

Strive to be a sturdy table

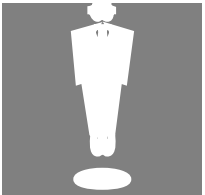
As a theatre teacher I frequently field questions about whether or not my job is secure in times of economic crisis. After all extra-curricular subjects like theatre are frequently one of the first things cut when funds get tight. While it's true that I am always ready with a plan 'B', I am generally not worried about my job because I ensure that my classes are well-promoted, that they meet educational goals in areas of writing and math, that my productions look professional and that my extra-curriculum program pays for itself. The key to making that happen is a four-part formula that I liken to a table. As long as all four legs are long and strong the table will be strong, but if one leg is too short or missing, the table will wobble or fall over. The same is true of extra-curricular programs like theatre. The four legs are;

- Be a great teacher
- Be an effective director
- Be comfortable with tech
- Be an expert at promotion



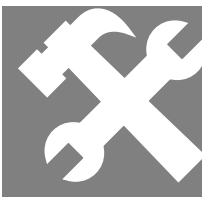
BE A GREAT TEACHER

Of course this includes things like having good classroom management and organization, but it is equally important that you be very knowledgeable about content. This may seem obvious, but it is surprising how many theatre teachers know very little about the practical aspects of theatre and, let's face it, only a handful of students are interested in acting. If your students don't have an opportunity to learn and practice technical theatre and play production, they aren't likely to stay around for long. In these times of budget cuts and reduction of arts programs at public schools, it is vitally important that we continue to recruit and retain students in our theatre programs. Being a great teacher who is knowledgeable and excited about all aspects of theatre will help tremendously.



BE AN EFFECTIVE DIRECTOR

This includes exercising exemplary time management and crowd control. It also includes having an innate grasp on the concepts inherent in blocking, staging, timing, pacing and scheduling. If you do musicals it helps to have a grasp of music, dance and crowd scenes. I am frequently surprised to hear people express disdain about taking classes or attending workshops designed to make them better directors. I once heard a student teacher complain, "What's so hard about directing? You tell people where to stand!" That comment told me that she would most likely struggle in a major aspect of her job as a theatre teacher; directing. There is no shame in admitting that you aren't the best director. The shame comes in refusing to do something about it. How many times have you been well into the third hour of a high school production where the pacing was excruciatingly slow and the set changes took about four minutes each? That is the surest way to drive audiences away from your productions.



BE KNOWLEDGABLE ABOUT TECH

In order to do either of the two things already listed with any degree of proficiency you also need to know your way around a shop and a catwalk. Of course not every theatre has a counter weight rigging system or state of the art equipment, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't still be knowledgeable about all of those things. Educating students about theatre must include a degree of technical theatre as well. This is especially true considering that for every one actor in this business there are a minimum of five techs, and that's for stage work alone! The rate is much higher in the film industry. Let's face it, technical theatre is where the jobs are. I always encourage my student actors to learn at least one technical position as well. They might not enjoy lugging heavy lighting instruments up ladders for hang and focus, but they can learn make up or stage management. For many years as a working actress I paid my rent working as a make-up artist on set. Not only was I working in the industry, but I was also able to network and make contacts. There's no better way to get a leg up at an audition than having worked with the director before on set and having them give you a personal reference. In order to teach your students what they need to know you need to be very familiar with the technical aspects of traditional theatre including stagecraft, set and lighting design, set construction, light hang and focus, costume design and construction, properties and paint techniques. There are many summer classes and workshops offered designed to give classroom teachers more knowledge and experience. Take advantage of all opportunities to improve your knowledge in technical theatre. It is an ever changing field that is becoming more and more technological and computer based. If you were an expert at your lighting board in college fifteen years ago, you can bet that you wouldn't know where to begin at a computerized board working through an WRFU system. You owe it to yourself and your students to learn as much as you can.



BE AN EXPERT AT PROMOTION

To keep your extra-curricular going you must be an expert at promoting your classes, promoting your productions and promoting yourself. This includes advertising your shows, connecting with the community, gaining support from parents, administrators, community and students. It is imperative that you get out of the theatre and take your students out into the school and community. Whether it is taking scenes or one acts to elementary schools and rest homes, or doing improvisations about issues facing middle school students for discussion and counselor training, it is important for your students to see that theatre can be more than just doing plays in a theatre. This not only helps with recruitment, but it garners community support and interest in your program. I also recommend involving as many departments in the school or community organizations in your productions as possible. Whether it's having the robotics team build the plant for 'Little Shop of Horrors', having the metals class make a pivot for your revolving set, or the art class design and paint a mural of Verona, Italy, the more students you get involved the more audience you will garner. I also try to involve as many community members as possible. For instance, whenever possible I add a dog to my productions and then involve the local humane society in providing the animals. I also then invite them to set up an information table in the lobby to promote adoption and spay/neuter programs. When I do this the newspaper is usually interested in covering my production as it is providing a community service. In every instance where I've done this the animals involved have always been adopted as have others at the shelter.

Be creative in your promotion. Think of ways to teach your students that theatre can be used to help their community and, in turn, the community will help your program.

CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Posts:

- Three times throughout the term I will post a situation taken from actual classroom experiences. I want you to respond with how you would handle the situation. The situations will include scenarios that require assignment or behavior modifications, parent communication or administrator action. Please reference personal opinion, but also reference resources and professional opinion learned over the course of your MAT studies, previous classwork or experience in your student teacher or observation classroom settings. I will be looking for fully supported answers that project probable outcomes and solutions for each scenario.

Writing Assignments:

- **Philosophy regarding arts education:** What is the purpose? What skills should your students take away from your class? Why should a student take theatre instead of another elective? How do you feel about theater classes that have increasing numbers of students in them and more students with special needs? What are your plans for differentiating your classroom to accommodate all of these different types of learners?
- **Warm up philosophy and sample activity:** In my classroom I have students sign in and begin a warm up activity on their own to establish ownership of the class. I observe their interactions and learn about the leaders, followers and students who don't want to participate at all. However, there are dozens of other ways to start the class and philosophies for each. Examine and analyze your personal philosophy for warm up and getting class started. Write your philosophy including rationale and personal examples. Then write a sample warm up and write a justification for why you think this is a good warm up for a diversified group of learners.
- **Resource Folder:** Establish a resource folder including websites, books, periodicals, journals etc. where you might find classroom and teaching ideas for your class. This should be organized and divided in such a way that additional material, scenes, articles, assignments etc. can be added in easily at any time. This is something that you will likely want to add to throughout the years so think 'permanent' when you are planning what sort of folder or organizational system to use.
- **Preparatory Folder:** Prepare a 'bag of tricks' with stand-alone assignments, games, activities that can be used by either substitutes with little or no experience in a theatre classroom, or could be done by students who complete projects and scenes early and need something pertinent to do. Folder should be divided by categories that would be useful in your classroom. Ideas could be; design, improvisation, character development, writing, analysis, focus etc.
- **Final Project:** Paper Play (Description below)

Your task is to "direct" a play on paper. You will do all of the things a high school director might do except cast the actors and hold rehearsals and performances. Assume that you have a budget of \$5,000 for the play which needs to include rental, licensing and advertising. The idea behind this project is that it will not only show me where your strengths and (potential) weaknesses is/are as a director of a high school extra-curricular program, but it will also serve as a portfolio piece when you are applying for jobs. Potential employers are always very impressed to see that you have a play ready to go and have already done the groundwork so they see that you are prepared and bringing them something ready to go. The requirements are as follows:

1. **Play Selection-** Select a published full-length (two to five act), non-musical play. Since you likely don't know where you will be teaching and directing, it's best to choose a play keeping the following things in mind:
 - a. More girls than boys AND/OR cross gender casting potential
 - b. Can be done with as few as 7 or 8 kids, but has casting potential for a large ensemble to give more kids a chance

- c. Can be done with minimal sets, costumes and lighting
 - d. Is designed with a set that can be easily moved and replaced for multi-use spaces
 - e. A comedy or well-known piece will have a larger draw for new audiences
 - f. Any potential for community/school involvement in the production (ie: using animals from local humane society, items from the robotics team, artwork from the art department, multi media images from the digital photography class etc) will bring in bigger audiences and have more local draw
2. **Synopsis-** Write a synopsis of the play covering the theme, major plot elements, the major characters, the time period and the central conflict in the play. Write this in such a way that you could print off or provide a quick summary to school administrators, concerned parents, school website etc.
 3. **Director's Vision-** Write a comprehensive director's vision for the play. Include the feeling and mood that you want to communicate and fully describe your design concept including colors, emotional impact, sounds etc. Write this keeping the following in mind: Many of your production crew will likely be inexperienced volunteers, parents and students. Your 'vision' needs to be clear, concise and, when possible, cause excitement and get people interested right away.
 4. **Character Description-** Write a character description of every character in the play, including his/her overall goals, obstacles, tactics and expectations (GOTE sheet), the character's personality, how he/she changes and what things you would need in the actor you would want to cast in the role. This helps you not only communicate the characters to the actors at auditions and rehearsals, but it will help you cast a show with kids you don't know well.
 5. **Audition Sides-** Choose audition scenes for the principal characters and indicate on which pages of the script they occur. List what it is you are looking for specifically in that audition (ie: actor is able to demonstrate anger, etc) Generally speaking, there should be at least two scenes for each character.
 6. **Rehearsal Schedule-** Plan a rehearsal schedule for a six-week rehearsal with four performances for each of two consecutive weekends. Specify the purpose of each rehearsal. Indicate which rehearsals are for blocking, working and running the scenes. Identify technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals (two minimum), and line deadlines. You may rehearse four or five days per week. Make sure that your calendar is easy to read and interpret. Do not assume that your new actors or their parents understand theatrical terminology like "call time," "go time," "dry tech," "wet tech" etc.
 7. **Set Design-** Draw a set design for every set in the play or build a model of the set(s). If you are doing drawings, do a floor plan for each set and include thumbnails of individual set pieces and drawings of any flats or murals. Include colors, decoration, etc. Base your set on a stage that is no larger than 30 feet wide and 20 feet deep, but be aware that spaces vary widely and you may end up in the middle of a gymnasium, library or football field. Plan your set accordingly and make sure that there aren't any required elements like rigging, rear projection or specialty lighting that are crucial to the show working.
 8. **Materials list-** Do a materials/ cut list for the set that you've designed. Don't assume that there are any stock pieces in terms of platforms and flats. Draw out all flats including basic construction techniques so that I know you understand the basics of stagecraft. Your set should include a minimum of one platform, one flat and one door hung in a flat. All elements should be made using materials that are 4x8.
 9. **Lighting Design-** Do a basic lighting design for your set. Include instrument placement, gel colors and indicate in the script where the lighting changes occur. For lighting placement you are generally safe assuming two battens for front light, 3 battens for down light and 2 trees on each side of set for trees. Of course lighting equipment and space considerations vary greatly from theatre to theatre, so you are safe always having a minimum needs plan and then supplementing it with your dream lighting plot.
 10. **Costume Design-** Draw or find pictures of costumes all major characters in your script. You may print off pictures or use pictures from rental company catalogs if you prefer. Remember that you need to include costuming in your overall budget so if you are not a seamstress and plan to rent costumes, you will need to plan accordingly. It is generally safe to assume approx. \$50/per contemporary 20th century costume, not including coats, hats, gloves, purses etc. There is usually a premium for period pieces or very fancy pieces like evening wear and animal costumes.
 11. **Props List-** Make a list of the props you would need for the play, including which scene each is used in and the character that uses it. You should also do some preliminary research on any strange or unusual props that would need to be located or purchased. For instance, if your play requires an old fashioned phonograph, you will need to look on ebay etc to see how much a piece like that will run you. Don't bother pricing everyday items that could be found at goodwill or your own home, but price out all weapons, old fashioned props, necessary personal accessories etc.
 12. **Publicity-** Design a publicity poster of your show. Include all necessary information including when, where, price, royalty and licensing etc. Include a description of your marketing plan for advertising. Include newspaper ads, preview or school shows, flyers, handouts, television or radio spots etc. Make sure all expenses for flyers etc are accounted for on your expense sheet.
 13. **Expense Sheet-** Make a list of all of your expenses. Be sure to include royalty and performance fees (look the play up on line to find who owns the rights and how much they charge for performances,) sets, costumes, publicity, programs etc. Keep a list of materials you will need and what the cost is for each of these.

14. **Organization & Presentation**- Put all of the required elements into an appropriate sized (1") 3 ring binder. Make sure that written portions are typed and neat in appearance. Drawings are scaled and colored appropriately and there aren't stray marks or obvious eraser marks on your pages. Each section should be tabbed and the overall project should have a professional look to it. Script should be included with notes made inside.