During these discussions, a particular point of collegial inquiry arose on Meier's part in questioning Zazzali's decision to modernize the production. Zazzali wanted to illuminate the play's themes and language for a contemporary audience consisting largely of the KU community, and he therefore conceived a modern-day production. Instead of having Don Pedro and his men returning to Messina from a vaguely defined war at the drama's outset, he had them come home to a hero's welcome after winning La Coppa, the Italian football championship. Zazzali reasoned that by altering Shakespeare's contrivance for introducing the

victorious retinue into the "world of the play" (which, of course, is set at Governor Leonato's estate), portraying Don Pedro, Benedick, et al. as much-beloved soccer players would make the story more accessible to our sports-crazed audience.[2] Moreover, the so-called "wars" from which the men are returning are never mentioned again after the first scene, and even so are only off-handedly referred to:

> Leonato: How many gentlemen have you lost in this action [the wars]?
> Messenger: But few of any sort and none of name.
> Leonato: A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings home full numbers! (Shakespeare, 150).

Much in the spirit of American sports teams being invited to The White House to meet the President, Zazzali envisioned that welcoming "Team Messina" to Leonato's estate in celebration of their victory would put *Much Ado* into an identifiable context for our audience. The play supported this choice in that Don Pedro, Benedick, and Claudio are treated like rock stars upon arriving and then spend roughly a week engaged in a life of luxury, leisure, and scuttlebutt. This concept served the text, a criterion that was essential to both of us.

To establish the concept, since the text obviously makes no mention of a soccer tournament, Zazzali chose to shoot a five-minute film that functioned as a prologue to the performance. The film depicted Don Pedro and Team Messina upsetting heavily favored Roma on a penalty kick taken by the David Beckam-inspired Claudio, whom Don Pedro chose for the winning shot, much to the consternation of his jealous brother, the villainous Don John, thereby setting up the latter's jealousy and quest for revenge: "That young upstart hath all the glory of my overthrow: If I can cross him any way, I bless myself everyway" (Ibid., 176). Thus, the film introduced the central plot's source of tension—Don John's jealousy of Claudio and his revenge therein against his brother (Don Pedro). To keep the audience's listening consistent with *Much Ado's* heightened language, Zazzali scripted the film's storyboard by reconfiguring Shakespearean excerpts into a context that fit the film's narrative, as demonstrated by Don Pedro's address to the team in advance of Claudio's winning goal:

> Now let us put on manly readiness and enter into the fray. After Claudio hath hit the mark and the victory fall'n upon us, safe will our travail be back home to Messina, where the heavens will lour praise upon us for this glorious act. Balthasar, Benedick, Claudio and *moi*; Conrade, Borachio and bastard brother John. We few, we happy few, we band of brothers will be remembered until the last syllable of recorded time. And so, once more into the breach dear friends once more and God for Messina, Italia, and Governor Leonato![3]

While the dialogue cribs from a pair of Henry the Fifth's most memorable speeches, this admittedly liberal adaptation prompted the audience's appreciative laughter every performance, and more importantly, set up the world of our *Much Ado*, which was in strong support of the text's narrative, spirit, and language.

Click here to view the film made as the production's prologue.

Upon first learning of Zazzali's modernized vision, Meier wanted reassurance that the production would not be reduced to conversational speaking, a disconcerting concept, and pedestrian performances. Buoyed by Meier's line of inquiry, Zazzali emphasized that he had examined the text line by line from the perspective of his concept and remained convinced that it would work. Moreover, Zazzali underscored his commitment

to "muscular" speaking that would meet "the text on its own terms" and "not reduce it to the level of pedestrian jabber," thereby giving Meier the reassurance he sought while allowing us to sharpen our approach to the play.

Since the lion's share of Meier's work would consist of individual tutorials with students, Zazzali observed two such demonstrations to gain insight into his process. On separate occasions, a pair of students brought in Shakespearean speeches that they had been working on with Meier, who spent an hour coaching them as Zazzali quietly observed. The students and Meier addressed a number of voice and text matters, such as stressing and subordinating certain words, arcing one's vocal energy to the end of thoughts, discerning rhetorical nuances like antitheses and metaphor, and, of course, using good speech practices to articulate words and phrases with clarity and distinction. Meier discussed the importance of being connected to one's breath and "staying on one's words" to effectively communicate the character's thoughts and actions.

Afterward, we discussed each tutorial towards organizing our working relationship for the production. It was obvious that we needed a clear plan of action, and therefore agreed that Meier would individually meet with actors for 45-minute sessions during weekday mornings and afternoons. We correctly predicted that this arrangement would double our contact hours with the student actors, as Meier's one-on-one work would supplement Zazzali's group rehearsal evenings and weekends. Our strategy was for Meier to address the clarity and intentions of each actor's speaking relative to his/her character, an approach that would augment Zazzali's work in the rehearsal room. It would be crucial for us to remain clear and consistent in our coaching. We did not want the students to even remotely perceive discrepancy in our direction, an objective that ostensibly would seem easy, since our tastes and desires for the production were aligned; nevertheless, the practice of teaching and directing a group that was inexperienced in the plays of Shakespeare invited much confusion, so we would have to be vigilant in how we guided the cast.[4] Overall, our strategy would be to saturate the untrained cast with tutorials and/or rehearsals that were dedicated to granting them ownership of their speaking towards rendering it as action. This would be our modus operandi.

As a matter of process, Meier's sessions would be audio-recorded and uploaded to a DropBox account that Zazzali—and the student actors—could access. Meier would also attend run-throughs during rehearsal and eventually move his sessions from his office to the performance space; we would be fortunate to have the theater for the final three weeks of rehearsal, thereby giving us time to adjust to the space's acoustic demands. We would then merge our energies for the final week of rehearsals in advance of the opening. Throughout the process, it would be crucial for us to discuss the progress of each actor on a daily basis. While the task ahead would be challenging, we firmly believed that we had the talent, strategy, and will to deliver a clearly and convincingly spoken production of one of Shakespeare's most linguistically complex comedies.

The working process: the first read-through, table work, coaching sessions, and glossing and sculpting the text

Zazzali cast the production in consultation with Meier, who had worked with most of the students in class and past productions, and could therefore offer insight to their speaking skills.[5] Because the auditions were held during the final week of the fall term,

our cast had the benefit of spending the winter break working on their roles. We scheduled our first read-through a few days before the break to bring the ensemble together, make friends with the play, and most importantly, leave for our vacations with an assignment before returning in January, when rehearsals would commence in earnest.

We were both in attendance for the December reading, during which time we established our shared goal of speaking the play with clarity, distinction, and power. "It's all about the words," Zazzali explained to the cast. "Without a clear sense of what and why you are speaking, our show is lost." Meier echoed these comments by stressing the significance of "being specific with everything that your character utters." Of course, specificity manifests in many ways. There is the obvious specificity of effectively using the consonant and vowel sounds to articulate one's lines with clarity. The actors are likewise responsible for being specific with every breath, thought, and phrase that they bring to the dramatic action. Most importantly, it is fundamental that the actors know the meaning of everything they say toward shaping their speech as action that conveys the story, which is the ensemble's signature responsibility. "Your speaking causes someone else to speak," Zazzali stated to the group, "and it therefore must be experienced as human action that shapes the dramatic conflict towards telling the story."

With these goals in mind, we instructed the cast to "gloss" their text over the winter break in preparation for the start of our rehearsal process in January. Essentially, glossing consists of defining the literal meaning of each line a character says—or has spoken in their company—by using various resources for looking up words and examining individual phrases. The most important such resource would be Alexander Schmidt's well-known *Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary*, which identifies every word in the context of the Shakespearean canon. We also relied on the lavish footnotes of our chosen edition for *Much Ado*, the Arden, as well as other versions, namely the Folger and Oxford. Meier also gave the cast subscriptions to his e-book, *Voicing Shakespeare,*[6] a resource that proved to be likewise invaluable to our research and preparation. Ultimately, we wanted the actors to operate as detectives combing the text for clues that would deepen their understanding of what and why their characters speak. As such, these strategies served the dual purpose of having our cast effectively analyze, explore, and speak the text while deepening our shared objectives for the production, and by extension, strengthening our collaboration.

As a way to help each actor, we provided a separate copy of the script with spaces beside or beneath each line, allowing room for their literal translation of each line—aka the gloss. This way, the actors could easily reference and study the text and its meaning. We also asked them to note any extraordinary use of rhetorical devices, such as antitheses, examples of balance and parallelism, chiasmus, amplification, and of course, double meanings of individual words and turns of phrase. These criteria for examining the text provide invaluable insights to each character and his/her given circumstance. To cite just one example, in act 2, scene 1, Benedick is reeling with frustration after being insulted by Beatrice at the masked dance. He uses simile and metaphor to argue that "this harpy" wronged him, as his speech amplifies to its final crescendo:

> O, she misused me past the endurance of a block! An oak but with one green leaf would have answered her; my very visor began to assume life and scold her. She told me, not thinking I had been myself, that I was the prince's jester, and that I was duller than a great thaw; huddling jest upon jest with such impossible conveyance upon me that I stood like a man at a mark, with a whole army shooting at me. She speaks poniards, and every word stabs … so, indeed, all disquiet, horror, and perturbation follows her! (Shakespeare, 192).

Shakespeare gives Benedick this eloquent prose to unleash his resentment, hurt, and frustration suffered at the hands of Beatrice at a time when he could not respond without removing his mask and revealing himself. The convention is such that the audience is aware that Beatrice knows who he is, and that she is deliberately provoking him by referencing "signor Benedick" as the "prince's jester … a very dull fool," and that he is forced to take her barbs without a retort (Shakespeare, 186). The given circumstances, therefore, are such that Benedick has been stewing for the past hour or so, and eagerly awaiting his chance to verbally repay "[his] Lady Tongue" (Shakespeare, 195). Shakespeare craftily devises this witty banter to position his jesting antagonists for their romantic comeuppance, a contrivance that is facilitated by their friends and family in the ensuing gulling scenes. While Zazzali oversaw the glossing in rehearsals as part of table work involving the entire ensemble, Meier met individually with actors to address the very same issues. During these coaching sessions, Meier would often ask an actor to summarize the meaning of a given line in the context of a scene's given circumstances toward specifying his connection to the language. We both always made sure to check in with each other regularly to discuss how these sessions were going, a practice that further developed our collaboration, and more importantly, enabled us to better serve our actors.

The cast was instructed to write out their glosses as part of analyzing the given circumstances of each scene where their character appeared. Returning from winter break, we would then spend the first week of rehearsals examining everyone's glosses in conjunction with these given circumstances. After probing the text in this regard, we would then read each scene without stopping. Though this process could be tedious at times, especially since we wanted the whole cast present for the table work, even if they were playing smaller roles, it was foundational to our overarching goal. One such example of our glossing process is captured on video below, as two of our actors (Zach Sudbury and Sara Kennedy) render the famous chapel scene between Beatrice and Benedick:

Click here to view the "glossing" session with Zazzali, Beatrice and Benedick.

We ended our first week of rehearsal with another read-through of the entire play. Everyone marveled at the progress since our initial reading some five weeks earlier in December. Clearly, the glossing and table work had paid off. Our next step was to put the play on its feet while continuing to deepen the actors' connection to their speaking, which again, was the source of action for this production. While Zazzali started staging the show, Meier began his individual meetings with the actors. These sessions were generally an hour long and dedicated to speaking the text. Meier's most recent KU Shakespeare coaching had been the 2010 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, performed in the original pronunciation. We briefly considered OP for this production, but decided against it because we both thought it would clash with Zazzali's modern "futbol" concept. Dogberry, Ursula, and Don John were to be played by British actors, yet we chose not to homogenize the company's dialect palette, something that would have occurred had we asked them to undertake a standard American dialect. Meier at first questioned this choice, but Zazzali eventually convinced him that it would be best on the grounds that we were working with untrained students in a relatively short rehearsal period, and charging them to master a dialect on top of their other textual responsibilities was most likely more than they could handle. We agreed to remain steadfast in achieving our primary goal: muscular speaking of each actor's idiolect. Thus, Meier's voice sessions pushed pronunciation into the background in favor of focusing on metrical observance in the prose speeches, and swift, clear, vigorous prosecution of the language at large. Laying bare the architecture of the arguments for total clarity, rising to meet the

heightened language, and taking ownership of the text therefore became the dominant themes of his work. These goals are clearly demonstrated in the following video clip, which is typical of the forty or fifty hours of recorded coaching sessions undertaken by Meier.

Click here to view Meier coaching session with Claudio.

We were in daily communication throughout this crucial phase of the process, acknowledging and addressing particular challenges with each actor. Zazzali sat in on some of Meier's sessions and Meier, in turn, attended run-throughs.

During week two of the process, Zazzali introduced "sculpting the text," a technique that corresponded with Meier's tutorials by having the actors "physicalize their words," so as to eventually "make them live in the playing space as action." The technique involved associating consonant sounds with areas of the body, and to then comb through each syllable of every word an actor was responsible for speaking in this way. The consonants are paired with a body part according to their kinesthetic relationship. For example, a fricative like (v) is associated with the forehead, whereas stop-plosives such as (t) and (d), respectively, originate in the groin. The practice engages each consonant sound with its relative body part while allowing the vowels to "spill out from them." Thus, the consonants function as the apparatus upon which the vowels are fastened, thereby giving the speaking a desired "muscularity." Like the glossing work, sculpting the text is a time-consuming exercise.[7] Zazzali pointed out to the cast that it might take roughly an hour to fully sculpt 12 lines of regular verse. Nonetheless, the practice was essential to deploying consonants to "move the text" into each actor's body towards imbuing his/her speaking with energy, power, and intention.

Final rehearsals and the performance run

Throughout the rehearsal process we placed a premium on speaking the text as human action. "It is all in the words," Zazzali repeatedly told the cast, as he guided them to use their lines to effect change in others. For example, in act 4, scene 1, when Claudio is humiliating Hero before the "whole assembly," Zazzali instructed his actor to use the text to convince the congregation that she had been unfaithful to him and is nothing more than a "common stale." The speaking is thus action that fulfills Claudio's objective. This approach was the benchmark of our working process.

Predictably, we encountered many challenges during our six weeks of rehearsal. Some actors equated action with shouting or "pushing," which resulted in undermining their power and presence. Others were inclined to utter their words in a pedestrian manner that came well short of the demands of speaking heightened language. One of our leading actors, for example, initially wanted to break up the lines of verse in favor of speaking with subdued plainness on the grounds that it felt "more real" to him. We both worked with him to understand that there is a distinction between "theatrical truth" and pedestrian reality, insofar as the latter results in ineffectual speaking at the expense of the language's scope, pungency, rhythm, and nuance. Happily, the entire ensemble eventually sculpted their words, specified their actions, owned what they were saying, and found a heightened level of speaking that met Shakespeare's text on its terms.

We were able to achieve these outcomes by remaining in constant communication with one another and reinforcing our shared vision throughout our sessions with the cast. While Zazzali worked the play by night, Meier held tutorials during the day, during which time he met with students in both his office and the performance space. At one point, Meier conducted a master class in the theater to address the finer matters of

stage deportment and vocally filling the space. In keeping with our collaborative ethos, Zazzali actively participated in Meier's master class just as the student actors did.

As we entered our final week of rehearsal, it was clear that we had a well-spoken show on our hands. We had all done due diligence to gloss the text, clearly articulate it, assign actions to the speaking, and focus on telling the story. The remaining challenge was to bring a balance of ease and energy to our production. Our penultimate dress rehearsal, for example, was relaxed to the point of being casual—very little seemed at stake for the characters, and the playing of actions was intermittent at best. While the lax playing was somewhat of a welcome change from our rehearsal two nights earlier, when the cast was rushing through moments and forcing the language, we had devolved to the opposite end of the speaking pendulum. We recommended that the cast trust the text and their work to date towards finding ease in their speaking (and playing) while maintaining a sense of urgency. Zazzali compared powerful speaking to an Olympic sprinter: "She/he makes it look effortless and graceful, their body, breath, and execution of the task at hand are jointly energized, relaxed, and engaged." He further asserted that "[One's] character speaks from a deep need to communicate something that was prompted by another character's speaking"; doing so, he argued to the cast, would illuminate the play's linguistic variety, dramatic action, and inherent rhythms. Relatedly, Meier encouraged the actors to "energize their lines to the end of a given thought," a technique that would bring intention to the speaking and likewise rescue our production from a plodding pace. Indeed, Zazzali was ever aware of the show's overall rhythm and flow, and constantly reminded the cast that the speaking "should go like the wind" without any pausing except for those that we "built into the playing."[8] Embracing these principles allowed us to cause the audience to listen to the words, follow the action, and partake in the story.

Our *Much Ado About Nothing* was well received by audiences and critics alike. The *Lawrence Journal World* referred to it as "delightful, rich, and thoughtful," and our audiences, in general, were engaged in active listening and laughing throughout the performance. Many told us afterward how much they appreciated being able to understand the actors. Perhaps most tellingly was our student matinee, in which nearly 800 adolescents filled the theater with laughter and appreciative responses. Most importantly, it was satisfying to see (and hear) our own students grow in their understanding and respect for Shakespeare. Each and every one of our 22 cast members overcame their initial tentativeness with *Much Ado's* heightened prose, witty banter, and eloquent verse. By working together to keep the play's language the focal point of this production, we were able to create a culture of communication and trust towards rendering a production that was both pedagogically and artistically rewarding. It was a collaboration that we will cherish for some time.

Click here to view Beatrice and Benedick scene in performance.

Click here for Lawrence Journal-World review of the production.

Notes

1. The authors recognize that some of our colleagues prefer the title "vocal director" as opposed to "coach," as suggested by Lynn Watson in "The Theatre Vocal Director in the US and England," *Voice and Speech Review* 2 (2001). Since our article examines the relationship between stage directors and vocal directors, for the sake of verbal variety, we have chosen to refer to the latter as "coach."
2. The dates of our production coincided with so-called "March Madness," the NCAA basketball tournament, which is quite a big deal on the KU campus and throughout greater Lawrence.

Zazzali argued that the "soccer team" concept would resonate with this particular audience without disrupting *Much Ado's* language or overall plotline.

3. Peter Zazzali, "*Much Ado About Nothing* Soccer Film Storyboard," unpublished.
4. A telling attribute of our collaboration is that not once did any of our actors express confusion or inconsistencies in our coaching and/or directing.
5. *Much Ado* marked Zazzali's first production at KU, and he therefore had not worked with any of the students beforehand. He was thus particularly reliant on Meier's insights to each actor's strengths, weaknesses, and work habits.
6. Meier, Paul, *Voicing Shakespeare*, Paul Meier Dialect Services, featuring a company of predominantly VASTA colleagues in the audio and video clips demonstrating the classical acting techniques.
7. The origins of "sculpting the text," which is comparable to how some voice teachers reference "working the words into the body," can be traced to Zazzali's work with Irene Connors and Fran Bennett at CalArts, and later Robert Taylor at the University of Delaware's Professional Theatre Training Program. For more on physicalizing the text, which is exactly what sculpting entails, see Barbara Houseman, "Connecting with Heightened Text through Movement," *Voice and Speech Review* 6.1 (November 2013).
8. There were some moments where we crafted dramatic pauses, but it was imperative that they were exceptional. We also looked to the text for missing feet to guide us in creating such moments. One such example occurs in act 4, scene 1 after the Friar utters, "Hear me a little…"—a line with two and a half missing feet, thereby cuing us to take a pause and play the silence. Again, these instances are rare in Shakespeare, and it was our firm belief that the acting had to be on the line for the majority of the performance.

Notes on contributors

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