

The Enlightenment of Uta Hagen's Method on Stage-by-Stage Teaching of Undergraduate Acting: Taking the Ten Targets Training as an Example

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Abstract: With the vigorous development of theatrical art, an increasing number of acting training methods have continuously emerged in the public view. As cultural exchanges between countries become closer, we have the opportunity to access various excellent acting training methods and schools. Schools are pure lands for education, and for students to grow well in their studies, teachers must constantly refine their teaching skills. Combining the author's 11-day study in the Uta Hagen Method Master Class, this article selectively exemplifies the basic content of the Ten Targets Training in Uta Hagen's method, explores the enlightenment brought by this training method to the stage-by-stage teaching of undergraduate acting, and discusses how it can address practical teaching problems.

Key Words: Uta Hagen's Method; Ten Targets Training; stage-by-stage teaching; application

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"Drama in Constant Flux"—Today's drama is global and diversified, with dramas from different countries and cultures always influencing and developing together. Since around 1900 BC, Asian drama has been influenced by Western modern dramas such as realism and expressionism. From 1949 to the late 1970s, Chinese drama grew rapidly. With the changes of the times, exchanges between Chinese and Western dramas have increased, and countries around the world have begun to visit and perform in China. Therefore, the form of Chinese drama has also continued to innovate and integrate. Russian drama has always had a great influence on Chinese drama, so China has introduced more of Stanislavski's acting system and applied the Stanislavski method to drama acting teaching (acting training methods).

"Flourishing Acting Training Methods"—Today's acting training methods are also competing, but most are influenced by Stanislavski. Some are teaching methods established on the basis of Stanislavski's theory. No matter how acting methods evolve, for acting teachers and students, the most meaningful approach is to use a dialectical perspective and a thinking mind to try as many different teaching methods, acting training, and learning approaches as possible. Acting teachers should integrate all types of training, choose the most suitable training methods, and use their teaching to help students establish a performance concept that is more conducive to growth and a personal performance methodology suitable for themselves.

1 The Ten Targets Training in Uta Hagen's Method

1.1 Basic Content of the Ten Targets Training

Table 1

1.Basic Objective Training	Recreate behaviors to accomplish a simple purpose.
2.Three Modes of Entrance	Preview and understand its impact on stage entrance.
3.Directness	Address issues arising from "anticipation" (e.g., when searching for lost items).
4.The Fourth Wall	Know how to face the audience while maintaining a sense of privacy.
5.Given Circumstances	Handle objects that lack authenticity—using real objects entirely would make you controlled by them.

6.Soliloquy	Understand the difficulties of monologues.
7.Outdoor Exercise	The relationship with air and nature;Continuously find objects to occupy attention without furniture or props.
8.Multiple Dominant Forces	Learn to combine three or more sensations—heat, cold, physical pain, panic, darkness, silence, etc.
9.Historical Sense	Seek identification and authenticity in historical periods and locations.
10.Character Behavior	How events influence the behavior of two characters in a play.

Table 1 summarizes the Ten Targets Training in Uta Hagen's Respect for Acting. Ms. Hagen emphasizes "action" within given circumstances. Through step-by-step exercises, students start from simple fragments of their lives, training them to grasp real personal experiences, act authentically and effectively on stage, evoke accurate emotions for characters in given circumstances, and facilitate their smooth immersion into the play's actions.

From January 1 to November 11, 2024, as a theoretical researcher, the author completed a fulfilling 10-day learning journey in the Uta Hagen Method Master Class. In the following section, the author will elaborate on the "Life Slice Exercise" among the ten basic target trainings.

1.2 Life Slice Exercise (Start inside the door and end outside the door)

Exercise Requirements:

- 1.Single-person restoration of a real 2–3-minute life fragment.
- 2.All stage props must be real objects (no imaginary prop performance is allowed).
- 3.Establish a familiar connection with objects in the performance space.
- 4.Observe oneself before and during the exercise.
- 5.The exercise begins when entering the door and ends when exiting.

This seemingly simple life slice exercise comprehensively trains all aspects of performers. When observing the master class students' feedback assignments, the author was particularly impressed by a female teacher's performance. Take her performance as an example to illustrate the training objectives and key points:

Time: 12 PM late at night, after work in modern times

Location: Living room of one's home

Surrounding Environment: The living room, with a child sleeping on the sofa and parents lying on their sides. It is very quiet.

Personal Status: Overtime at school, no time to eat; holding two plastic bags—one with milk as requested by parents, and the other with dinner.

Relationships: Parents helping care for the child, and a naughty child.

Main Objective: Eat and sleep to rest.

Immediate Objectives: Enter the door, turn on the light, take off shoes and put on slippers, place items down, and prepare to eat.

Obstacles: Everyone is asleep at night; opening the door, turning on the light, changing shoes, opening the plastic bag, and opening/closing the refrigerator will all make sounds in the quiet environment.

Actions: The female teacher enters quietly, closes the door softly, turns on the light (noticing the child adjusted the brightness), changes shoes, places her coat and bag down, opens the takeout bag to eat, opens the refrigerator to store the milk...

The above life slice exercise by the female student exemplifies Uta Hagen's "Basic Objective Training." We categorize it into six elements, merging the main objective and immediate objectives into one. Achieving complete authenticity in such a simple life exercise requires repeated practice. Uta insists that all props must be realistic. Accurate and specific props help actors establish familiar connections with all objects in the performance space, avoiding unfamiliarity. In this concrete and real space, performers can more effectively "live" authentically on stage, presenting their observed daily selves sincerely. The chosen scenario should be clear and concise to serve the defined objectives.

This exercise helps performers act realistically and effectively on stage. Key considerations during practice:

1. Establishment of the objective.
 2. Relevance between the selected time and each performance element.
 3. Influence of the surrounding environment (seasons, temperature, time of day) on the performer's authentic expression and personal feelings.
 4. The performer's relationship with the situation ("A moment situation").
 5. Flexibility of objectives (main and immediate) within the scenario.
 6. Whether obstacles in the scenario hinder objective achievement. Obstacles are events that inhibit original actions.
- Notably, performers should embrace unexpected situations during practice, as resolving them within the scenario can create brilliant moments.

Uta Hagen discusses more objective training methods in *Respect for Acting*, which are not elaborated here. Another example is the "Character Objective Sketch" (restoring a character's life scenario), a derivative of the life slice exercise. It replaces the performer with a play character, relying on the six elements of objective training, ensuring scenario items match the play, identifying character-specific elements, locating obstacles in given circumstances within 2–3 minutes, and repeatedly dialoguing with the character to find objectives and achieve desires through multiple methods. Uta Hagen still uses the six elements of basic objective training to help actors connect with characters, identify actions and scenario objectives, find logical actions consistent with the character, and ultimately complete the character's objectives—thereby excavating the character's action logic within themselves and fostering belief in the role.

2 Characteristics and Challenges of Stage-by-Stage Teaching for Undergraduate Acting

2.1 Monotony in General Teaching

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Russian drama has profoundly influenced Chinese drama. China has introduced a large number of Stanislavski's acting systems and applied the Stanislavski method to drama acting teaching (acting training methods). With the development of the times, many acting training methods have been introduced to China and applied through cultural exchanges between China and the West. However, Chinese acting teaching still predominantly follows the Stanislavski method. Except for a few major art academies, comprehensive universities offering acting majors are overly cautious in teaching methods, leading to unsolvable problems in the teaching process.

In the freshman year of undergraduate acting teaching, most institutions still use animal and character simulation exercises and imaginary object exercises. In the second semester of freshman year, it transitions to acting sketch teaching and life observation exercises. In the sophomore year, students begin to shape stage character images—typically, the first semester of sophomore year involves reporting on famous Chinese and foreign drama excerpts, while the second semester focuses on one-act or multi-act play reports. The junior year is dedicated to shaping complete stage images: the first semester usually involves studying Chinese and foreign multi-act plays, while some schools may already enter the large-scale play training phase.

In the early days of acting teaching, outstanding senior artists integrated the Stanislavski method into teaching, cultivating many excellent acting artists, actors, and acting educators in China. However, with the development of the media era, the number of schools establishing acting programs has increased, accompanied by declining enrollment quality, obvious teaching non-standardization, and insufficient teaching staff. This has created a poor teaching atmosphere, and the vicious circle continues, imposing negative impacts on the development of Chinese acting teaching.

2.2 Problems Faced by Monotonous Teaching

As a teacher in undergraduate acting education, the author has found that the relevance between teaching modes at each stage is weak. Many students fail to apply what they learned in the first semester of freshman year to the second semester, leading to numerous challenges for both teachers and students in sophomore year teaching. During sketch teaching, we often focus more on sketch composition, ignoring students' personal feelings about the stage, character perception, and grasp of actions in given circumstances—resulting in most students having weak acting foundations. When creating stage character images in the second semester of sophomore year, they struggle to act realistically and effectively

in given circumstances, often maintaining a distance from the characters they portray. Some even fail to understand the true purpose behind character lines during large-scale play training, pretending on stage and struggling to handle basic lines correctly. For acting students, mastering basic elements such as true listening, seeing, and feeling, muscle relaxation, and attention concentration has become problematic, let alone personal cultivation and life experience accumulation.

This continuous vicious circle has caused difficulties in students' acting studies and increased challenges for acting teachers. If such common problems remain unresolved, the phenomenon of disconnection in the entire acting major will become more severe, which is highly unfavorable for the professional development of Chinese acting. This must arouse reflection among acting education workers and attention from institutions offering acting programs.

3 Application of the Ten Targets Training in Stage-by-Stage Teaching of Undergraduate Acting

The famous acting artist Yu Shizhi once said, "Actors should be determined to show the audience what is common in life but uncommon on stage, rather than performing stylized things that are common on stage but non-existent in life." In his book *Yu Shizhi on Acting Art*, he wrote: "Learning acting is not learning playwriting. It is said that acting students sometimes submit one sketch per week, spending more time on plotting—how to include conflicts, climaxes, and good themes, often with no dialogue between two characters. The actual acting sketch only accounts for one class hour per week. If this is true, it is equivalent to learning playwriting. In Paris, I once visited a school's sketch teaching and watched two exercises. One asked students to depict the process from sound sleep to getting up in the morning and going swimming—no story, just requiring real and sequential actions."

Mr. Yu Shizhi's words should inspire teachers profoundly. To some extent, Uta Hagen's method is highly compatible with China's acting teaching. We can apply the Ten Targets Training from Uta Hagen's method to the freshman and sophomore years of undergraduate acting teaching, reducing the proportion of animal simulation and imaginary object exercises, and enabling students to learn how to study the logic of their own lives. They can restore real-life events on stage, using the six elements of Uta Hagen's objective training to learn step-by-step how to organize logical stage actions, objectives, and obstacles, seek actions and methods to achieve objectives realistically and effectively in given circumstances, and discover new obstacles in evolving objectives—preparing for later character image shaping.

Additionally, the six elements of basic objective training can be extended to all subsequent trainings. Using "Directness" (A moment situation) and lost item search exercises can interrupt students' unnatural performances (problems caused by preset expectations): "I am acting—what should I do next?" This helps students establish real and effective connections with given circumstances on stage, addressing attention issues and resolving how to anticipate without acting on anticipation.

Regarding the Fourth Wall, the author has a real teaching case to illustrate. A female student always focused her attention and gaze entirely on the side of the stage, props, and her scene partner when delivering lines, fearing to communicate with the audience—her performance failed to evoke emotional resonance. The author discussed with her: "You need to communicate with the audience." The student replied, "Should I look at the audience? I think this will make me lose focus easily!" The author explained: "When I say 'communicate with the audience,' it means 'your eyes look at the audience but ignore their presence, while your heart connects with them without gazing.' Because you should communicate as the character, and throughout your performance, you do not shift your gaze to the audience." In hindsight, this explanation may have been too abstract. Referencing Uta Hagen's establishment of the Fourth Wall, combined with fixed gaze points and telephone call exercises, can partially resolve such teaching challenges.

4 Conclusion

Schools represent the future, and professional education in schools represents the future of the discipline. Teaching methods for professional studies must continue to improve, especially for acting teaching due to its unique characteristics. As times and life change, so do people. Society, composed of humans, is constantly evolving, and art within society cannot remain static. This requires art education workers to maintain a keen awareness of art education methods and continuously explore them in practice.

In the continuous exploration of teaching methods, teachers should draw inspiration from various approaches. When

learning a teaching method, we must conduct practical investigations and research, then adapt it in practical teaching by retaining the parts most compatible with our teaching environment. Through systematic study, the author has found that Uta Hagen's method integrates well with undergraduate acting teaching in China. It can effectively assist teachers in instruction, students in professional learning, and actors in continuous progress. Ms. Uta Hagen's Respect for Acting and her methods deserve repeated study by scholars who love and engage in the acting profession.

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