2003

The keys to theatre education

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Higgins, Angela, "The keys to theatre education" (2003). *Master's Theses*. 2403.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.c8ds-4duu>
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THE KEYS TO THEATRE EDUCATION

A Special Project

Presented to

The Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Angela Higgins

May 2003

UMI Number: 1415715

UMI Microform 1415715

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ABSTRACT

THE KEYS TO THEATRE EDUCATION

Adviser: Anne Simonson

by Angela Higgins

This special project documents two musical productions and one dramatic play that have been the product of three semesters worth of teaching drama classes at Keys School in Palo Alto. Every seventh and eighth grade students has been able to take part in either a play or musical as part of their school curriculum, in order to adequately prepare them for performing arts classes at the high school level. This project includes director's notes, commentary on the success of the program, and actual footage of the final productions.

In addition, lesson plans for sixth grade theatre are included, following the standards that the State of California now follows for all public schools grades K-12 and the Backward Lesson Design enforced by the California Arts Project, a state funded subject matter project for professional development in the visual and performing arts.

A resume of the instructor has also been included.

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Introduction: Director's Notes

When looking at the prospect of teaching acting and studying "Theatre Arts Education" for my Master's Degree, I found what I thought to be a perfect teaching/directing position to be the basis for my project. This position as the seventh and eighth grade Drama Teacher at Keys School in Palo Alto has given me invaluable experience.

Being the Drama Rotation teacher at Keys Middle School, I am given the assignment of putting on two shows for the year. Each of the seventh and eighth grade students is given the opportunity to sign up to be in either a musical or a play the spring prior to the next school year. In the fall I collaborate with the Musical Director to put on a musical and in the spring I direct a play alone. At the end of each semester the cast performs for the entire school and then again for their friends and families.

This, at first glance, seems to be a fun and stress-free job, as we have the whole semester to prepare. However, when rehearsing for the musical, our limited time of 1:30pm to 3:00pm every Wednesday to coordinate music, drama, and dance became quite a challenge. So I started my adventure into crash courses in acting and hours of preparation to make rehearsals run as smoothly as possible.

For the fall semester of 2001, the Musical Director and I chose to do "Guys and Dolls" from the Broadway Jr. Collection. This proved to be a huge success for parents and students alike. Students were able to play characters from a different time period, giving way to dancing and acting in the world of Nathan Detroit's gambling New York

friends, in contrast to the conservative Salvation Army band that make up the cast of the play. Not only was the show a success, but I also believe it served as an experience that built confidence and lasting memories for the children. While they are able to walk away with the experience of being in a theatrical production, they also were opened up to an artistic side of themselves that many did not know before.

The following semester, Spring 2002, I chose to do the play version of the screenplay *Fame*. Having a class of nineteen students, *Fame* proved to have a large enough cast to accommodate our large group. One choice I made regarding casting, that I found to be a great learning experience for the students, was having the teacher's roles in the play played by actual teachers from the school. The teachers I asked were no more experienced in acting than their students that would be interacting in the scenes with them. Not only did the students find the experience of having their teachers being on the same playing field as themselves exciting, but the teachers participating did as well.

On the last day of class, after we had performed our production, I asked the students what they had taken or learned from the class. One student who had worked closely with one of the teachers, having many one-on-one scenes with her, commented that he realized that his teachers were "real people." He went on to say that by going through the rehearsal process with them, working on lines, and spending time outside of their teacher/student roles made him appreciate them more as human beings.

Some students commented that they liked playing characters that they could relate to, while others said they felt more confident in giving oral presentations in their other subjects.

For all of these reasons, I found our Spring play to be a success. Besides the fact that they all improved in their acting and put on their first full length play, they learned to empathize with others to a greater degree.

The following school year, Fall 2002, I was pleased to be able to see the familiar faces of my seventh graders from the previous year coming back as eighth graders. In our musical *Bye Bye Birdie*, I was able to see improvements, from children who had been in *Guys and Dolls* and *Fame*, that made me beam with pride. Many commented that the level of characterization and overall performances of the students was the highest the school had ever seen. The students put every effort into making the show the best it could be. In comparison to *Guys and Dolls*, this production had twice as many large production numbers, but the students still were able to produce a successful show in the same amount of rehearsal time. One high school Drama teacher, who saw the show, came up to me after the production to tell me she thought our middle school students were performing at the same level as many high school students. Besides the buzz in praise of the cast going on after the show, I saw four of my graduates, three from *Fame* and one from *Guys and Dolls* from the previous year who came back to see the show. The fact that they enjoyed the experience enough to come back and support their younger friends spoke volumes of their experience. One of the girls, Michelle, told me she is signing up to take Drama at her high school now. I, of course, encouraged her and said she would be great!

Talking to her reminded me of the previous semester when she played the lead, Doris, in *Fame*. After the show had ended she gave me a card in which she wrote, "Thank you for giving me a chance!" Michelle is one of the many students I think can be

encouraged through the experience of theatre. I believe bringing this wonderfully collaborative art to the classroom is essential in a child's education.

To continue that learning in the area of theatre education at Keys, I have written a set of lessons to be taught in six class periods over the course of a semester for the sixth graders. This course is compressed into such a short time span due to the limited time in the already busy school-day schedule. These theatre workshops are meant to prepare the students for the performance based Drama Rotation class that I already have in place. By having this sixth grade introduction to theatre, I believe they will have an even more fulfilling experience in the art by the time they have graduated.

The design of the lessons is following the Backwards Design used by the California Arts Project. The University of California administers the California Arts Project in order to provide professional development in the arts for teachers. The standards in the lessons are from the Visual and Performing Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools adopted by the California State Board of Education January 2001. This portion of the project will be proposed to the Head of School at Keys with hopes of implementation for Fall 2003.

Overall, I would have to say that the experience at Keys has given me the inspiration to continue to bring theatre into the lives of children. As said by teacher and scholar Eric Jensen, "The arts should be supported not only because research supports their value but also because they are as dynamic and broad-based as more widely accepted disciplines... Ultimately, the arts can help make us better people."

Lesson 1: Focus On Theatre

Unit developed by: Angie Higgins

Discipline: Theatre Arts

Standards grade level: 4 (See Summary)

Length: 1 hour

STANDARDS ASSESSED:

Grade Four

Connections, Relationships, and Applications

5.3 Exhibit team identity and commitment to purpose when participating in theatre experiences.

OTHER STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Grade One

Creative Expression

3.1 Demonstrate skills in pantomime, tableau and improvisation.

Grade Two

Creative Expression

2.1 Perform in improvisational theatrical games that develop cooperative skills and concentration.

Connections, Relationships, and Application

5.1 Use problem solving and cooperative skills in dramatizing a story.

Grade Three

Creative Expression

2.1 Participate in Improvisations that incorporate the five W's.

Connections, Relationships, and Application

5.1 Use problem solving and cooperative skills to dramatize a story with emphasis on the 5 W's.

Grade Four

Creative Expression

2.1 Demonstrate the emotional traits of a character through gesture and action.

BRIEF SUMMARY:

Although this may appear to be a lesson for fourth graders, according to the standards, it is designed to be the first of a six-class session for sixth grade Beginning Acting students. This session of focusing and listening exercises is intended for those who have never had an acting class. Therefore, it is necessary to start out slowly and get the students to focus. While this lesson emphasizes that concentration is key in theatre, enforcing “commitment to purpose,” the exercises are meant to be ice breakers, since it will be the first day of their theatre workshop.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. When you focus your mind and will on something, you can accomplish anything!
2. Listening is an integral key to understanding and relating to those around us.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How can our focus affect us in our everyday activities?
2. How can we cooperate effectively with others while still reaching our own goals?

TOPICAL UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Focus and concentration are essential in performance.
2. An actor must actively listen to the others on stage.
3. Quick thinking is essential to improvisation.

TOPICAL QUESTIONS:

1. How do we remain focused?
2. Why is what your neighbor says important to what you say on stage?
3. How can we let down our inhibitions to create interesting and fast-thinking improv?

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INCLUDED IN THIS LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Focus and concentration needed for theatrical performance.
2. Improvisational skills through exercises.
3. Cooperative skills in problem solving.

4. Practice in vocal projection.

PERFORMANCE TASK:

Participate in an improvisational story and scene with a group of students. After each group finishes their story, they will take on the roles of the characters they have created and reenact their story. (We'll soon find out who was listening!)

EVIDENCE:

1. Teacher observation of participation in group improv. games.
2. Contribution to improved story in "Story Story Die."
3. Reenactment of story to evaluate concentration and listening skills.

VOCABULARY:

Collaboration: The act of working together in a joint intellectual effort.

Diction: The pronunciation of words, the choice of words, and the manner in which a person expresses himself or herself.

Ensemble: A group of theatrical artists working together to create a theatrical experience.

Improvisation: A spontaneous style of theatre in which scenes are created without advance rehearsing or scripting.

Projection: The placement and delivery of volume, clarity, and distinctiveness of voice for communicating to an audience.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. Items for "This is a what?"

LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Warm up: Loosen joints, roll up one vertebrae at a time, suns and prunes, etc.
2. Lightening: In a circle one student makes a gesture and noise to the person to their left. As quickly as possible, every student then imitates that person's movement and sound around the circle. When it comes back to the original person the next person starts a new one. This is to get the students into their bodies, as well as get them to think fast and not be self-conscious.
3. One by One: Have students stand in a circle. Tell them that their goal is to count to 10 together. The hard part will be that they have to say each number, one person at a time. There is no order given and they may not signal to the next person to speak. If someone says the next number at the same time as someone else, they must start over. The trick is to listen closely, not rush, and realize you can feel when someone is going to speak near you. Once they have gotten to ten successfully, try to go to 20.
4. "This is a What?" Pace items to the person to the right in rhythm as you take another item from the left at the same time. The following is the dialogue that should happen from Giver to Receiver if they were to pass a pen.

G- This is a pen

R- A what?

G- A pen.

R- A what?

G- A pen.

R- Oh a pen!

The Receiver then becomes the Giver to the person on their right while the Giver passes a new item to the original receiver. Concentration is key when you become both a Giver to the right and a Receiver to the left.

5. Split the class into three groups (ten each) and create a human knot. Students must use cooperation and communication to untangle themselves!

6. Story Story Die!- Line up five students at a time to tell a story together. When the instructor points at them, they must improv a story until the instructor points to another person. If someone repeats a word that was just said, doesn't make sense in the story, or pauses for too long, they "die" and are out of the game. After they "die," they must act out a dramatic death scene for the class.

7. After each story, the group quickly reenacts their story with the instructor, assigning the characters they created. Some stories will be exciting while others may feel slow....

Discuss why this is and how we must quickly accept the reality of the improv for it to work.

Assessment:

Beginning: The class has difficulty working in teams, telling a story as a group, and reenacting it.

Developing: More than half of the class understood the exercises and worked well in creating performances.

Accomplished: The entire class completed exercises with focus and creativity.

Lesson 2: Details! Details!

Unit developed by: Angie Higgins

Discipline: Theatre Arts

Standards grade level: 6

Length: 1 hour

STANDARDS ASSESSED:

Grade Six

Creative Expression

2.2 Using effective gesture, facial expression...to create a character.

OTHER STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Grade One

Creative Expression

2.1 Demonstrate skills in pantomime, tableau and improvisation.

Grade Three

Creative Expression

2.1 Participate in Improvisations that incorporate the five W's.

Connections, Relationships, and Application

5.1 Use problem solving and cooperative skills to dramatize a story with emphasis on the 5 W's.

Grade Four

Creative Expression

2.1 Demonstrate the emotional traits of a character through gesture and action.

Connections, Relationships and Applications

5.3 Exhibit team identity and commitment to purpose when participating in theatre experiences.

BRIEF SUMMARY:

Understanding the language of the body is crucial in theatre as well as life. Our ability to perceive what someone is feeling through their body language can enable us to become more sensitive people, as well as perceptive performers.

The following lesson is the second in a six-class theatre workshop created for sixth graders to prepare them for a seventh and eighth grade performance class. This class is meant to make students aware of how they move in the context of theatre and how we can adjust our own movement, in addition to reacting to fictitious circumstances in order to better tell a story on stage. Students will be encouraged to focus on making their movements and their pantomime specific.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:

1. Just as we each move differently, we are all unique individuals.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How are we each unique?
2. Why is it important to observe and appreciate our differences?

TOPICAL UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Observing others can make actors more perceptive.
2. Understanding how people move will enable an actor to play a role well, physically.

TOPICAL QUESTIONS:

1. How can we change our movement to play the given circumstances? Who are you?
Where are you? What are you doing?
2. How can we create an interesting story through our movement?

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INCLUDED IN THIS LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Creating detailed Pantomime.
2. Playing the Given Circumstances.
3. Exploring the five W's.
4. Working as a group to create an improvised scene.

PERFORMANCE TASK:

Students will perform location scenes where they will pantomime a type of person in a specific place doing an activity.

EVIDENCE:

1. Teacher observation of participation in group improv games.
2. Contribution to “Location” scenes that create a detailed pantomime.

VOCABULARY:

Collaboration: The act of working together in a joint intellectual effort.

Ensemble: A group of theatrical artists working together to create a theatrical experience.

Improvisation: A spontaneous style of theatre in which scenes are created without advance rehearsing or scripting.

Gesture: An expressive movement of the body or limbs.

Pantomime: Acting without words through facial expression, gesture, and movement.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. Location written on paper folded in a hat or bag.

LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Warm-up: Ask the students to think of something they do to get ready in the morning. Then have them act it out. After they have finished ask them to perform their task again, but as if they were going to perform it for us. Discuss what changed in there performance the second time. Were their movements bigger? Did their facial expressions change?

2. “Mirroring”: Have students find their “perfect spot” (a spot where they can stretch their arms out without hitting their neighbor). Students face instructor and mirror exact movement and facial expressions. The purpose of this exercise is to get children physically warmed up for theatre games, as well as spark the imagination.

Here are some ideas for mirroring:

- a. Facial expressions such as, surprise, fear, tired, etc.
- b. Pantomime swimming then become a shark, then go back to being a swimmer who is trying to get to shore.
- c. Make a “shh” sound with your finger to your mouth, then proceed to pretend to sneak up on someone tiptoeing until you tap them on the shoulder, then run away... there can be a sigh of relief at not getting caught.
- d. Moving like different types of people such as: a soldier, a queen, an elderly person, a two year old, a witch, a cheerleader, etc.

BE CREATIVE! The sky is the limit!

3. “GO”: For this exercise you will be taking a magical journey to different places all over the world! The purpose of GO is to have the children see how the environment around them affects how they move and to use their imaginations to act out where they are. Have the children stand in a circle and explain that you will cross the circle one at a time. The person you have crossed to then journeys to the person across from them, and so on, until everyone has gone. If your class is particularly large, you may change

locations before everyone has gone. Encourage your students to be creative. Not everyone moves in the same way, nor do people portray a character the same as another. Side coaching is very helpful. Ex: If they are walking across the desert... you may say, “You’re dying for water! There is sweat dripping down your face! Your legs are SO tired!”

Location Ideas:

- a. Hot lava
- b. Outer Space
- c. Ice and it’s snowing out (remember to encourage creativity.... Maybe they have skates, maybe they are a penguin!)
- d. Under Water
- e. Desert
- f. Peanut Butter! There has been an explosion at the Skippy factory!

4. “Flea Market”: All students will pantomime an item that they are going to “trade” at a fictitious flea market. Detail is essential in this game of pantomime to ensure an item such as a brush doesn’t get mistaken for a curling iron. Students must silently show other students (one at a time) their item. When they both nod in agreement that they know what the other has, and then they proceed their trading with the new item. This game can go on as long as time permits. At the conclusion, go around the circle and ask what each student ended up with. Then have the person who started with that item raise their hand. It is very

likely that items will have been mistaken for something else and that people will end up with things that no one started with. Use this as an opportunity to show how important detail is when pantomiming.

5. “Locations”: In this exercise we are adding facial expression and body movement together to clearly portray different types of people in different locations. Discuss the Five W’s in performance. Remind children that detailed movement will help their portrayal be more believable. Write down different locations on slips of paper prior to class and put them in a bag or hat. Have the children sit in an audience position and choose a volunteer from the audience to pick a location out of the bag. Without talking, they must act out the location, so that the other children can guess where they are. As each child guesses where they are, add them into the pantomimed scene. Also: Make sure you encourage the children to clap for the actors on “stage.”

Ideas for “Locations”

1. Beach
2. School
3. Restaurant
4. Hospital
5. Concert
6. Grocery store
7. Playground
8. Amusement Park

9. Office

Assessment:

Beginning: Majority of the class does not successfully pantomime.

Developing: At least half of the class successfully pantomimes location scenes.

Accomplished: Entire class creates specific pantomimed location scenes.

Exemplary: All groups performed expressively and contributed equally in all improvised games.

Lesson 3: Show Me a Story

Unit developed by: Angie Higgins

Discipline: Theatre Arts

Standards grade level: 5

Length: 1 hour

STANDARDS ASSESSED:

Grade Five

Creative Expression

2.2 Demonstrate the use of blocking (stage areas, levels, actor's positions, such as full front, quarter, profile, and full back) in dramatizations.

2.3 Collaborate as an actor in creating informal theatrical performances.

OTHER STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Grade One

Creative Expression

2.1 Demonstrate skills in tableau and improvisation.

Connections, Relationships, and Application

5.2 Demonstrate the ability to work cooperatively in presenting a tableau.

Grade Two

Creative Expression

2.1 Perform in improvisational theatrical games that develop cooperative skills and concentration.

Connections, Relationships, and Application

5.1 Use problem solving and cooperative skills in dramatizing a story.

Grade Three

Creative Expression

2.1 Participate in Improvisations that incorporate the five W's.

Connections, Relationships, and Application

5.1 Use problem solving and cooperative skills to dramatize a story with emphasis on the 5 W's.

Grade Four

Creative Expression

2.1 Demonstrate the emotional traits of a character through gesture and action.

Connections, Relationships, and Applications

5.3 Exhibit team identity and commitment to purpose when participating in theatre experiences.

BRIEF SUMMARY:

This lesson assesses standards from the fifth grade level, but is intended for sixth graders who have not had prior drama classes. As middle school students are often in a growing phase, this lesson will not only help them in understanding and acquiring

beginning acting skills, but will hopefully help them to feel more comfortable with their own bodies on stage, and off as well.

This session will build upon the skills used in the last session “Details! Details”.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Understanding the language of the body is empowering when communicating with others.
2. People communicate largely through the language of the body.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How does our visual language influence our perception of others?
2. In what ways might visual language influence people's choices and behavior?

TOPICAL UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Relationship, status, and importance are often relayed through the use of space, focus, and levels.
2. We respond emotionally and mentally to what we see.

TOPICAL QUESTIONS:

1. How are relationships, status, and importance conveyed through the use of space, focus, and levels?
2. How do we respond emotionally to different ways of physical communication?

3. How can we tell a story strictly through movement or visual pictures?
4. How do we make interesting stage pictures?

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INCLUDED IN THIS UNIT:

1. Basic stage direction
2. Elements of space, depth, level, and focus.
3. The Five W's.
4. Composition of a stage picture.
5. How to show relationship and status through body language.

PERFORMANCE TASK:

Students in a group will create a tableau with a title and present it to the class.

After this is accomplished, the groups (feeling more confident hopefully) will create a series of 3-4 tableau's that will tell a story from the beginning, through the middle, and on to the end. These tableaux must show the given circumstances as well.

EVIDENCE:

1. Improvised performances.
2. Tableaus: single scene and series.
3. Teacher observation of participation in group work and discussion.

VOCABULARY:

Actor's positions: Full face, 1/4 right and left, profile right and left, 3/4 right and left, full back.

Composition: The organization of elements of a work of art.

Elements of story: Beginning, middle, end, problem, complication, resolution.

Given Circumstances: The Five W's- who, what, where, when, why.

Tableau: A silent and motionless depiction of a scene created by actors.

Space: The immediate spherical space surrounding the body in all directions.

Line: How the viewer's eye travels when viewing the stage picture..

Stage Directions: UR, UL, DR, DL, UC, DC.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. Chairs or boxes to use in tableau scenes.
2. Diagram to show stage areas.

LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Warm-up: Loosen joints, roll up one vertebrae at a time, suns and prunes.
2. Mirror a partner's movement.
3. Introduce different areas of the stage through "4 directions" game. Following the same rules as the old classroom game "4 corners," the referee, with eyes closed, counts to five

and then calls out either upstage right, down stage right, upstage left, or downstage left. Whoever is in that area of the stage is out and must sit out at center stage.

4. Students walk in different directions leading with different body parts. Students then will "melt" until the instructor says freeze. They may melt to the ground or into the other people around them. Unfreeze those who are not in "interesting" positions to view others as if at an exhibit. Discuss what makes the images of the people interesting. (Levels, line, etc.)

5. Introduce the term Tableau. "Any picture of representation; a striking scene presented dramatically."

Divide into groups of 4-5 and ask each group to create a tableau and give it a name.

When presenting them they will first show the audience and then the audience will close their eyes, hear the name, and then open and view it again. Discuss what may come before or after this moment in time.

3. Review the basic elements of a story and then assign groups to create a new set of tableaux that show a story with beginning, middle, and end. Tableaus must show given circumstances, problem, and resolution.

Assessment:

Beginning: Majority of the class does not grasp the concept of blocking and does not create successful tableaux.

Developing: At least half of the class demonstrates an understanding of blocking and creates interesting tableaux.

Accomplished: Entire class understands the use of blocking and stage directions. They are able to work cooperatively to create tableaux with levels that also tell a story.

Exemplary: Groups create tableaux that demonstrate a great understanding of blocking, levels, as well as portrayal of characters.

Lesson 4: Hear My Voice

Unit developed by: Angie Higgins

Discipline: Theatre Arts

Standards grade level: 6

Length: 1 hour

STANDARDS ASSESSED:

Grade six

Artistic Perception

1.1 Use vocabulary such as... vocal projection.

Creative Expression

2.2 Use effective vocal expression to create character.

OTHER STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Grade One

Artistic Perception

1.2 Observe and describe the traits of a character.

Grade Four

Artistic Perception

1.3 Demonstrate how voice (diction, pace, and volume) may be used to explore multiple possibilities for a live reading.

Grade Five

Creative Expression

2.3 Collaborate as an actor, director, scriptwriter, or technical artist in creating formal or informal theatrical performances.

BRIEF SUMMARY:

The following lesson, being the fourth in the sixth grade theatre course, will focus on vocal technique necessary for theatre. While learning to project (a basic theatre principle) they will also focus on how to make their voice change to become different characters. Students will be encouraged to explore the different dynamics of their own voice, while exploring their creativity and gaining confidence in speaking by themselves in a non-threatening performance environment.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Every person has a voice inside of them just waiting to be heard!
2. You can better know how others are feeling if you learn to listen to them.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How does our voice and our speech patterns reflect who we are?

2. Can we tell something about what others are feeling by their vocal intonation and become sensitive to that understanding?

TOPICAL UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Vocal projection is essential to performing on stage.
2. By changing the dynamics of one's voice while acting one can portray different characters with different emotions.
3. The voice can possess many different qualities such as, nasal, breathy, resonant, etc.

TOPICAL QUESTIONS:

1. How can we support our voices to be heard on stage?
2. How can an actor "find a character" by using a voice different from their own?
3. What does it mean to have different vocal qualities?

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INCLUDED IN THIS LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Vocal support and breath control needed for theatrical performance.
2. Improvisational skills through exercises.
3. Cooperative skills in problem solving.
4. Practice in vocal projection.

PERFORMANCE TASK:

Students will create a character with a voice, exploring their own vocal variety that will be inspired by various pictures of people from magazines and postcards. “Character voices” need not be drastically different from their own, but must be projected well and show an understanding for the vocal concepts discussed within the course of the class.

EVIDENCE:

1. Teacher observation of participation “Say What?”
2. Character Voice created and presented in mock interview at the end of class.

VOCABULARY:

Collaboration: The act of working together in a joint intellectual effort.

Diction: The pronunciation of words, the choice of words, and the manner in which a person expresses himself or herself.

Ensemble: A group of theatrical artists working together to create a theatrical experience.

Improvisation: A spontaneous style of theatre in which scenes are created without advance rehearsing or scripting.

Projection: The placement and delivery of volume, clarity, and distinctiveness of voice for communicating to an audience.

Vocal Quality: The characteristics of a voice such as shrill, nasal, raspy, breathy, booming, and so forth.

Volume: The degree of loudness or intensity of a voice.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. Pictures of unique looking people or characters from various postcards or magazine cutouts for character inspirations.
2. Hats. Scarves, and other accessories.

LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Vocal warm-ups: Tongue twisters, stretch muscles in face, etc. Breathe from the diaphragm. Flop over like a rag doll and then stack up one of your vertebrae at a time. Pretend there is a puppet string going through the center of your body to create perfect posture allowing proper support for your voice.
2. Discuss Thespis being the first Greek actor to step out from the chorus and speak by himself. Also mention that most Greek plays had Greek gods as characters. In honor of Thespis, the students will be stepping out from the circle and speaking on their own. Ask the students to think about who their favorite super hero is (who may have powers like the Greek gods), then have them introduce themselves in the following manner: "By day I'm (their real name), but by night I'm (Super hero name)" They should speak their "By Day" persona at a normal volume level and then project loudly and clearly the super hero that they really are! This will open up the floor for discussion of vocal projection, as well as characterization.
3. Have students go around the circle and say their name

with different vocal qualities. (Breathy, nasal, booming, etc.) Discuss how these different qualities give you different impressions of the people being introduced.

4. “Say What?”: The focus of this exercise is to continue with our characterizations while working on vocal projection.

Have the students line up against the wall facing the opposite side of the room. You’ll want to face them whatever way will put the most distance in between them and the far wall. They then will go to the far wall one at a time and introduce themselves as a character. This character can be specific such as Spiderman, or general, such as a princess or soldier. The actor must not only act like the character, but must project clearly so that we can hear them from across the room. If the actor is very soft and we can’t hear them the line along the back wall will say, “SAY WHAT?” they then must repeat who they are so we can hear them. If we can hear them, the back line will then echo what they have said and imitate their movements.

All children should have a turn. After one child has gone, they come back to the line and tag the next child to go as though it were a relay.

5. Creating a character: Instructor will put pictures of various types of people from postcards or magazine cutouts in the center of the room for students to look at. Ask the students if they can imagine how these people might sound. Ask questions such as, “Do they look like they would have a soft nervous voice or a loud confident voice?” Once the

students have had a chance to look at the pictures, let them pick one that they will then become.

For this exercise, it will also be helpful to have scarves, hats, and other costume accessories for students to use as inspiration for their character. After students have been given a few minutes to think of their character's name and have been able to experiment using different voices with a partner, they will have a chance to introduce themselves to the class with their new voice and identity.

Assessment:

Beginning: Students begin to experiment with their voice but, do not speak at a level to be heard on stage.

Developing: At least half of the class is creating a character and understanding vocal qualities and projection.

Accomplished: Entire class is able to project in front of the class when doing character interview, while being creative in creating a character voice.

Exemplary: All students are creating unique characters through voice and movement, building on the previous classes.

Lesson 5/6: Behind the Lines

Unit developed by: Angie Higgins

Discipline: Theatre Arts

Standards grade level: 6

Length: 1 hour

STANDARDS ASSESSED:

2.1 Participate in improvisational activities, demonstrating an understanding of text, subtext, and context.

2.2 Use effective vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, and timing to create a character.

OTHER STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Grade Two

Creative Expression

2.1 Perform in group improvisational theatrical games that develop cooperative skills and concentration.

Grade Three

Connections, Relationships, Applications

5.2 Develop problem solving and cooperative skills by participating collaboratively in theatrical experiences.

Grade Four

Artistic Perception

1.1 Use the vocabulary of the theatre such as plot, climax, resolution, tone, objectives, and motivation to describe theatrical experiences.

1.2 Identify a character's objectives and motivations to explain that character's behavior.

Creative Expression

2.1 Demonstrate the emotional traits of a character through gesture and action.

Grade Five

Creative Expression

2.2 Demonstrate the use of blocking in dramatizations.

SUMMARY:

This is the fifth class in a six-week theatre session written for sixth graders. In the following lesson we will be exploring what goes into making a character come to life. The use of voice and movement along with the understanding of basic acting techniques such as finding the objective and changing tactics will be the central core of this lesson. We will also be engaging in exercises that show how an understanding of subtext and how changing or solidifying tactics can color a character's dialogue and make for an interesting performance.

This is a very compressed lesson and covers concepts that would ideally be introduced over the course of a few classes. Due to time constraints this is a crash course in character development. It is merely an overview (an introduction if you will) for the middle school level. In a full year this section could be stretched to a few weeks.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING:

1. Theatre embraces empathy and understanding of other people.
2. In understanding how people express themselves through the voice and body we ultimately reach a better understanding of other's feelings.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. How do people communicate with their bodies and voice?
2. What do people do to get what they want, and what is the force that drives them?
3. What makes people say one thing, when they mean something else?

TOPICAL UNDERSTANDINGS:

1. Characters are built through physical and vocal choices that express motivation.
2. It is not necessarily what you say, but how you say it.
3. How you carry yourself tells something of who you are.
4. Everyone has subtext that affects the way they speak and even the way they move.

TOPICAL QUESTIONS:

1. How can we change our gestures and facial expressions to play a specific character?
2. How can our voice express a character's actions/tactics?
3. How can our vocal intonation and facial expression be colored by subtext?

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS INCLUDED IN THIS LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Develop an understanding of the difference between text and subtext and its importance.
2. How to use our voice and body effectively to express a character's objective and tactics.
3. Vocabulary: Objective, tactics, obstacle, and subtext.

PERFORMANCE TASK:

Students will perform a short contentless scene with a partner given different character's objectives, and subtext.

EVIDENCE:

1. Improvised performances of "Yes/ No"- understanding of tactics and subtext.
2. Teacher observation and questioning throughout group warm-ups and "Hunter".
3. Students display an understanding of changing or solidifying tactics to reach an objective in their jump scenes.

VOCABULARY:

Gesture: An expressive movement of the body or limbs.

Improvisation: A spontaneous style of theatre in which scenes are created without advance rehearsing or scripting.

Motivation: A character's reason for doing or saying things in a play.

Objective: The immediate desire of a character in a scene. Not an intellectual decision, but a powerful need, drive, impulse that requires fulfillment.

Obstacle: A person, object, state of being that is a threat or in the way of achieving an objective.

Pitch: The highness or lowness of your voice.

Projection: The placement and delivery of volume, clarity, and distinctness of voice for communicating to an audience.

Subtext: Information that is implied by a character, but not stated by a character in dialogue, including actions and thoughts.

Tactics: Methods of attaining your objective. Can be verbal or physical.

Vocal Quality: The characteristics of a voice, such as shrill, nasal, raspy, breathy, booming, and so forth.

EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. Paper baton and chairs for "Hunter."
2. Furniture pieces for improv scenes.

LEARNING SEQUENCE:

1. Warm-up: Loosen limbs and tongue twisters.
2. Use verbs to color intonation: "I'm _____ing you with my voice" (punching, hugging, etc.)

3. "Hunter/ Hunted" Divide the room with half in chairs facing each other. All participants close their eyes while the instructor places the baton in the middle area then taps one student from each side indicating they are "it." When the instructor says, "Go," those who were not tapped must watch without talking while the two students who were picked keep their eyes closed and attempt to reach the baton first. Once someone has it, the instructor will call out that "Someone has it" and the person with the baton now becomes the hunter trying to tag the other person, while the person without the baton must find their way to the other person's seat. After playing a few rounds of this game, discuss the terms objective, tactics, and obstacles.

"Your objective was to get the baton, but you had to over come the obstacle of not being able to see where it was. What tactics did you use to reach your objective?"

4. "Yes/ No"- with a partner try different ways of saying yes and no. Introduce the idea of subtext changing the way you say things. It's not what you say, but how you say it. Reinforce changing of tactics to reach your objective. How does your changing of tactics

change your voice, create a character with depth? Remind students that tactics can be physical too and reflect the personality of a character.

5. Have students pair up and decide who will be A and who will be B. Have B stand up and try to get A to give them their seat. Remind them that when one thing doesn't work try something else. After a few moments, stop the scenes for discussion of what the B's did to try and get the seat from the A's.

6. Jump scenes: Have the pairs come up one at a time to perform an improvised scene of trying to reach an objective by jumping tactics. Give the students situations and roles for the first few scenes and then have the class give suggestions of situations and characters from then on.

7. Homework to be presented the next class: Contentless scenes: Pair students up and give all students the same short contentless scene. Written on each one will be a different type of character with different objectives. It is the task of the student to present the short piece to the rest of the class for the following session which will be the conclusion of their sixth grade acting workshop.

The following class, when students present their scenes, will serve as a forum for discussion led by the instructor in evaluating a performance; observing the actors movement, vocal quality, and tactics to reach their objective.

Assessment:

Beginning: Students do not fully participate in improvisational games and do not grasp vocabulary concepts.

Developing: At least half of the class understands the concept of objectives and tactics and create improved scenes that display this.

Accomplished: Entire class successfully participates in improvised scenes and display an understanding of the material.

Exemplary: Students perform improvised scenes that display creativity and understanding of changing tactics to reach an objective.

Final Thoughts

I strongly believe that the incorporation of theatre curriculum and performance into the middle school grades prepares students, not only for high school, but for life as well. The art of theatre is collaborative, teaching students skills in cooperation and team work like no other subject. Besides the ability to analyze a story, character, and develop critical thinking skills, students learn to empathize with those around them. Becoming a character takes the ability to delve into the heart and mind of a person other than yourself. Theatre thrives on the ability to understand and accept different types of people, a trait that is not only an asset, but a necessity in our world today.

Through the theatre program I have worked to develop for Keys Middle School, students will not only be exposed to viewing theatre, but they will be able to take part in it and learn how to create an effective performance. Each lesson carefully builds upon the skills learned in the previous lesson. The curriculum covers many essential standards, but is condensed enough to easily fit into the already full school day calendar. I have also made the exercises within the lessons detailed enough that they may be easily followed by another teacher. This program will benefit students educationally in the art of theatre, as well as feed their spirit.

The ability to have a specialist to teach theatre, or any other arts subject, is crucial. One day last semester, I walked into my rehearsal space early and found the third grade class practicing for some sort of play they were to put on for their parents. I quietly watched as not to disturb the classroom teacher's direction, but found myself very amused

by the comments that were made to the children. "Talk slow! Actors talk slow!," called out the teacher who shortly after asked if I could please give her any advice. I almost had to hold back my laughter as I had a vision of actors speaking in an unusually slow motion manner. I say this not to demean the teacher's effort, but merely to point out that children are often presented with theatre in a manner that not only turns them away from it, but does not do it justice. By having a trained teacher in the discipline being taught, a world of opportunity is opened up for student and teacher alike. Students can build confidence through the art as it is presented in a creative way coming from a person of experience.

From learning how to effectively tell a story through performance to gaining presentational skills and confidence that will aid in any chosen vocation, students will greatly benefit from the many skills embodied in theatre.

Appendix A

Sixth Grade Theatre Content Standards

1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

Processing, Analyzing, and Responding to Sensory Information Through the Language and Skills Unique to Theatre

Students observe their environment and respond, using the elements of theatre. They also observe formal and informal works of theatre, film/video, and electronic media and respond, using the vocabulary of theatre.

Development of the Vocabulary of Theatre

1.1 Use the vocabulary of theatre, such as action/reaction, vocal projection, subtext, theme, mood, design, production values, and stage crew, to describe theatrical experiences.

Comprehension and Analysis of the Elements of Theatre

1.2 Identify how production values can manipulate the mood to persuade and disseminate propaganda.

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in Theatre

Students apply processes and skills in acting, designing, and script writing to create formal and informal theatre, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them.

Development of Theatrical Skills

2.1 Participate in improvisational activities, demonstrating an understanding of text, subtext, and context.

Creation/Invention in Theatre

2.2 Use effective vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, and timing to create a character.

2.3 Write and perform scenes or one-act plays that include monologue, dialogue, action, and setting together with a range of vocal character types.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Theatre

Students analyze the role and development of theatre, film/video, and electronic media in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting diversity as it relates to theatre.

Role and Cultural Significance of Theatre

3.1 Create scripts that reflect particular historical periods or cultures.

History of Theatre

3.2 Differentiate the theatrical traditions of cultures throughout the world, such as those in Ancient Greece, Egypt, China, and West Africa

4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

Responding to, Analyzing, and Critiquing Theatrical Experiences

Students critique and derive meaning from works of theatre, film/video, electronic media, and theatrical artists on the basis of aesthetic qualities.

Critical Assessment of Theatre

4.1 Develop and apply appropriate criteria for evaluating sets, lighting, costumes, makeup, and props.

Derivation of Meaning from Works of Theatre

4.2 Identify examples of how theatre, television, and film can influence or be influenced by politics and culture.

5.0 CONNECTIONS, RELATIONSHIPS, APPLICATIONS

Connecting and Applying What Is Learned in Theatre, Film/Video, and Electronic Media to Other Art Forms and Subject Areas and to Careers

Students apply what they learn to theatre, film/video, and electronic media across subject areas. They develop competencies and creative skills in problem solving and career skills. They also learn about careers in and related to theatre.

Connections and Applications

5.1 Use Theatrical skills to communicate concepts or ideas from other curriculum areas, such as a demonstration in history-social science of how persuasion and propaganda are used in advertising.

Careers and Career-Related Skills

5.2 Research career opportunities in media, advertising, marketing, interactive Web design.

Appendix B

Resume of Angela Higgins

Angela Higgins
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San Jose, CA 95118
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sillyeigna@hotmail.com

Education:

- MA "Theatre Arts Education"/ Interdisciplinary
San Jose State University- May 2003 (4.0 GPA)
- BA Creative Arts/ Drama minor- Summa Cum Laude,
San Jose State University - May 2001
- BayCAP Leadership Invitational Seminar (partial scholarship)
- Lincoln High School - Graduated June 1997

Experience:

- San Jose State University-- TA5-Beginning Acting Instructor (2002-Present)
- C.L.A.P - Drama, Dance, and Musical Theatre Instructor (Present)
- Pigeon Player's Community Theatre- Theatre Programs Manager (Present)
- Keys Middle School--7th and 8th grade Drama teacher and Musical Choreographer (Spring 2001- Present)
- Milpitas Christian School--Music dept.- Drama Director and Choreographer (Fall 2000-Present)
- Theaterfun-- Children's Theatre teacher, In-school field trip and Improv. Assemblies leader, and Character Birthday parties (2000- Sept. 2002)
- City of Menlo Park-- Drama instructor for K- 6th grade (2000-Aug. 2002)
- Teacher's Assistant- San Jose State University
-- Assisted Amy Glazer's Drama 17 (Intermediate Acting Spring 2002)
- Kid's Korner-- School Age teacher (1997- 2002)
-- Producer/Director of summer plays (1998-2002)
-- Organized crafts, dance, games, chaperoned field trips, etc.

- Potter's Clay Drama Team Director/ Instructor (1998-2002)
-- Directed casts of children and adults for performance
- Drama Adjudicator-- Assembly of God Fine Arts Festival (1999 ,2000, &2001)
- Sunday School Teacher (1994- 1997)

Awards and Honors:

- President and Deans Scholar, San Jose State University
- Most Improved Interpreter, San Jose State University Forensics Team
- Kaucher/Mitchell Oral Interpretation Competition Winner
- American College Theatre Festival- Irene Ryan Nominee

Special Interests:

- Writing Poetry, Reading, Traveling; Dance-- Jazz, Tap, Modern, Latin

Appendix C

Letter of Recommendation

725 Marion Avenue
Palo Alto, CA. 94306
March 5, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that I write a letter of recommendation for Angela Higgins. Angie and I have worked together for three years at Keys School co-teaching a middle school Music/Drama class to 7th and 8th graders one day a week.

Angie doesn't have one strong point; she has many. She deals with large groups easily and with authority. The students love her, and therefore work for her. She has the capacity to grasp blocking details and choreograph dances in a quick and easy way. Her choreography is creative and imaginative. She deals with space and size limitations creatively and has a good sense for casting roles appropriately.

Although she has definite ideas and opinions, she listens to others and is a good team player. Her positive attitude makes it fun for people to be around her.

Angie would be a definite asset to any organization.

Sincerely,

Signe Boyer
Music Director