



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **A Theater Workshop to Improve Character Development and Collaboration Skills**

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“An actor’s development parallels his growth in self-awareness,” - Julian Schlusberg.

Every year, my Freshman acting students face the same challenges to be overcome before they can even begin to develop acting techniques. The biggest challenges include working together cooperatively, and expressing themselves in writing. This curriculum unit addresses these challenges by turning the theater classroom into a theater production office. The students will first identify their own unique talents and experiences, and then bring them to the group in an office work setting. Integrating production and curriculum, as the students work together on one imaginary and one real production, will use democratic education to forge an appreciation of multi-cultural diversity.

The history and origins of theater embody multi-culturalism. From Asian and European origins to the complexities of theatrical production, many ethnicities contribute to the living art of theater. Each participant, whether a creator or a spectator, is bound to one another in many ways. Theories and practices since the beginning of humanity exist to help a person explain their connection to a larger group. Religion, philosophy, theater exercises, professional training games, social development classes for teenagers, and more, attempt to assist a person’s search for self, and connection. In the theater classroom, a group of students must work cooperatively, embracing the diversity of each student. In this unit, the goal is for the students to realize themselves, and then the group.

Ken Wilber, in his book *No Boundary*, illustrates a technique of recognizing connectedness to whatever exists outside of what a person may call self. He draws lines of demarcation, to identify what is self, and what is outside of self, and proceeds to erase those lines as being mostly arbitrary. He argues that anyone’s consciousness belongs to a higher or super-conscious. His ideas present a very useful concept in achieving an ensemble in the freshman acting class. Modifying his concept to suit my students’ needs, in this unit each student defines himself in terms of experiences and current values, delineating himself from all others. Each then shares and incorporates these experiences into group work processes. Once they can describe who they are in terms of their experiences, and recognize the creative usefulness of diversity, together the students can identify a pool of resources, and begin to work as an ensemble. This unit, written from the premise of liberatory pedagogy, promotes social change (in the classroom,) through a transformation of the individual student recognizing the necessity of their own magnificent uniqueness contributing to the success of a

magnificently unique group of classmates.

The writing components of this unit demonstrate the power of labeling, and the importance of language. The students need to express themselves in writing, and to appreciate the nuances of words chosen specifically by any playwright. They also need to understand the powerful impact of what they say and how they say it, both onstage and while working in the classroom.

Beginning with value assessment, this unit presents a list for each student to prioritize their personal and work values. Then each student writes a resumé encompassing academic and work experience, extra-curricular and volunteer activities, and special interests and training. Next, they begin the role-playing portion of the unit, engaging in meetings and written communications to negotiate plans and expectations for an imaginary production. The next part of the unit provides a job classification list for the students to peruse. Each learner then writes a brief play, showing what may be a typical happening in the day of one of the vocations chosen from the list. As a culminating project, the group determines and produces the worthiest play, with each student acting and assuming production responsibilities in the aspect of their choosing.

## Academic Setting

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Most of my theater students will not pursue a career in the professional theater. Most arrive without any formal training, and very little acting experience. With a median class size of twelve students, they may come from as many towns, as the magnet high school where I teach serves fifteen districts. Admission is by a lottery system, requiring only an interest in a particular arts discipline.

Discipline is what my students apparently lack the most. They do not fall short on robust energy, cultivating an active social life, or seeking fun in every venture. During a recent professional development day for my high school's faculty, a group of nine teachers received the task of collectively describing their students. I was in this group. We considered aspects of their lives including family life, religion, nutrition, work ethics, goals and attitudes. This task at first seemed impossible, since our students come from fifteen towns, and their backgrounds are all so different. But soon enough, we identified some commonalities, and possible contributing factors.

Many of our students live in single-parent homes. Many receive low exposure to culture and areas outside their local vicinities. Most students do not have a daily meeting when their whole family sits together to talk or share a meal. Most play video games, use a computer, and watch television daily. Preaching rather than practicing religion, minimal participation in organized sports, ineffective nutrition, and a lack of determination to find humanitarian role models contribute to a low self-esteem. Most do not read or write for fun, or to effect change in their community. The students are prone to swearing, violence, peer pressure, and a very low respect for authority. Overall, most students possess no work ethic.

## Unit's Rationale

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The students need to develop a work ethic, self-discipline, written and oral communication skills, and working as an ensemble. For our year together to be the most productive, the students must realize, as early in the school year as possible, just how they contribute to the ensemble, and what they hope to take away.

Most teenagers that I have worked with like to talk about themselves, but shun writing anything at all. In this unit, the students begin by writing about themselves. They assess their values, and write a mini-curriculum vitae. I think the students will be quite proud of how much they have already achieved in life but did not realize until they wrote it all down. They will learn more about their classmates, hopefully accepting and encouraging the multi-cultural and diversified school community in which they now evolve. Later in the unit, they write production reports and memoranda, expressing their own ideas about producing a play. They proceed to exercise creative writing skills by dramatizing a vocational situation. The goals remain to increase self-awareness and effective self-expression, through improved literacy and cooperative learning.

During class, I frequently remind my students, "I can not teach you anything. You can only learn." I explain that the responsibility to learn anything at all falls on them. I do my part; they have to do theirs. It does not matter what I have to teach if they are not willing to commit to learning. They have to own their part in the process. Once a student understands that it is his or her personal responsibility to learn, I can begin to share with them something about acting and the theater industry. They receive rivulets of stage sense, and they are either a holding pool, or a sieve. It's up to them.

Typical of a public high school, my students receive a college preparatory education. However, not every student intends to go to college. As an additional rationale for writing this unit, I want my students to consider what they might want to do for a living after graduation, and the steps they will need to take to prepare for their choices. Assessment of their values and previous experience, along with their production team role-playing, will reveal to them the necessity of specialized training and effective communication skills to attain their vocational goals.

When I was in fifth grade, a teacher with a hand puppet came to visit my classroom. She led us through a three-week series of sessions, with her hand puppet named Occu-Possum leading the way, exploring which occupations might fit our personal interests and goals. It was a great workshop, and revealed some things about ourselves that we had not thought to consider before Occu-Possom's prompting. This curriculum unit sets forth similar goals of prompting students to consider vocational options, and to determine the requirements they will need for vocational preparedness.

Many of the students I have worked with in the last three years do not appreciate the necessity of critical analysis and effective communication. Most students shun both expository and creative writing. But in the theatre, and most other industries, every facet of collaboration relies on different components of writing. Concise, effective written communication is required by every person on all of the creative, managerial, administrative, and technical teams. Everyone on the production team must be literate, and even superior in his or her facility with language to keep them competitive in a brutal industry.

The script remains the fundamental tool in the legitimate theater. The script consists of words, written language that is meant to be spoken aloud. The better a student's grasp on both spoken and written language, the easier it becomes for him or her to render dialogue in a style suitable for a particular character.

And then there is every-day life, and its demands for literacy. Below is just a sampling of the types of writing any person may need to use to communicate ideas to someone else:

- Job Application or cover letter
- Resumé
- Form at Doctor's office, Emergency Room
- Complaint at Small Claims Court
- Complaint letter to a company
- Letter to political official
- Letter to family or friend
- Eulogy
- Wedding, birth, graduation, etc., announcement

Anyone interested in creative writing may write any of the following:

- Diary or journal
- Critique
- E-Mail / Note
- Comic strip - scenarios and dialogue
- Documentary
- Poetry
- Short story
- Play
- Novel
- Biography / Autobiography

Our future workforce demands literate workers. Engineers, bankers, nurses, every single profession, vocation and job requires that a person can read and write. To survive, every adult person must know how to read and write, or else be guided through life by a literate person.

In today's global community, literacy and understanding serve as the required tools for a harmonious global society. Future global understanding relies on today's youth to articulate the eradication of ethnocentrism and negative racial stereotypes.

## Unit Objectives

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The primary objective of this unit remains the primary objective for all of my Freshman theater classes: to foster cooperation between the students. The class puts itself at a disadvantage when it fails to work as an ensemble. When studying theater, an actor must take creative risks, and act onstage in ways they may or may not normally behave. But, a perpetual anxiety persists when revealing vulnerability. The students need to feel safe to take risks, and to try out new ways of being. When the stakes and risks are common to the class-at-large, the group can safely share criticism and grow in an atmosphere of approval and acceptance. As a collective, the class can metaphorically explore the "edges" of the globe, knowing that they can not fall off, but can sink or swim as a whole.

The approach of this unit is to have the students work as workers, instead of students. By that I mean that they treat each other as colleagues, not just peers. The unit's lesson plan objectives facilitate the students' noticing what they have done in their life so far, and how they can apply that experience to future success. The unit asks them to function as production team members, producing an imaginary play, and then producing a real one together. Throughout the process, they inventory their own skills and personal values. After each section or lesson plan, they will know a little bit more about themselves and each other. Hopefully, by the end of the unit, they will see each other as a vital worker, necessary to their own progress. They will embrace diversity as an integral part of studying theater. The more an actor knows about people, the more their created characters will be realistic, believable and interesting.

There are multiple objectives in having the students work as workers. First, they can view their work as an investment, not just required schoolwork for a grade, and immediately reap the rewards of investing in themselves. Secondly, they can begin to think more seriously about what they want to do for a living after high school, investigating other options for success excluding the college tract. Thirdly, they can explore the ramifications of every occupation and pursuit placing different demands on the human body. A bus driver of twenty years walks differently than a professional bicycle racer. Consideration of posture, body language, potential injury or pain, level of education and economic status contributes to an actor's realization of a character and their behavior onstage.

Encouraging discovery of self-knowledge will foster cooperation only if the students can express that knowledge. That is why this unit features several different writing and communication styles. The students communicate self-knowledge by writing their resumé, writing a cover letter, a memorandum or report, and a short play.

In addition to improving collaboration and increasing self-awareness, this unit addresses many of the National

and District Standards for teaching theater. The standards addressed include acting, literature and technical theater production.

So much in life presents opportunities for creative problem solving. Yet, my students often give up before they devise a solution, or brainstorm options for solutions. In this unit, they will realize that their work counts just as much as the next person's, that they can't give up as easily as they usually do, as others are counting on them.

In addition to problem solving skills and tenacity, an actor must develop astute thinking skills. This unit offers a nut-and-bolts approach to recognition of thought processes and behaviors using critical analysis. Once the students gain insight into their own thought processes, they can use that information to consider a character's thought processes. Acting is reacting; how a character reacts to an event or situation reveals to the audience how they think. An actor must consider how their created character gathers, organizes and evaluates information to justify the character's behavior, and determine their motivations.

Along with consideration of thought processes, an actor must consider a character's personal values and goals. My students can not successfully write an analysis of a character's values and goals, until they are familiar with the critical process of prioritizing such things. The assessment and resumé portions of this unit will provide insight of their own values and goals, so that they may then apply this prioritization to a character analysis.

The more actors discover about themselves, the more mysterious life itself becomes. Every newfound insight leads to deeper levels of knowledge, and myriad applications of such knowledge. Throughout this unit, the students use their own experience as the standard against which to measure other forms of experience, starting with the experiences of their classmates. This process will increase the level of student self-respect, and their respect for others. It also will better prepare the students for success, in college, a trade or a vocation. It will optimally create and sustain an ensemble work environment, the benefits of which can be directly applied to life inside and outside of the classroom, through development of learners' behaviors associated with creative or higher-order thinking. As they work together as a production team, the students will have to remain flexible in their application and measures of experience. They will have to recognize the origins of their opinions, be able to elaborate an idea, and collectively grapple with the complexities of unifying ideas from very different origins. They must train themselves to remain curious and courteous, be willing to take risks, and stretch their imaginations.

## Strategies

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The daily lesson plan format for an eighty-minute acting class includes a focus exercise, followed by a brief physical and vocal warm-up. Then the skill or technique lesson is introduced and practiced. Each class concludes with a reflection discussion, and/or a rubric assessment.

This curriculum unit will be taught over the first marking period, a duration of nine weeks. It will be interspersed with their regular lessons, creating a progression of first identifying who they are, and then how they can improve sharing who they are, and accepting their classmates.

The first semester of the Freshman acting class teaches three basic acting techniques. First, the actor trains

himself to create believability through focus and concentration. Secondly, the actor learns to consider climate, location, and level of comfortability for a character to establish the script's environment. Thirdly, the actor learns to endow objects with properties they do not normally have.

Throughout the year, every acting and stage voice class involves an established routine. The curriculum design affords time for an exercise to focus the students' concentration, an exercise to energize and loosen the body, the day's lesson and a reflection period at the end of class. If either of the warm-ups (mental and physical) is skipped, the day's lesson suffers. The students lead such busy lives, and can not easily switch gears to begin acting class.

From the first day of school, I teach a physical warm-up based on the Alexander Technique. It entails a series of stretches to elongate the spine, and move the body's ball joints. Every movement based on the Alexander Technique requires that the actor maintains constant awareness of their spine, and what direction it is moving. Every stretch, even standing erect, must be done in the context of widening and lengthening the spine.

Diaphragmatic breathing and vocal exercises conclude the physical warm-up. Later in the year, class can begin with the physical warm-up. But early on, the students usually require a simple exercise to bring their focus into the room, and on the work at hand. Exercises, like sending your hearing or vision out of the room, visualizations of flying on magic carpets, creating a ball out of imaginary space substance and then tossing it in the air and catching it, develop the concentration young actors require before they can begin to study or work.

Once they have prepared their focus and released muscular tension, the students can begin to study the day's lesson. The spectacular thing about theater, in terms of teaching strategies, is that it daily encompasses all of the usual methods of instruction used in outcomes-based education. Direct instruction serves to explain the basic techniques explored and applied in the lesson. The students proceed to work individually, in small groups, or with the whole group. The process of studying theater relies on cooperative learning, as each work piece receives criticism and critique from the whole class. Together and individually, the students explore creative problem solving. They research the clothing, architecture, mannerisms, and customs of different time periods, depending on the dramatic piece being studied. Every day, they research characterization by simply observing the people they see throughout the course of their day.

The fact that the theater classroom is so diverse makes it readily enjoyable to most students. Each learner works in the mode that works best for him or her, during every class. A fundamental difference between my upbringing and today's teenagers lies in the notion of fun. I was raised in a society based on manufacturing, moving toward technology, and later, service. My students are being raised in a society growing toward leisure. "Fun" for my students is not a happy by-product of learning; it is a required motivation. If an activity is not fun, it should be replaced with something that is. My students believe they are wasting their time, or doing themselves a disservice, by engaging in a project that lacks fun. Thank goodness theater is fun. Every class requires so many different activities that each child can find something they like, and something that challenges them. Exercises, games, and rehearsals keep them moving, stretching their limits and their imaginations.

Oscar Brockett best describes what we are really doing in theater: "Acting is the illumination of human behavior onstage." Since human behavior relies on communication through both verbal and body language, student actors study both types of language. There are four interrelated processes of verbal language: talking, listening, reading and writing. Every class features exploration of these four processes. The approach to

exploring language varies from lesson to lesson, but always seeks to reveal methods of how humans communicate. Students readily study the human senses, enjoying the process of isolating one sense from another. I try to have each lesson appeal to, or include reactions to, as many of the senses as possible. Understanding various reactions to sense stimuli helps the actor to create believable characters.

Each learner receives and delivers information (communicates) differently. According to Howard Gardner's research on human intelligence, there are four basic learning styles. Gardner describes these styles as visual, aural, tactile and kinesthetic. Almost every acting lesson teaches and tests application of knowledge in all four styles. This is the nature of theater.

To be open to receiving or sharing personal information, actors must learn to dismantle the "mask" they wear. Everyone wears a mask; it is a barrier people use to conceal inhibitions. By finding common ground throughout this unit, my students can leave their mask at the stage door, and put it on again at the end of class when they leave. Ideally, they will take with them new mental directions on when, where, and why they (and their characters onstage) wear a mask.

To be successful in imparting knowledge to my students, I must constantly be aware of my roles as a theater educator. It is rarely, if ever, sufficient for me to give a lecture, and then a written test. In addition to designing and implementing a curriculum, I must be a coach, mediator, cheerleader, facilitator, and assessor. Likewise, the children must learn how to assume these roles for themselves and for each other, to work and grow cooperatively.

## Implementation

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Here is how the unit progresses, and the estimated length of time needed to complete each section. All acting classes are double periods, for a total of eighty minutes, and meet three times a week.

I. Values assessment	30 minutes
II. Resumé and cover letter writing	90 minutes
III. Role-playing	2 hours
IV. Work skills assessment	20 minutes
V. Job indexing	30 minutes
VI. Playwriting	2 hours
VII. Acting & Production	4 hours

This curriculum unit concerns itself with encouraging cooperation, through practicing some of the communication styles used every day in the professional theater. Temporarily turning the theater classroom into a theater production office, a group of ten learners will explore the communication process of producing a play. Student learners will hopefully gain an appreciation of successful collaboration, improve their writing and communication skills, recognize themselves as workers in a work environment, and identify which vocations suit their education and employment goals.



Each section of this unit should include appropriate warm-up exercises and games to reinforce the skills and techniques being studied. For this unit, games can be any type as long as they increase skills in one or more of the following areas: team learning and information sharing, trust-building, conflict resolution, managing change, task and process evaluation, role fulfillment, embracing diversity, creativity and innovation, and/or group and individual empowerment. (These areas of concentration are some of the areas into which trainer Carolyn Nilson categorizes her team games. Viola Spolin also categorizes her Theater Game File similarly.)

Please note that every lesson plan below should include a brief physical and vocal warm-up, as well as the games and exercises listed. Since the physical warm-up I teach the children is standard and done every class, I have left it out of the lesson plan descriptions below. Please also note that students frequently need to be reminded to avoid physical and verbal violence when working on any game or exercise in the theater classroom. Violent scenarios interrupt cooperative learning and usually abruptly end the creative flow of ideas. Encourage students to find a different course for the scene to take. I do not allow violence at all, since drawing the line on acceptable and unacceptable violence also disrupts the lesson, requiring that we use our energies to debate instead of create.

### *Lesson One: What are Your Values?*

Suggested focus exercise: Glowball

Objective: Individual empowerment

The teacher verbally leads the class through the following exercise. "Focus on a spot on the floor. Make it grow larger, and become your favorite color. Make the spot move into the air, and onto a wall. Make the spot dance on the wall, and jump into the space before your eyes. Shrink the spot to the size of a marble, and now make it begin to glow. Let it float down to rest in the palm of your hand. Pop the glowing marble into your mouth and swallow it. This is your personal glowball, and can never be turned off. No one can take it from you. It is always shining brightly within you. You can not choke on it; it will never harm you. Whenever you feel anything sad or displeasing, and before you go onstage, turn up the power of your glowball."

Core Activity: Personal Values Assessment

Objective: Increase self-awareness

The teacher distributes to each student a list of personal values. Working independently, each student circles the values that best describe their personality. (This list can be used throughout the year as a template each time the students develop a character biography, choosing which attributes comprise their character's personality.) Make sure there are a few dictionaries around, and go over the list aloud. If the group can not define a word, have one person look it up and share the definition with the class. Below is a partial list of attributes that could be used in this exercise.

Helpful  
Esteemed  
Calm  
Relaxed  
Worrying  
Popular

Exciting  
Sentimental  
Polite  
Assertive  
Adventurous  
Dynamic  
Patient  
Wholesome  
Energetic  
Conscientious  
Unassuming  
Escapist  
Sophisticated  
Likable  
Generous  
Persistent  
Agreeable  
Unobtrusive  
Earnest  
Gregarious  
Daring  
Outstanding  
Docile  
Tolerant  
Sympathetic  
Demanding  
Nice  
Loyal  
Charitable  
Compelling  
Self-starter  
Persuasive  
Resolute  
Conventional  
Careful  
Tranquil  
Eloquent  
Satisfied  
Cultured  
Cynical  
Understanding  
Dominant

Reflection/Assessment: After completion of the checklist, have each student identify the two traits that they possess which they consider the most valuable, and the two traits they would like to cultivate in themselves. Students may share their results with the class.

### *Lesson Two: Resumé Writing*

Suggested focus exercise: When I Go to California

Objective: Memory recall

Have the group sit in a circle. The teacher begins by saying, "When I go to California, I'm going to take my...." Insert any article, including an adjective to describe it. For instance, "When I go to California, I'm going to take my fluffy slippers." The next person in the circle repeats what the person before them said, and adds their own article. The game continues around the circle, getting more difficult as the list of things to take to California grows longer. This game can get zany; be sure that each student adds only one article with one adjective describing it.

Core Activity: Resumé Writing

Objective: Self-assessment of accomplishments

Distribute two pieces of paper to each student. Have them write their name, address and phone number at the top, in the center, of one of the sheets. Explain that they will write a student resumé, and discuss how this is more of a miniature curriculum vitae, than a resumé. Dates are not as important as on a typical work resumé. Take them through the following formula, allowing as much time as needed for everyone to complete each section before moving on to the next one.

- Paid work experience (babysitting, gardening, etc.)
- Volunteer work experience (especially supervisory positions)
- Community Service (with or without an organization's sponsorship)
- Extracurricular activities (including athletics, after-school programs, etc.)
- Awards (from and for any accomplishment)
- Specialized training (computers, performing or martial arts, etc.)
- Acting experience

Reflection/Assessment: Sit back and watch most of the students glow with a sense of pride. Make a copy of his or her resumé for each student to take home. Encourage them to share it with their family, and even to type it.

### *Lesson Three: Production Team Role-Playing*

Suggested focus exercise: Milling About, Occupation by Individual

Objective: Exploration of the various body movements required for different occupations.

Have the students “milling about.” This is a condition where students roam aimlessly, in any direction, within a specific large area. They must be fully aware of their kenosphere (the approximately three-foot area around their body) and not invade anyone else’s kenosphere. In this exercise, they work non-verbally. Have them mill about, having various parts of the body lead them. Occasionally, yell, “Freeze!” When they hear that, they must stop all movements immediately. After a brief period of time, introduce different occupations for them to demonstrate as they mill about. Using “Freeze!” and changing the occupations roughly ten times, isolate demonstration by one or two students at a time, for the rest of the class to observe.

Core Activity: Production Team Role-Playing, Part One: The Cover Letter

Objective: Increase self-awareness as “worker”; improve written self-expression

Distribute the following chart of production team jobs. Lead a group discussion of job descriptions for each position on the production team, having the students take notes on their chart. Include in the discussion an identification of which position or person each team member reports.

*(chart available in print form)*

Next, distribute the chart below that illustrates typical writing styles used in the particular areas of theater production. Next, have each student write a cover letter of two to three paragraphs stating why he or she would be an ideal candidate for one of the positions. They should include relevant skills and experience from their values assessment sheet and their resumé. Indicate that the job they write a cover letter for will probably not be the role they are assigned. It is preferable for the success of this portion of the unit to match weakest skill areas with a job that demands strength in a skill area, to allow for more discoveries, and ultimately, acceptance of self and others’ capabilities. In the real work world, a person has to possess the necessary skills and qualifications for a particular job when he applies for the job. In this unit’s academic setting, students may take chances, and apply for a position that requires greater strengths than they have in certain skill areas.

Types of Writing in Production Areas

*(chart available in print form)*

Core Activity: Production Team Role-Playing, Part Two: Assignment of Roles

Objective: Devise a production team; Group empowerment

Assign each learner a production team role to play in an imaginary production. It is important at this stage to not specifically match roles with already known skills, to allow for more discovery of how each learner receives and shares information. The teacher is the Production Manager, facilitating the process of production team members understanding and completing their assigned tasks. It is not important that each student is assigned the role they applied for. It is more important to have each role represented.

### Core Activity: Production Team Role-Playing, Part Three: Concept Meeting

Objective: Foster cooperative collaboration

The group reads the script that the teacher has selected for this exercise. The imaginary production used in this exercise can utilize any script. I suggest a short children's play which features some non-traditional aspects to production. I will use the play, *The Magic Bookshelf*, found in the *Drama Magazine for Young People*. This play tells the story of a boy who is bored in general, and bored with reading. Characters come alive from well-known fairy tale books on the shelf, and have a meeting about imaginary characters becoming real once they exist in a reader's mind.

After reading the script, each production team member writes their ideas on how to fulfill their job requirements for this production, being as specific as possible regarding their designs and expectations. Students may use lists, diagrams, images, phrases or sentences. Next, team members verbally share their ideas with the rest of the team. This portion of the lesson is over when the group has reached a unified concept plan for production.

### Core Activity: Production Team Role-Playing, Part Four: Conflict

Objective: Foster cooperative collaboration; improve written self-expression

At this stage in the role-playing, a conflict for each team member is introduced, and the team member must resolve the conflict using a form of writing. The conflict is presented using a form of writing typical to their primary area of production. The resolution can be a memo, letter, or report. The student must decide if they need more information before attempting to resolve their problem, from whom they should get it, and to whom they should present their solution. Possible conflict suggestions:

Assistant Production Manager: The Director hates the Set Designer's ideas, and has written a letter of resignation because of it.

Director: The Costume Designer wants all the actors to wear pink tutus, and has provided sketches of their ideas.

Stage Manager: The actors are on strike until they get a coffeepot in the rehearsal hall, and have all signed a petition stating this.

Playwright: The Director wants a new ending to the play, one that features a musical dance number for the finale.

Scenic Designer: The Producer needs clear plans to substantiate such a "big build" budget.

Costume Designer: After taking costume measurements, it is evident that three of the cast members are over seven feet tall, walk with a hunchback, and would look lousy in bright colors.

Actor: The new script is out, but the Director wants it performed with puppets instead of live actors.

Lighting Designer: The current light grid in the theater has ten instruments, but the Director's concept calls for thirty-five instruments.

Publicity Director: The program layout is done, but does not provide any space for a cast list or Director's notes.

Sound Designer: The theatre is acoustically unsound, and there are only two stage microphones available.

Reflection/Assessment: team members meet with the team member who sent them a memo or report, and discusses the level of efficacy in communicating information.

#### *Lesson Four: Work Skills*

Suggested focus exercise: Mill About, Occupation by Group

Objective: Identifying parts of a whole

Ask two students to step out of the room. Ask the remainder of the group to decide on an occupation that the group can perform as a whole. For instance, they all could be performing separate tasks in a bakery, on a construction site, in a grocery store, etc. Give the group a couple of minutes to establish the performance of their tasks, and then ask the students who stepped out to guess the occupation that the group is performing.

Core Activity: Work skills, Part One: Assessment

Objective: Increase self-awareness; identify work skill areas that require improvement

Distribute the following list of work skills, and ask the students to choose the two strongest skills, and the two weakest skills they possess.

*(chart available in print form)*

Core Activity: Work skills, Part Two: Potential Applications of Work Skills

Objective: Matching work skills with potential vocational choices

Distribute the following job classification list, which lists approximately one hundred vocation and career choices. The list should be scrutinized by the students, revealing which vocations best match their preferences and abilities. Ask the students to circle their top five choices.

Please consider that before reviewing the following list with the students, it may be beneficial to discuss with them how studying theater can prepare a person for any occupation. Critical analysis, problem solving, discipline, creativity and team cooperation include some of the major skill areas improved when studying theater and acting. Lawyers and people preparing for vocations that require presentation skills often take theater classes, both in college, and as part of professional vocational training.

Job Classification List

*(chart available in print form)*

#### *Lesson Five: Playwriting*

Suggested focus exercise: Who's Coming to Your House Party?

Objective: Exploring personalities in relation to their chosen occupations

One student volunteers to host an imaginary party at their house. He or she establishes the room where the party will be, turning on an imaginary radio, or hanging balloons, etc., while the rest of the group watches. Then four students select from a hat a piece of paper with an occupation written on it. One at a time, each of

the four students goes to the party, behaving in a manner typical of that occupation. After all four have been at the party for several minutes, the host tries to guess their occupation.

Core Activity: Writing a short play

Objective: Exploration of potential vocational choices; improve creative writing; understand dramatic structure

Discuss the basic principles of dramatic structure: exposition, conflict, turning point, climax, resolution, and denouement. It may be useful to use the script used in Lesson Three, Part Two, although any traditional script will do. I would avoid non-traditional scripts that mix up the standard progression of dramatic structure, and avoid a lengthy script.

Next, distribute lined paper to every student. Ask the students to choose one vocation from the job classification list above that they may be considering as a potential vocation. Have them write a short play based on that choice, illustrating a typical happening or day in the life of a worker who performs the job they chose from the list. Make sure their play has a beginning, middle, and end.

Reflection/Assessment: Have the class read all the plays aloud. Ask the group to determine which play is the most interesting, best written, and worthy of production.

### *Lesson Six: Acting and Production*

Suggested focus exercise: Machine

Objective: Combining individual parts to make a whole

Have one student stand in the center of the room. Ask them to think of a repetitive noise and a simple accompanying gesture. Be sure that they can maintain the noise and gesture for several minutes. After establishing their sound and movement, ask another student to add himself or herself to the previous student's motion, making their own sound and gesture. Each student joins in, one at a time, adding to the conglomeration. After the last student has joined, ask the group what they think their "machine" may be making.

Core Activity: Rehearsing the Play, Part One: Expanding the Script

Objective: Application of skills and concepts studied in this unit

Distribute to each student a copy of the play that the class chose as the worthiest to be produced. Have the student who wrote it perform the role of the protagonist, and ask for volunteers to read the other parts. Then have the class read it aloud again, standing, and have the remaining students add themselves into the scene, as they desire. Afterward, discuss which aspects of the new version, with the extra characters, worked best. Repeat improvising the expanded script until the whole group likes the piece.

Core Activity: Rehearsing the Play, Part Two: Building the Production

Objective: Successful collaboration; establish work ethic; artistic expression

Ask the students to choose which production aspect they would like to develop for the play. They may choose to build costumes, props, sound or lighting effects (using whatever equipment is available,) or program or

poster design. Assign homework: bring in at least two items to fulfill their production responsibility.

Core Activity: Rehearsing the play, Part Three: Performance

Objective: Application of all skills and concepts studied in this unit

Invite other students to watch an informal presentation of the piece the group built together.

Reflection/Assessment: After the performance, have the class discuss with the audience the process of writing and building the play. Ask the audience to answer the following questions:

Did the actors maintain focus?

Were the characters believable?

Did the technical production elements contribute to the dramatic action?

Did the cast work as an ensemble?

## Assessment

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Assessment of the success of this unit should be evident as the unit progresses. The students should be collaborating more successfully with each step of the unit. Their treatment of each other should steadily become more considerate and respectful. They should work with an increasing measure of self-confidence and attachment to the group, feeling safe to express their opinions and ideas. The class's culminating performance should yield the answer "yes" to all four questions asked of the audience at the discussion afterward. The script for the culminating performance should be well written. The students should become more and more articulate when they express themselves, both verbally and in writing. As the unit goes from start to finish, an ensemble should be created and maintained. The students' work in the culminating performance should demonstrate being a strong and effective individual part of a successful whole.

## Annotated Bibliography

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### **Topic: Policy and Practice in Current Educational Trends and Instructional Systems**

Darling-Hammond, Linda, et al. *Authentic Assessment in Action: Studies of Schools and Students at Work*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995. Studies of five New York secondary schools that use authentic assessment of student learning, requiring solutions to complex problems to test students' knowledge, instead of relying on standard written testing.



Evers, Frederick, et al. *The Bases of Competence: Skills for Lifelong Learning and Employability* . San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. A book about bridging the gap between the college campus and the workplace. The Resource appendix features a very useful questionnaire for students to rate their strengths in eighteen work skill competences.

Halvorsen Smith, Raynette, et al. *Perspectives on Teaching Theatre* . New York: Peter Lang, 2001. An extremely topical collection of essays written by teachers of theatre in higher education.

Harris, Roger, et al. *Competency-Based Education and Training: Between a Rock and a Whirlpool* . S. Melbourne, Australia: MacMillan, 1995. Chapter Two, "Historical and International Context," offers an explanation of the global origins of competency-based education. Provides useful background information when considering the potential future of competency-based education.

Killen, Roy. *Teaching Strategies for Outcomes-Based Education* . Lansdowne, S. Africa: Juta, 2000. A superb book outlining six major teaching strategies, the expected critical outcomes from use of all six strategies, and definition of the roles of an educator.

United States. State of Connecticut. *Connecticut Academic Performance Test: Test II: Reading for Information and Test III: Interdisciplinary Writing* . Department of Education: 2002. Excerpts from a mandatory test administered to all Connecticut high school sophomores.

Van Niekerk, Petro. "Values and Ideologies." In *Contemporary Education: Global Issues and Trends* . Ed. Eleanor Lemmer. Sandton, S. Africa: Heinemann, 1999. 1-25. An investigation of the origins and impacts of pedagogics in South Africa.

## **Topic: Vocational Preparedness and Training**

Adams, Frank, and Clarence W. Stephens. *A Student Job Classification Plan for Colleges and Universities* . Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972. A meticulous resource that classifies two hundred fifty jobs into five categories, with job descriptions and required candidate qualifications.

Gray, Kenneth and Edwin L. Herr. *Other Ways to Win: Creating Alternatives for High School Graduates* . Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, 1995. Closely examines the impact and implications of the United States' trend toward college preparatory education, and offers alternative educational goals.

Kroehnert, Gary. *100 Training Games* . Sydney, Australia: M<sup>c</sup> Graw-Hill, 1991. This and the two books below offer high-involvement games and training aids for developing individual and team skills.

Newstrom, John and Edward E. Scannell. *Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises* . New York: M<sup>c</sup> Graw-Hill, 1980.

Nilson, Carolyn. *Team Games for Trainers* . New York: M<sup>c</sup> Graw-Hill, 1993.

## **Topic: Understanding that which we don't have direct access to**

Longinus. *Longinus on the Sublime* . Trans. H. L. Havell. London: M<sup>ac</sup> Millan, 1890. An ancient Greek philosophical treatise that defines the notion of subliminal, and the five sources of the sublime. This and Thomas Reid's book (listed below) provide insight into higher-order thinking and behavior.

Reid, Thomas. *Inquiry and Essays* . Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983. A collection of essays that explore human development of intellectual powers, morality and belief systems, and creation of individuality.

Wilber, Ken. *No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth* . Boston: Shambhala, 2001. A nuts-and-bolts

approach to explaining human consciousness and the subconscious.

## Reading List for Teachers

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Brockett, Oscar. *History of the Theatre (Seventh Edition)* . Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon, 1995. A comprehensive history of the origins of world theater.

Gray, John. *Your Guide to the Alexander Technique* . London: Victor Gollancz, 1990. Devised by Mathias Alexander, his technique is used in theater classes around the world, and can help anyone improve posture and poise.

Manderino, Ned. *The Transpersonal Actor: Reinterpreting Stanislavski* . Los Angeles: Manderino Books, 1976. The author takes Constantin Stanislavski's famous System to a higher level, from sensory awareness to consciousness awareness. A must-read for teacher's of intermediate and advanced acting courses.

Schlussberg, Julian. *Lessons for the Stage: An Approach to Acting* . Hamden: Archon, 1994. Written in two parts, this comprehensive teacher's guide provides a base curriculum for Acting I and II classes. It is extremely easy to use, and includes worksheets for students.

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisation for the Theater* . Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1963. This is the remarkable book from which the *Game File* listed below grew.

Spolin, Viola. *Theater Game File* . Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989. An indispensable resource for any and all theater teachers. Ms. Spolin literally wrote the book on theater games, and went so far as to catalogue each game on a five-by-seven index card. A teacher needs to know nothing about theater to use this collection of theater games and exercises.

## Reading List for Students

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Clapp, Patricia. "The Magic Bookshelf." *Plays : The Drama Magazine for Young People* Nov. 1998: 43+

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