

Towards a More Dramatic Classroom (a BRIEF outline)

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YES- classrooms are incredibly dramatic spaces! Exploring similarities between the art of theatre and the process of instruction challenges us to rethink how we operate as teachers. While the comments below are certainly not comprehensive I do hope they will serve as a reminder of the information covered during our limited time together.

I. Become a Playwright-



Like a playwright, your work as an instructor begins well before anyone sees the public presentation of that work. You craft (and re-craft) your “story” or, in our case, your lesson plan/syllabus/ course timeline. This includes two versions of lesson plans- one “EVERYTHING” version with ALL the things you’d like to teach your students and a revised, focused version based on that “EVERYTHING” version. By giving yourself permission to dream big first you stay excited about your topic and your revision makes that excitement manageable in the classroom. Through this “playwriting” you create the dramatic arc- giving dramatic structure to your lesson and aiding in student understanding.

II. Cast Your Roles-



Start with yourself- what type of instructor will you play? Are you the leader? Are you the discussion facilitator? What casting best enlivens the dramatic structure of your lesson plans? Don’t forget to cast your students. What roles do you expect them to play? Will they be active participants? Will they play the roles of questions askers? Decide what roles best support your dramatic arc. Finally, don’t forget the possibility of casting those guest “stars” in your classroom. Experts, guest lecturers, special supporting visual materials- these can all play a role in your classroom and when cast thoughtfully they can enhance your teaching.

III. Rehearsal(s)-



Theatre artists craft, develop, and rehearse their work- and so can teachers. Try your lessons out loud. Practice before you have to stand in front of your audience. Practice with your props! Those handouts, PowerPoints, visual aids, and microphones sometimes conspire to work against you. If you rehearse with them you will know how they work (or don’t work) before you are center stage in the classroom. AND- through rehearsal- you might discover that your lesson plan needs a bit of revision. Don’t be afraid to take another look at how that dramatic arc works in actual practice.

IV. Final Tech/Dress Rehearsal-



Visit your classroom before the first day making certain everything will function as you need. Make a plan of action for using the space effectively and excitingly. Remember to use that space in a vibrant way that supports your dramatic arc. Consider your “costume” and how that will serve to support your casting decisions.

V. Opening the Show-



Few things can make you as nervous as your very first public performance. The energy of those nerves can serve you well or they can ruin you. Find a space before you step in front of the class that allows you to physically take control of your breathing (remember the counting exercises we did), try a few vocal warm ups (like tongue twisters we did), and make sure you have all your materials in the proper order (a prop check.) Support your voice with enough breath to carry fully through your space. Be sure you pace yourself at an understandable rate. Use that breath as fuel for vocal variations in pitch and placement. Your nerves might make hiding behind the podium a tempting proposition- don't do that. Give yourself a clipboard with your notes on it so you can travel in the space a bit without feeling nervous about forgetting what you want to say. Try to channel that adrenaline into an energetic and vibrant delivery!

VI. The Reviews Are In-



Don't miss the opportunity to take a quick check of how class went. Talk to the students as they are packing up to go. Ask questions about the clarity of what you taught. Check in with them to see if they understood what you were trying to teach them. Many times they might be so excited that they want to continue the lesson. Take a few seconds to gauge the effect of your performance.

VII. Passionate Passion-



I know it seems to be such a risk but the more your students see your passion for the subject they will value their time with you that much more. Take the risk and let people see you passionately engaged in teaching. Let them feel the excitement you have for the subject. Let your live presence give them an experience they can't get anywhere else.