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### Montana Story Tour, the story of Our Town| Developed and sponsored by the Montana Repertory Theatre Company, a professional equity theatre company in residence at the University of Montana-Missoula, Department of Drama/Dance

Michael A. Johnson  
*The University of Montana*

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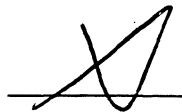
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The Montana Story Tour, The Story of Our Town:  
developed and sponsored by  
The Montana Repertory Theatre Company  
a professional equity theatre company in residence at  
The University of Montana– Missoula  
Department of Drama Dance

An Examination of a Practical  
Drama Artist in Residency Project

by  
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Presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
The University of Montana  
June, 2000

Approved by:



Chairperson

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The Montana Story Tour, The Story of Our Town: an examination of a practical drama artist in residency project

Chairperson: Randy Bolton 

*The Montana Story Tour, the story of our town* project used drama as a teaching and learning tool to extend the creative, performance, and study possibilities of collected oral histories. Nineteen Montana junior and senior high schools participated in the residency project. Oral histories collected by students in grades six through twelve were used as a basis for participation in a process of skit and performance development.

By using drama as a development and performance tool teachers and students saw that:

- 1) The dramatic arts strengthen and enliven the learning process through the use of the multiple intelligences.
- 2) Participation in the dramatic arts allowed students to learn and express ideas through the use of symbol systems which communicate ideas and culture.
- 3) *The Montana Story Tour, the story of our town* provided an opportunity for students to learn and develop techniques of performance and design.
- 4) The project also provided an opportunity for students to learn with and from community members thereby instilling in the students a deeper appreciation for historic place, time, and character

The project was sponsored by The Montana Repertory Theatre Company a professional equity theatre company in residency at The Department of Drama Dance, The University of Montana– Missoula.

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The Montana Repertory Theatre Company  
a professional equity theatre company in residence  
at  
The Department of Drama Dance  
University of Montana– Missoula

Greg Johnson, Artistic Director  
MaryAnn Riddle, Administrative Assistant  
Steve Wing, Production Manager  
Shaun Gant, Educational Outreach Coordinator

Shelly Reed, Fellow Artist and Educational Outreach Instructor

Sharon LaBonty, Chairperson, Northeastern Arts Network  
Glasgow, Montana

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## Preface

*Two students crawl on the floor. They are close together; they crawl forward as if animals. Another student climbs on their backs-- knees in the most uncomfortable location. This is now the performance of their ideas. Fleeting, quick and rich with invention. The other student becomes a cowboy. He grabs the imaginary reins. The horses grunt and growl. They strain at the pull of the weight behind the wagon. It is a wagon that we can not see, yet it is there. We learn from the cowboy that: "We need to pull this outhouse over to the railroad tracks. Come on boys." Another character enters the scene. She is participating in the prank. Later, the actors who had represented the horse transform into friends as well.*

*The group hides behind a building which is created only in the minds of the actors and the audience. One actor becomes the train which emerges in the distance. A whistle is blown. The train is coming. The pranksters react with glee. "This is going to be great!" Suddenly, the train reaches the outhouse which is represented by a trash can on the floor of the cafeteria. The trash can erupts with violence and sound. The students see the outhouse, the audience sees the outhouse. It is destroyed. "Wow, That was great. Oh, it stinks." The students come forward-- this is the end of their scene. An educator says, "Come on and take your bow." The students line up. They bow. Two other adults say: "That was great. Nice work." I looked over to see that the elder who told the story is in the room. She came earlier to share some more stories with the class. There are tears in her eyes. The kids are curious. They ask: "How was that?" A smile crosses the elder's face; she says while she laughs: "That was great. That's just how I felt, too." <sup>1</sup>*

I would learn later that the elder felt embarrassed to have shared this story with the students as she looked at the prank as an illegal and punishable act. She had basically kept this story a secret from people other than her closest friends and family for years. Now, not only the students knew the story but also two artists and a teacher as well. By tomorrow, the story would probably be all over school and then back to parents in homes by kitchen tables at dinner. I would also learn later that pranks were common around Montana. In Stevensville, for example, a group of adolescent pranksters burned an

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted by the author from a performance in Moore, Montana on March 8, 2000

outhouse on main street on Halloween night and also stuck a cow in a church over the weekend.

Hence, when we saw this touching reaction from the elder storyteller, I think several things were going on. First, the elder is proud to see her story dramatized. Secondly, she knows these students as fellow community members who will share her story with others. However, she is embarrassed. The story is a private mischief. It is not meant that everyone in the community know that she did these things in her youth. Thirdly, the elder sees this story as part of her history. As silly as the skit is, it nevertheless represents a moment from this elder's life which is precious on many levels. To share such a story is a gift even if the story might seem laughable.

Indeed, this story was common among teenage pranks throughout the communities of Montana in the 1930's and 1940's. Savage, Montana did not have indoor plumbing, for example, until 1963 when a local restaurant installed an indoor toilet. It is within this framework of illuminating the history of Montana through personal stories that *The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town* sought to fulfil the mission statement of The Montana Repertory Theatre as:

tell[ing] the great stories of our world to enlighten, develop and celebrate the human spirit in an ever-expanding community. The work of The Montana Rep reflects, and contributes to, the ideals and values of that community.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>From, "The Montana Repertory Theatre: Mission and History" a public relations handout of the organization. Available from The Montana Repertory Theatre Company, University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812.

## Inspiration

Four years ago I was involved, as director, in a production of More Precious Than Gold. The play was spearheaded by Sharon LaBonty who had been a member of The Fort Peck Fine Arts Board. She wrote grants to hire a dramatic writer, a song writer, production staff, and supplies for a production which was to use collected oral histories as a base for script development. Before I became involved as director for this play, Mrs. LaBonty had been busy collecting stories from community elders. Then, a writer was brought in to listen to selected tapes, meet selected elders, and work with community members who were interested in writing. These stories were then turned into dramatic encapsulations and interpretations of the originals. The scenes and pieces were assembled in a rough framework and written as a script for performance. When I arrived on the scene, this initial script had been completed for act one with act two to follow the next year.

We began to produce the first act and could not find a third male actor. As a result, I was selected. Now, I was stuck in two roles— actor and director. I must say directing is not an easy thing when one is also on stage; however, the experience produced valuable results for me.

One evening in Choteau, Montana I was delivering a monologue told by one, Santos, who lived and worked primarily around Sidney, Montana.

My family migrated to the United States in 1916. Dad landed a job right away on the railroad, they were extending the track. You was never any one place very long... lived on the railroad, right on the cars. We traveled all through Texas, got to Pueblo, Colorado, but we didn't stay there very long, because a friend of my dad's said with a family the size of ours, we could make a lot of money in the beet

fields. Lo and behold, Holly Sugar was building their plant in Sidney and they had a recruiter. And this fellow coaxed my dad into getting signed up and coming to work beets in Crane, Montana. Oh, it was very exciting, because we actually didn't know where in the world Crane, Montana was at. We were used to living in cities... populated areas and when we landed in Crane, right away my Mother said, 'Well, where is all the people?'<sup>3</sup>

As I was delivering this monologue, I saw an elderly man in the audience who was crying. I made it through my piece, but I'll bet it was colored a little differently that evening. We talked about this experience on our ride back to Glasgow, Montana. All of the other actors and even the producer had similar experiences that evening. In fact, as we toured the play to four venues around Glasgow, the experience of affecting an elder in the audience would be repeated at every performance.

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<sup>3</sup>Baldwin, Margaret. More Precious Than Gold. (Glasgow, Montana, Northeastern Arts Network, 1997), p. 12.

## The Idea

Imagine if students could have a similar experience. They could meet elders in their communities, hear their stories, and be affected by them. The students could come to see history in a living way with colors of region, personality, and character. These stories could be dramatized. In this way the multiple intelligences would be used—logical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intra personal, visual, aural, and spiritual<sup>4</sup>. The students' image of their rural community would never be the same. Their perception of place would be strengthened and the pages and lectures from their history teachers—perhaps even elements from the American Literature unit as taught in their English Class—would be colored by action in their bodies. The process of collecting and dramatizing stories had the potential to be an integral part of the school's larger curricula.

The idea of this production and of this experience stuck in my mind. Four years ago, I was satisfied with my understanding of the event, but it would not be until the end of my current project, *The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town*, that I would be able to share this experience with students in a meaningful way.

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<sup>4</sup>Note: I deviate a bit from Howard Gardner's names for the multiple intelligences as presented in Frames of Mind as linguistic, musical, logical- mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and personal. However, Mr. Gardner would admit that his names for these intelligences are not to be seen as hard and fast.

## Planning

In the spring of 1999, I approached Greg Johnson, Artistic Director for The Montana Repertory Theatre, with the idea of collecting scenes from high schools around the state for a final Montana 2000 performance. These scenes were to be developed from historical research or from oral histories, improvised, scripted, and assembled into a collection of scenes for a final presentation. I saw this project as a way to begin to extend my experiences in Glasgow and to provide some unique learning experiences for the students involved. (More on the nature of these experiences to come.)

As often happens with an idea, the kernel is but one of many versions. Suffice it to say that through consultation, meetings, and research with his staff and me, The Montana Repertory Theatre developed a project entitled: *The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town*.

As part of our planning, I designed a portable set which would fit in our Suburban and allow for rear projection of images from an overhead projector. This set consisted of two boxes, a truss, a small muslin drop, and two sets of tri fold flats. The truss allowed for the drop to be hung between the two tri fold units. The set was painted in a neutral grey with the drop left in its unbleached natural state. My hope here was that the visual projection of images would lead to cross curricular teaching between the visual arts, history, and English as images from various historical and or artistic origin could be used to reinforce the dramatic events created in front of the screen. I also hoped that this would further the possibilities of the project as an integral part of the school wide curricula. Such cooperation among teachers it was hoped would allow them the chance to

work together across domains.

In addition, as part of our pre-planning, we looked at elements of Montana's history by region, prepared budgets, and contacted teachers. The Montana Repertory Theatre, hired Shelly Reed former graduate of The University of Montana's Masters of Fine Arts program with an emphasis in Acting to work and travel with me. She would be an excellent partner to work with as Ms. Reed has significant expertise in acting and a solid understanding of the teaching and learning process.

*The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town* would through a gathering, collecting, interpreting, creating, and performing process show that:

- Most Montana classrooms are traditional in nature
- The dramatic arts can be an integral part of learning where the use of the multiple intelligences is part of the design for teaching and learning
- The arts strengthen and enliven knowledge of community and place
- The arts represent symbol systems which communicate ideas and culture
- Drama can be used to provide for cross curricular teaching
- Students should participate in a learning process which builds upon their strengths
- An artist in residency program must be flexible
- Education can be related to service
- Host teacher planning is key to a successful integrated dramatic arts residency
- Students can see the positive aspects of homework
- The dramatic arts can ensure student engagement in learning

These are the educational ideas held by this author, and these ideas were realized in various degrees through each school's residency.



## An Ideal Workshop

### Summary

Our process for developing stories through improvisation proceeded along a familiar path in most instances. First, we contacted each school's host teacher— **Pre Planning**. Secondly, the students, teachers, and community members completed the gathering, collecting, and writing process where interviews were conducted and stories written— **Student Advance Work**. Third, we introduced ourselves and The Montana Repertory Theatre, hence— **Introductions**. Fourth, we presented two examples from literature as models of our— **Operational Philosophy in Simple Theater**. Fifth, we warmed up— **The Blood Flow Increases**. Sixth, we played— **Theater Games**. The seventh element in our process began a process where students shared their interviewee's knowledge with the group through— **Storytelling**. Eighth, these stories, ideas, and facts were chosen for portrayal— **Group Selection**. The ninth element in our process follows logically as students began to go about— **Skit Development**. Tenth, after the students had developed these scenes they participated in— **Presentation**. Eleventh, we conducted a— **Critique and Observation** following the groups scene performance. Twelfth, we discussed the use of photography as a basis for— **Visual Imagery, Character Research, and Design**. At this point we could have brought our train to a concluding stop or we could turn and continue on like locomotives at the— **Wye**<sup>5</sup>. Our Fourteenth workshop element occurred in a few schools who sought to proceed on track to public performance.

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<sup>5</sup>Wye is a railroad term for a simple structure of three tracks shaped like a 'Y'. At the wye locomotives can turn around and head off in a new direction.

As a result, we had to work on– **Direction and Rehearsal**. For those schools who chose to present their work to the public we helped them towards a– **Performance**. Finally, each host teacher was asked to complete an **Evaluation** of the residency.

Bellow are these sixteen workshop elements in greater detail.

### **I. Pre Planning**

An understanding of each school’s goals and outcomes would be of primary import. For example, I contacted Maeta Kaplan, Corvallis Middle School’s host teacher for our workshop, three months in advance. She taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grade English and was also the lead teacher for the school’s six week drama program. This was our plan of action. Her students collected stories from teachers, parents, and elders around a central place– their school. These students were members of an after school writing club which was already in existence. Through this club, the students developed several drafts of their stories. Some stories were written in storytelling or script format.

My partner and I would also discuss our workshop approach prior to visiting each school. We did a good job of relating to each other the host teacher’s desires and wishes. Then, after discussing these ideas we developed our approach for each school. We often settled on similar elements focusing on the following methodology in large part because it was familiar to us. The process we used has many similarities to my preferred method of directing actors while the process of developing work through improvisation was familiar to Ms. Reed in her approach to class projects and produced theater performances.

### **II. Student Advance Work**

As mentioned above, the students in Corvallis collected stories and worked with

them as written compositions. This advance work was key to our success as workshop artists. The material each student collected was the basis for the bulk of the workshop activity in skit creation, direction, rehearsal, and performance. Below is an example of this written work created by a Corvallis Middle School sixth grader.

It's the 1930's in Corvallis, MT. Everyday Mrs. Madge Buck and her friends would ride the bus to school. The bus had curtains for windows instead of glass. There was no heat in the bus, and many times the temperature was zero, or far below. To keep from freezing from the wind chill factor, the kids had to scrunch way down in their seats... Another problem for the busses was the railroad tracks. In those days the trains ran more than once a week through the Bitterroot Valley. When the bus came to the railroad tracks, one of the boys would have to get off and tell the driver if the tracks were clear. One day, when the boys got out the driver misinterpreted their signal. The bus started to go across the tracks, but to the horror of the driver and passengers, the bus was hit by an oncoming train! Luckily, the bus was just barely on the tracks when it was first hit. Then the bus spun around and was hit once again. People were screaming and yelling like it was the end of the world....<sup>6</sup>

Through this story collecting and written work, the students use their skills in the personal, logical, and linguistic intelligences. They work with and relate to elders in groups thereby using their personal intelligences through the social process of gathering and collecting information. Next, the students use their analytical or logical skills as they compare stories from elders to their lexicon of historical, personal, and cultural information. And finally, through speaking and writing, the students use their skills in language and composition.

### **III. Introductions**

Our workshops began with introductions. We told the students about The

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<sup>6</sup>Written by a Corvallis Middle School student under the direction of Maeta Kaplan and adapted from an interview with Drew Lesnick.

Montana Repertory Theatre Company, its past and future productions. Our hope here was to inspire the students and their teacher to look for the next Montana Rep production in hopes that they might attend. Next, I would introduce my partner and myself. We felt this was important as the students could hear about our background and skills. Shelly Reed, for example, is an actress with a Masters of Fine Arts in Acting while I have taught high school drama and am primarily a technician although I like to do a bit of everything.

The main intelligences at work through the process of introduction are involved in the personal realm as people relate to each other as individuals and in groups.

#### **IV. Operational Philosophy in Simple Theater**

Our fourth workshop element entailed an introduction and discussion of simple theater. Here we often used two primary methodologies in order to communicate what we proposed to the students as a method for producing theater.

This discussion of theater philosophy began with a look at the prologue in The Life of King Henry The Fifth.<sup>7</sup> The speech is delivered by a character named Chorus who has some interesting ideas to share.

In this opening monologue, Chorus discusses several important concepts. First, theater and story telling is primarily the work of the imagination: "...On your imaginary forces work." Because we are participating in the creation of an imaginary world one actor can represent many things: "...Into a thousand parts divide on man..." This work of the actor is created from words, and may transport an audience and the actor across time

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<sup>7</sup>William Shakespeare. The Life of King Henry the Fifth in The Complete Works of Shakespeare, Third Edition. David Bevington ed. (The University of Chicago. Scott, Foresman and Company, Glenview, Illinois. 1980), p. 875.

and space: “Can this cockpit hold/ The vasty fields of France?” Furthermore, theater is a simple thing which does not need great and tremendous special effects, settings, and budgets in order to be creative and effective in storytelling. This is possible in the theater. Finally, we emphasized to the students that Shakespeare created moving works with a limited use of props. He based his performances on words spoken by the actor. As students they are capable of similar creations, and these performances come from a line of story telling which enables all of the human world to be created and explored only by an actor in front of an audience.

Our second method for discussing simple theater depended upon an inquiry based discussion of what’s needed to create a theatrical experience. We asked the students an open ended question: “What do you need to produce theater?” Their responses included: sets, script, actors, story, lights, sounds, special effects, a director, place, a theater building, money, and the like. Interestingly enough, the students left out an audience. Next, we asked them to boil this list down to the essentials. One girl said that “All that was really needed was story, actor, and audience.” To which we replied: “You mean you don’t need props and sets and lights? That’s amazing. A story can be created with just people?”

Our final method for looking at simple theater used a reading from More Precious Than Gold. This particular scene takes place between Molly, a thirteen year old, and her guide, The Storyteller. In the play, Molly and The Storyteller are used as a vehicle to transport the audience from story to story. It is as if The Storyteller has the ability to control time and space a bit like Chorus’ representation as a guide in The Life of King

Henry The Fifth. Molly and the Storyteller have just watched and participated in the re-enactment of some cowboy stories when we meet up with them on the prairie of Eastern Montana.

Molly: Did you see that sunset?

Storyteller: What sunset?

Molly: Just now, over the prairie there, that sunset... all golden... the clouds dipped in pink and red and purple and grey. It was amazing... didn't you see it?

Storyteller: You did. That's what counts.

Molly: But it was right... *Storyteller Smiles* What are you smiling at?

Storyteller: It is amazing, Molly.

Molly: What

Storyteller: What the story lets us see, if we're willing to listen

Molly: You mean the sunset wasn't real?

Storyteller: Of course it was real. As real as you and I.

Molly: You always say that.

Storyteller: I say it, because it's true.

Molly: And the Cowboy... was he real?

Storyteller: What do you think?

Molly: He had some great stories.

Storyteller: I'm sure he did. Everyone does.

Molly: Everyone?

Storyteller: Everyone who believes.

Molly: Believes in what?

Storyteller: In the power of their words.<sup>8</sup>

Again, we used an inquiry method here by asking the students to look at what ideas the scene presents regarding the format of the larger play and the play's philosophical approach to performance. These ideas can be found within the scene as encapsulations. Here our purpose was to build a foundation for the project; to connect the ideas presented; and to see what connections the students could figure out for themselves. A typical inquiry question might be: "How many props do you think this play has?"

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<sup>8</sup>Baldwin, pp. 37 - 38.

Why?” Perhaps another question might be: “How was the sunset created on stage?” We wanted the students to conclude that there are similarities in the Twentieth Century to the ideas of Shakespeare. Secondly, we also wanted our students to see how another play had been developed using some of the techniques they were using to develop their work. Thirdly, this scene from More Precious Than Gold communicated the abilities of theater to deliver images, associations, and values to an audience. The students were most impressed with the line, “What the story lets us see, if we’re willing to listen.”

This was a valuable exercise in that the discussions tapped into the students fundamental understandings of theater, story, communication, history, and values. In addition, the students seem to “get it” after this discussion. They saw that work similar to their work had been done before. They also saw that it is not difficult to create simple theater with a few concepts and ideas. As Shelly Reed says, we saw a few *light bulbs go on* during this activity.

This discussion and analysis of simple theater depended upon the use of many intelligences as the students were asked to imagine how they could work in this manner while also comparing their possible work to that of literature they have studied. The students used intelligences in personal, analytical, linguistic, and spatial domains. They had to react to each other and their teacher in a group and as individuals– the personal intelligences. The students were asked to compare possibilities with stored information from past experiences. In this way they used their logical abilities. Finally, students were asked to use their directorial and cultural imaginations to place actors in space while analyzing the More Precious Than Gold text.

## V. The Blood Flow Increases

Our fifth workshop element was to have the students participate in a group warm up. Our objective was to have the students participate in a physical activity where there were no comfortable social hiding places and where they would need to depend upon the leader or teacher for success. The students would look silly, be embarrassed, but they would have to continue to participate in order to succeed. They would have to trust each other.

We generally, used a simple physical and vocal warm up routine which involved some stretching while using the vocal chords to make open throat sounds. We would talk about the need to isolate particular parts of the body. The need for an actor to be physically trained and the use of exercises to train the voice. For our students, this activity was one of overcoming embarrassment and one of building common ground.

Next, we conducted a group trust exercise that I call *The Group Sit*. Once again, the students in this activity had to depend upon each other. Briefly, the students gathered in a circle facing in one direction until there was little room between them. Then, they sat on each other's knees or laps. After this was mastered, the group walked in a circle while sitting on each others' knees. If we stepped back from the activity as it started it allowed us as teachers an opportunity to see who the leaders in the larger group were. In addition, it generally took a group three to five tries to succeed in the activity, and this again gave us an opportunity to learn about the students.

In our warm up activities we saw the students use their abilities in the personal, spatial, and kinesthetic intelligences. The students were asked to relate to others in a



large group while also placing themselves as individuals within this interaction. The spatial intelligence was used as the body was placed within a group of others participating in similar movements and activities. An acting warm up also uses the bodily or kinesthetic intelligences as the human form must be manipulated in space to make a jumping jack or to create a picture of action through mime.

## **VI. Theater Games**

Our sixth workshop element was to play two theater games which varied in application with each setting. Our purpose here was two fold. First, we were interested in using the games to define and represent work which continued in the small groups. Secondly, the games provided a safe and trusting environment for students to learn from each other and to experiment. In addition, their representation as games defined the rules of the activity while also allowing for individual differences and adaptations.

Our first theater game was called *Change the Object*. This is a game where an inanimate object is passed from person to person. When a student receives the object, he or she has to create an imaginary object using the real one as a place keeper. For example, a student might take an eraser and transform it into a television remote control. The game can also be altered to apply to a more sophisticated student as the mime and story telling elements can be expanded.

This game was useful for us in that it provided an opportunity for students to learn mime, storytelling, and improvisation from each other. As one student succeeded, the group noticed and remembered and the game grew. In addition, the game was a realized implementation of simple theater as discussed earlier.

Our second theater game was actually more of a device to frame a process in improvisation. I call the activity *Tag Improv*. Here, the students began a scene as a pair. The scenes could be amazingly simple: two guys wait for a bus on a bench and look at the sun or listen to the wind. The scenes could also become highly complicated and involved. At any rate, as each scene died out, another actor tagged one actor from the preceding pair. The scene could switch at this point or it could continue along the same track in theme, language, or plot as was established by the earlier group. This new pair of actors then performed a new scene. The process continued until all participants had been in two scenes.

This process had two useful purposes for us. On the one hand, students could use this process to develop small ideas from their interviewing and collecting process. On the other hand, the process could fail. This was also useful as we could use this failure as talking points in stage fright, having something to do, dramatic choice, establishing a character, establishing and going with another's ideas. In essence, this process could be used to study all aspects in acting, design, and direction. Therefore, *Tag Improv* was a useful tool for any level of student, as the process lent itself to adaptation and intervention by the teacher.

Here again, we saw the integration of many intelligences in these theater games as the act of storytelling allowed for any element of art and thought to be added to the particular student creation within the parameters of the game. The only limitation we tended to see was that the mathematical and musical intelligences really were not provided for in the games. Perhaps this was influenced by our lack of skill in these areas

as artists.

## **VII. Storytelling**

Our seventh workshop element was to have the students tell each other selected stories from their interviews and research. They had previously participated in a process where they would interview local elders, record their interviews on video or audio tape, and then take notes from these interviews or write stories and scripts. Usually, the host teachers had groups participate in this story collecting process with selected elders. A representative from each group would serve as spokesperson to tell the stories to us and to other students.

Reading and sharing stories with each other was important as this element of the process accomplished several things. First, storytelling educated the participating artists. Secondly, storytelling taught the whole group about the content of the interviews. The performing and creating process ran smoother later as each student understood the key elements from each story even if those elements were left out due to mistakes in presentation. Thirdly, the storytelling process was a valuable teaching tool in its own right. Through this process the students learned about their town, its people, its struggles through time, and the nature of play. In addition, the students saw the value of interviewing as research; they saw the value of homework; and their knowledge was valued by the larger group.

One story which stuck in my head from Whitehall, Montana summarized the life of one elder who liked to go swimming in the summer, and ice skating in the winter. Her first car had only curtains-- making for a cold vehicle. She was good in school, enjoyed

hanging out with her friends, and she took the train to Butte some twenty four miles away to attend the Columbia Gardens.<sup>9</sup>

This element of our process was familiar to many students as they used their skills in public speaking, language, and group relations through the use of the personal, linguistic, and logical intelligences.

### **VIII. Group Selection**

The next phase in our process was to begin to select stories for improvisation and skit development. We selected themes from the stories; listed each story under a heading; and then we had the students vote on stories or ideas to be developed. Here we chose a story for each group to develop.

This process depended mainly on the use of the personal and analytical intelligences as the students choose stories to be improvised in relation to their own personal likes and dislikes while also looking to their peer and cultural references for potential rewards.

### **IX. Skit Development**

This is the most mysterious element of the process. After the stories and ideas had been chosen and assigned to groups, each group would relocate to a space where they could work independently while Shelly and I came around to help them with their creation. The groups were often given fifteen to twenty minutes to develop and rehearse their skits and then they presented their scenes to the larger group.

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<sup>9</sup>The Columbia Gardens was an amusement park of sorts which was presented to the people of Butte as a gift from minning. Oddly enough it was demolished to make way for an exploratory minning shaft later on.

One particular group from Whitehall had fifteen students. The students had chosen the Columbia Gardens as a possible location while the scene centered around a double date. Two girls began by buying snow cones with their beaus while the other actors created elements of the carnival around them. Interestingly enough, this idea for a story was based on very small pieces of information in the collected essays.

### **X. Presentation**

After each group's rehearsal process they presented their scenes to the class while using our set of boxes, tri fold flats, and a drop. The skits ranged from simple scenes to a developed compilation of events relating to a central theme with an overall framework.

One particular group of skits was performed by students in Whitehall, Montana on February 24 , 2000. One skit featured a young lady attending a movie. She and her mother bought tickets, got popcorn and what not, met the usher, and picked their seats. The audience knew what the general time period of the scene was as the box office attendant said, "Fifteen cents please." Then, the movie started with four other students portraying the action on the screen. This was interesting as the group had created a scene within the scene. Moments in the imaginary movie intersected with the imaginary audience. At one point, a horse fell and our young lady began to cry. The mother had her daughter leave the theater with the movie drama still proceeding down stage. The scene was again based on a story their interviewee had related about her fear that horses had been mistreated in the filming of Gone With The Wind.

Another group of initial performances was presented by Savage High School students on March 15, 2000. This group of scenes included depictions of: a thirty family

influx of folks from Colorado for the completion of a Holly Sugar beat canal for irrigation; a payroll robbery; a one elephant circus; shopping for feed sacs to be used as material for skirts; and a treatment for framing the presentation.

After each performance, it was important to recognize the students' accomplishment. As a result, we lead applause at the end of each scene, and we also had each group gather in a line to bow before the larger class and yet more applause. Generally, we also gave each group simple verbal praise after their performance. Such praise might consist of: "Good job." Or "Nice work." Our purpose here was to bring each performance to a natural completion while also attempting to keep the general atmosphere positive and rewarding.

This process of skit development and performance used many of the intelligences as students related to each other, an audience, the particular story to be communicated; their cultural references to other stories; and the abilities to use their bodies to communicate an idea. An actor or actress spoke on stage; he or she used his linguistic and personal abilities. An actress or an actor created a door knob through mime; he or she used his or her abilities in the use of the body in space. An actress or an actor sang a song with a dance; he or she used his or her musical abilities while also using the body and space. Finally, an actor or actress, colored these movements and moments with cultural and personal references; he or she used skills in logic and analysis.

## **XI. Critique Observation**

We followed a critique and discussion pattern which did not allow for negative or critical statements from the students. We did this by asking the students to relate to us

only what they saw represented before them. For example, I asked the students to relate simply what they saw. Here I was looking for simple observations concerning character, location, properties and the like. The idea behind this sort of approach was to move beyond the all too frequent tendency to be critical. Next, I asked the students to expand from this initial observation to a judgement of what the portrayal represented.

Judgements of success or failure were to be ignored. I forced this approach for two reasons. One, it was too easy for students to be critical of each other's projects. Secondly, I was interested in seeing the students remember the moments created in each skit. A student may have played three or more parts, for example-- flowing effortlessly from one character or object to the next. For example, a *what I saw observation* might include the statement: "I saw five male students on chairs which they scooted around on." The portrayal observation might include: "I saw cowboys on horseback." Once again, I was looking to discover the success within these small pieces of performance.

My belief here was that by pointing out these successful moments, they can be recalled-- the expectation for success set, and the beginnings of a vocabulary of successful moments established. The students were asked to use their analytical and logical skills as they compared these successes with past experiences. Students, if given enough, time can then go about the business of building up a repertoire of these moments. They saw and talked about success; began to notice and recall it; and the cycle will continue. In the long run, the students will build up an array of simple *bits* while in the short term their tendency to be self and peer critical was dissuaded by the task of following the critique standards which were designed to solicit positive responses.

During our critique and analysis phase of the workshop the students used their intelligences in the logical mathematical, personal, and spatial domains. They related to each other in a large group, and they were asked to make judgements of form and content when compared to their own cultural, interpersonal, and intra-personal knowledge. In addition, the students used their logical mathematical intelligence as they followed the rules for this critique form.

## **XII. Visual Imagery, Character Research, and Design**

Our ninth workshop element used the photography of Evelyn Cameron as an exploration of photography both as a tool for research and also as ready-made scenic projections. Shelly Reed first talked about character research from a photograph. She used overheads of the photographic work of Evelyn Cameron who photographed life in a Montana community in the early part of the Twentieth Century<sup>10</sup>. One particular photograph shows a well-to-do merchant class family on the wooden walkway to their residence. Behind them is a tree, a Sears and Roebuck fence, and a corner of the house. In front of them in the foreground are cans transformed into flower pots. In the rear of the portrait are a pair of couples—two woman with a man on either side. One man wears a garter on his sleeve. The couples are in their early thirties. It is unclear from the photograph as to each couple's marital status. Perhaps they are brother and sister. We do not know. In front of them in chairs are what appear to be grandmother and grandfather. Although, it is unclear as to the relationship among the family members. In between the

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<sup>10</sup>Montana History Through the Photography of Evelyn Cameron. Compiled by The Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.



older couple is a young lady who is seated in a rocker with one leg hidden behind a flower pot.

Shelly's discussion of the photograph with the students first covered simply what they saw. She avoided statements from the students which led to assumptions of character, relationship, and place. Only after the students had analyzed the photograph for its visual contents did she move to the next phase of the observation. Here Ms. Reed began to ask the students questions of character and relationship emphasizing to them that accuracy on a historical level was not important. What was important for the actor, she said was to use the photograph as a tool for developing a character. For example, "Why is the young girl's leg covered by the flower pot? Was this intentional? Is she crippled? If so, what implications does this have for a portrayal of this family? Ms. Reed then moved to examine other photographs in a similar fashion.

My use of photography entailed the use of images as scenic elements. For example, the image of the family above can be used to establish the same scene on stage. Actors can pose in front the image. The actors can then become their characters as the image fades or dissolves to another. Here I had students act these poses out while at other times I came up with an action in relation to an image. For example, a favorite image of mine was of a tree in front of a large lake. I stood in front of this image and pretended to cast my line into the lake.

This use of visual imagery also included the use of historic photographs from each school's archives or the use of student created visual art. In Corvallis, Montana these elements were used to their fullest potential as two students participated in the project as

artists and created images to go with each scene. These creations were coupled with historic photographs to establish mood, time, and location for each scene.

Through this exercise the students were asked to use their artistic, spatial, personal, and analytical intelligences. They were asked to compare their knowledge of persons in history with that of their knowledge of personal habits of behavior and thought in their own time. In addition, the students used their spatial and artistic abilities as they were asked to imagine these photographs on stage in a given scene.

### **XIII. Wye**

At this point, our workshop residency might be concluded. This departure point depended upon a school's focus as the workshops were tailored to fit various school paradigms and student skill levels. Generally, we would continue in residency if a school was interested in developing a performance from the stories, interviews, and skits.

Otherwise, we would move to conclude our residency.

### **XIV. Rehearsal and Direction**

These two workshop elements often occurred in such close proximity to each other that it is difficult to separate them from each other even though they are separate elements in the process of creating an original work. For example, in *Savage, Montana* on March 16, 2000, we began to take ten skits developed by the students and string them together as material for a public performance. As a result, Shelly Reed and I developed an opening staging idea for this group of scenes which we hoped would help to tie the elements together while also showing the students that their scenes did relate to each other enough to be communicated to an audience as a cohesive whole.

The staging which we directed had our actors in Savage group together as if posing for a family portrait. The six families were formed and staged in close proximity. One character in each grouping told the family's story, its name, and its origin. Each character then introduced themselves giving the audience a glimpse of who this person was so that in a later scene the audience would have an easier time distinguishing one character from another. This scene also tied the performance to historical data as real names and character traits were used.

This is a simple "bit". Yet, it is an example of the sort of work we engaged in while refining improvised skits for public presentation. Through the above scene we worked on staging, blocking, framing, projection, characterization, and an incorporation of historical knowledge into student work. While each school would be different at this point in the process, we covered many of the same elements in direction.

Another example of our work in direction took place in Stevensville, Montana. At this school, the students had developed highly effective work by the end of their second day with us. However, they were lacking a framing technique to tie their scenes together. As a result, we solicited the students for ideas. After some discussion of the possibilities, the students came up with the idea that their presentation could begin with a lone switchboard operator on a dimly light stage. Slowly a cacophony of moments intrudes upon her: "What number please?".... "I forgot that recipe...." "There's a fire..." "I lost my teeth." Gradually these voices from the darkness build until a fever pitch is reached, silence, pause, a breath... and the switchboard operator will answer a specific call. The caller will be illuminated on the opposite side of the stage and the scene will

begin. Here pictures and other visual imagery could also be used to establish the origin of the year, the storyteller, the interviewer, location, or time of year. After each scene is presented, we could again return to the convention of the switchboard operator and to the visual images.

As directors, we set about making this image come to life. First, Ms. Reed worked the beginning moments of this scene, directing the overlapping of voices while I went back stage and began to set up images for scenic projection. Next, we ran the scenes and skits in order using this framing technique. Finally, we assembled the cast and gave a few notes while also soliciting responses from the actors as to how this technique worked.

Another example of our work as directors occurred in Corvallis, Montana on April 13, 2000 with sixth grade students. With these students we had some trouble getting them to portray make believe worlds. They would say the lines expressively but the students did not believe that they were on a bus, for example. They were not seeing the world before them. As a result, we decided that we should work on characterization for one of our sessions. We talked and worked on this topic for an hour and a half with two approaches. First, we simply talked about the implications of character-- about creating a world, about seeing the cookie which is not there before you, about differences in folks based on stereotypes, and about questions one might ask to help the actor create a character. Next, we simply created a walk for each character individually. We talked as a group with the individual actor and helped them make choices about their character. Then, we simply asked the actor or student to walk from one point in the story to another

in this character mode. Here it was amazing how reserved the students were-- perhaps cautious would be a better word. They did the walk, but again-- they were not in the world to the extent that I would have expected. Shelly even had the class applaud for each person's walk; yet, they remained reserved as the exercise progressed. I would have expected the exercise to produce more dramatic results because of this positive feedback, but this did not occur.

Our work in rehearsal and direction had the potential to use all of the intelligences as scenes were performed, analyzed, critiqued, changed, and performed again. Our limitations here centered mainly in the areas of dance, visual art, and music. These intelligences were not utilized to the extent that they could have been. This is probably the result of our own personal limitations as artists and a factor of the time available. We were interested in concentrating on the development and success of the dramatic intelligences, and we implemented our workshops accordingly.

## **XV. Performance**

I went down to Corvallis on Thursday, April 14, 2000 at 6:30 p.m. to see the students' performance and to video tape it for our archival use as well as for the students. After talking with their teachers I discovered that the students had worked through the play two times that afternoon. Hopefully then, they had an understanding of the improvisational connections they would need to make for this evening's work.

One of the scenes presented in the performance looked something like this:

*On a muslin curtain upstage we see a projected image of a fleet of open window buses parked in front of the pre fire Corvallis school. We know a rough time period. The bus on stage pulls up to the side of the road. The audience sees this*

*as represented by two gray boxes and through the action of the driver. Downstage a row of students stands huddled in the cold. One boy catches a snowflake on his imaginary mitt and licks it with his tongue. The driver opens the door, says "Good morning, Miss Johnson." A group of students enter the bus complaining of the terrible weather outside. Some of them brush their imaginary coats and remove their hats as if to say: "It's snowing." One student sits next to the driver. A student in the back sticks his head out the window. The driver breaks character and says directly to the audience: "We didn't have glass in the bus windows back then. There were curtains, but it'd get pretty cold in the winter." The driver resumes character, pulls to a stop, and sees the railroad crossing sign. He says, "Mr. Thorenson will you go outside and look for trains. I can't see with all this snow." Jimmy does as he was asked. We see him stand up stage left. He begins to wave his hands as if to say, don't go. Just then, stage right, a blizzard enters. It is represented by three students who whirl about in a dance like motion. They surround Jimmy and the bus driver says, "Can any one see Jimmy." There is a cacophony of responses among them. "I can't see a thing with the snow." By another, "He's waving his arms, I think that means...." A train whistle is heard. "I see him; it's ok." The train has entered stage right. It is represented by another group of students. The blizzard is whipped away. The bus pulls forward. The train hits the bus in the front knocking the rear of the bus around and into the train. Serious injury is averted. The students are shaken. The bus driver and the students begin to pick themselves up off the floor of the bus. "Is everyone alright?" "My head, oh it's not to bad." The scene ends...<sup>11</sup>*

I must say after seeing the performance, that the students did an excellent job.

What was of special interest to me was how the work seemed to be very much like a Missoula Children's Theater production in that each of the students had at most five lines for each scene. Their teacher's previous experiences as a Missoula Children's Theater artist and director might have influenced this result. In addition, most of the scenes moved along fairly rapidly with little introduction or subtext. One scene for example which involved a teacher being scared by a mouse, moved rapidly from establishment of character and place to discovery of the mouse, the teacher's reaction, and the killing of the animal with a pretend notebook. The students then proceeded to taunt the teacher

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<sup>11</sup>See sample student writing p. 15.

who was screaming on her desk. Here the teacher had very few lines: one or two with each student in the beginning of the scene; her reaction to the mouse; and then her chastisement of the students for teasing her. Many of the scenes proceeded in this skeleton fashion.

## **XVI. Evaluation**

After each working day or during lunch Shelly Reed and I would discuss the day's accomplishments and shortcomings. For example, at CS Porter Middle School we had a difficult time with the students during the story selection phase of the residency. The students had a hard time agreeing on which stories should be dramatized for performance and at one time wanted to change the cast completely before performance. Naturally, Ms. Reed and I discussed this group controversy after the day had ended. We talked about group dynamics, leadership styles, and the teacher's role in working with each group. Here we reached the conclusion that the two most powerful leaders in the class were having a simple disagreement which neither understood. However, they were unwilling to discuss the problem towards clarification. Rather, the students were more comfortable arguing with each other.

Each host teacher was also asked to fill out an evaluation form. Of nineteen schools, nine forms were returned. In addition to the simple statistical information which included number of students served, location, time, dates, and other numerical information— two subjective questions were asked. “What did we do well?” and “How

can we improve?”<sup>12</sup> Of nine responses all were positive with such statements as: “Really got the students energized and interested. You made them feel comfortable and willing to take risks.”<sup>13</sup> Or, “You put the kids at ease and helped them stretch and explore their abilities. You also handled a controversy in the groups exceptionally well. Thanks.”<sup>14</sup> As suggestions, the teachers felt that more time was needed for the residency and that more historical relevance could have been provided. Perhaps a tie in with The Montana Heritage Project might lead to more historical relevance in the future.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted from “The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town, Educational Outreach Program, 2000 Evaluation Form”. Available from The Montana Repertory Theatre Company, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana, 59812.

<sup>13</sup>Lisa Hendricks, Language Arts Teacher, Victor Shool, Victor, Montana.

<sup>14</sup>Sharee Ballinger, Language Arts Teacher, CS Porter Middle School, Missoula, Montana.

<sup>15</sup>The Montana Heritage project is a project of The American Folklore Center. More information is available at <http://www.edheritage.org/flag.htm>



## Unique Elements

As mentioned earlier, our workshop residency project in drama did not always follow the same delivery system. Certainly, as demonstrated earlier there were common elements in our creative process; however, there were also some significant departures from the process which led to discoveries.

### **Wasted Time**

Sometimes we would arrive at a school where the preparation work had not been completed. We then had to take the time to do what was needed in order to assemble enough material for the students to work with to create scenes and skits. In Stevensville, Montana on April third, 2000 for example, we met with video production students in a studio off campus. Here the video students were filming other students as they retold stories from their interviews. The teacher's purpose here was to document this information so it would be available for use later. Two students ran the video switcher and control area while two other students manned cameras in the talent area. We placed two storytelling students at a time in talent chairs, *mic-ed* them up, and had them present a retelling of their interview's highlights. While this was a valuable experience for the students, it would have been better if this were done separately from our visit to the school. What we needed was for the storytelling students to tell their stories to the drama students. Perhaps this video documentation experience was the result of poor communication between artist and host teacher.

### **Tag Team Variations**

In Savage, Montana on March 15, 2000 we had eleventh and twelfth grade

students play tag team improvisation using small elements from historical research as material. A list of these discoveries was placed on the board and then, as each improvisation team tagged in, one of the facts was picked as the basis for their scene. The students then had to create a series of moments from this item. One fact, for example, related that the first Model T Ford did not have a speedometer. This was coupled with an elder's story of riding in such an early car. As a result, a student improvisation pair developed a scene where a couple on a date was amazed with speed as the fence posts went by. The dog in the yard was their speedometer. If the dog began to lag behind then the car was driving too fast. This was a good use of improvisation for these students as they created many scene ideas from these small pieces of information.

Another twist in the use of improvisation occurred in Stevensville, Montana on April 4, 2000. Using an idea from Who's Line is It Anyway Ms. Reed had the students gather in pairs in front of the group. Next, she shouted out a scene idea from her notes of stories and ideas. The students then had to create a scene immediately upon hearing the key words. This was a positive change in our exercise. The actors had to go with the first idea which popped into their heads. There was no time to develop ideas while watching other skits or while waiting for a turn in the game. Useful dramatic ideas were produced in this way as well. However, this is clearly an exercise for advanced students.

Tag team improvisation did not always produce positive results. In Corvallis, Montana, we started tag improvisation with our group of sixth grade middle school students. This was very difficult for the students who were chosen. I had decided that we would just go around the room beginning of course in the front and to the left. Then, we

would zig zag around the room. The initial students showed a great deal of blocked thinking and nervousness.

While I felt some remorse for these students, their failure turned into an opportunity for discussion. We asked each of the embarrassed ones what it felt like to be up there in front of an audience. We were able to talk about stage fright, establishing a character, creating a sense of place, and being able to work with a partner. Shelly demonstrated some easy character scenes with a willing volunteer, and I demonstrated Stanislavski's notion of purpose and action. Where he had his students occupy themselves because he had given them a task to accomplish,<sup>16</sup> I dropped some change from my pocket, watched it roll about, and then set out to pick it up. This talk back proved fruitful in the long run.

### **Students Want Comedy**

The students in Moore, Montana presented a story of the outhouse getting hit by the train. The students in Rudyard, Montana improvised a scene where a soldier was shocked with heart paddles represented by two hand held mixers. Students in Stevensville, Montana presented a scene where the neighbor's outhouse was transported to main street only to be burned on Halloween night. Students wanted to be funny. Few of the scenes we saw were of a serious nature. The entire town of Stevensville almost burned to the ground, but the students chose to focus on the freezing fireman as he returned home. "Get the ice ax." he said to his wife. The audience laughed.

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<sup>16</sup>Constantin Stanislavski. An Actor Prepares. (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1982), p.35.

It is most likely that the students wanted to be funny because the elders told and emphasized funny stories. In Stevensville, Montana for example, Barb Chilcott was asked to relate some of the more challenging moments in her life to which she replied, “My brother was a challenge.” She did not want to talk about the challenging moments in her life. To her it was more important to represent her life as one filled with friends, pranks, and funny things. Earlier in Rudyard, Montana an elder told the story of being trapped in a blizzard only to see a light in his window at the moment that he was about to give up, forever. The students did not dramatize this story. Instead, they chose to develop a story where one teenager led the others home in a blizzard by walking in front of the car.

I’m not sure why the skits tended to be comedic. Perhaps it is because life in rural Montana is challenging still today. Perhaps students like to be funny because they feel that laughter from their peers is a stronger reward than silence. Perhaps they see comedy as being easier to act out. Or perhaps they see examples of comedy more frequently in the popular culture of television sitcoms like The Cosby Show or The Huguelys and variety hour programming like Mad TV or Saturday Night Live.

### **Unique Student Writing**

As mentioned earlier student writing, and story collecting could take many forms. In Whitehall, Montana, for example, the middle school English teachers had their students use prepared questions while interviewing an elder in groups. These interviews were videotaped as well. Then, because the students were currently studying essay writing in English class, they edited their original notes into a one page single spaced

historical interview essay.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, the students in Savage, Montana did not prepare more written work in addition to their notes of the interviews. They preferred to work from an oral tradition. Prior to our arrival, the teacher and her class had met as a group to brainstorm various ideas and strategies for framing the presentation. These ideas were then typed and organized by the teacher.

The most successful integration of student writing came from Corvallis, Montana. In addition to interviewing elders, parents, and grandparents-- these students also participated in an after school writing club which developed stories related to their school. They were also encouraged to produce several drafts of their writing and to work in various formats as their written work was published at their performance.

### **Outside Influence**

Some schools had visits from local community members which impacted their workshop performance. In Savage, Montana the teachers arranged for a local reporter from the Sidney paper to come and interview the students about their project. In Stevensville, Montana a local Bitterroot Valley Television Volunteer cooked breakfast for the teachers, students, and artists. In Shelby, Savage, Corvallis, and Stevensville elders came to visit the children before and during the workshop as well as to watch performances. In Rudyard, the principal came by to watch the students' final improvisations, and in Moore a television reporter even came by. I think these visits from outsiders had a positive impact on student success. I'm certain that sharing a breakfast

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<sup>17</sup>See Appendix, p. 69.

together makes one feel valued and important, and I'm certain that a visit from a TV reporter adds a new level of focus and tension to a creative process.

I think that when the schools were able to create these moments of outside influence their project was stronger for it. One could also argue that the teacher who is active and concerned with success and publicity is by nature going to be a more positive and influential force as he or she has more at stake.

### **Artist Writing and Research**

In some communities, it was necessary to show the students how easy it was to dramatize stories. In Whitehall, Montana on February 24, 2000, Ms. Reed and I went about this in a planned manner as we had sensed from the students in our first day that they were reluctant to use their skills in drama. We wrote a short scene as an example of a completed skit. For our skit we used the historical grand opening celebration for The Lewis and Clark Caverns along with the coming of the railroad in 1881 to Whitehall as factual background information for our scene. We combined these elements with a story told by one Mr. Patacini<sup>18</sup> as the basic material for our skit. We asked for volunteers to read the scene in front of our portable classroom set which consisted of two boxes, a drop, and a pair of grey tri fold flats. Then we discussed how simple it was to write this two page scene, believing that if the students saw us do this; then, they would feel that they could also.

### **Development Speed**

In Moore, Montana on March 8, 2000, we had two and one half hours to complete

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<sup>18</sup>See Appendix p. 69.

the selecting, improvisation, critique, and visual research aspects of our process. We had to hear stories, chose stories to dramatize, work in groups, present, critique, and look at historic photography in a very short time period. I was not sure this could be done, and there was also a new stress factor in that this workshop segment would be used as material for an “Under The Big Sky: Montana 2000”<sup>19</sup> segment to be broadcast across Montana.

As a result of this pressure, we got right to work proceeding through introductions and heard summaries of selected stories. Then, we formed three groups and gave the students perhaps fifteen to twenty minutes in which to develop an idea, frame the idea, develop narrative plot points, and rehearse.

After this development and rehearsal process, we watched the skits which were wonderful. One group produced a series of scenes where they began with a pretend interview of an elder. Then the group presented three stories related to the theme of teenage pranks. In one of these stories, the characters played a prank using a neighbor’s outhouse.<sup>20</sup>

Why were these students able to create such a wonderful performance in such a short period of time? Some factors may have led to their success. First, despite the school’s small enrollment, the students produce a junior/senior play each year. Secondly, the English and history teacher was highly organized as the students each had pages and pages of written work completed prior to our arrival. Third, the students had also

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<sup>19</sup>“Under the Big Sky.” KPAX Missoula, 19 March, 2000.

<sup>20</sup>See preface p. vi.

discussed the project and selected stories to perform before the workshop began. These students were much further along in the process than was normal for us in our residency project. They and their teacher were extremely well prepared and enthusiastic. Fourth, their teacher wanted this short workshop to be an integral part of the student learning process. He tied our work in with his history and English class work. This tie between the workshop elements and the regular curriculum in the school made the project an integral part of an arts model for learning. This integration moved the students along. Fifth, Moore High School is very small. There were nine students in this class. With this particular teacher, it would be hard to not to complete the work as assigned and still participate in class. The students already had a fundamental understanding of the project; they understood the educational aspects of knowing their elders; they understood their community's place in history; they had a demanding and prepared teacher; and the students had a degree of expertise in drama and performance. These factors led to their success.

### **Earlier Connections**

While we were working in Savage, Montana, I discovered a connection to earlier work I had done in Fort Peck and Glasgow, Montana when I portrayed, Santos, a man who had spent the better part of his life as a migrant worker in and around Sidney, Montana for the Holly Sugar Company. In Savage, one of the student groups presented a scene centering on a portrayal of the historical fact that thirty families moved to Savage at once during the building and completion of the Holly Sugar Company irrigation ditch. The scene was loosely based on this report while being augmented by my knowledge of



similar works projects around the country. The scene began with a *town meeting* where the federal man related the future of the project and the plan to advertise nationally for workers and families. The next scene related the posting of a flyer in a struggling Colorado town. This scene showed a farmer seeing the flyer, discussing the idea with the mayor, and proceeding home. At home, he and his wife discuss the possibilities and ultimately decide to relocate. The farmer then returned to the mayor who added this family's name to the roster of relocating folks.

This was an interesting scene. Not only did the scene developed by the students have several segments, it also was based on information from a man who I had portrayed on stage three years earlier in More Precious Than Gold.

### **Elder Participation**

As had occurred in some other schools across Montana, in Stevensville on April 5, 2000 we were treated by a visit from one of the elder storytellers. The host teacher's plan was to have her come back for an hour or so to tell more stories; however, this would not be the best part of her visit by any means.

After Barb Chilcott, the elder, told some new stories and answered some questions, we asked her to stay and watch a few of the student skits. The first series of scenes that she watched might be called the *Great Creamery Fire*.

*Four students proceeded to re create their earlier portrayal of this fire. They played switchboard operators, fireman, hoses, buildings, neighbors, and even the fire itself. First, a resident called the switchboard operator to let her know that there was a fire. Then, the operator sounded the alarm, but in fifteen minutes no one came. It turned out that all of the fire fighters were off at the fair in Darby and would not be home for hours. As a result the fire erupted as the students became a rolling cacophony of dance like fire before our eyes. The fire roared on*

*as the fingers and arms became entire bodies in a kinesthetic interpretation of fire. The townspeople tried to fight the blaze, but it spread from building to building until the firefighters came home tired, exhausted, and drunk to put out the flames leaving only a few buildings remaining upright.<sup>21</sup>*

During this performance, I spent a quarter of my time watching Mrs. Chilcott's face and body. How was she reacting? In general, she was enthralled and focused. She laughed and cried and was astonished at the level of performance she was seeing from the kids. In addition, I watched the kids in the audience. What were they watching? As it turned out, their energy was split. They were as focused on a peripheral view of Barb's reactions as they were on the scene itself. After Barb Chilcott left, I talked a bit with one student who cried when it was revealed that Barb had enjoyed the experience. Here I was moved as the students and their elder gained a new level of understanding for each other.

### **Student Pre- Knowledge**

This scene was also amazing from another standpoint. The story of the fire was told to the Stevensville students by several elders. They had heard the story many times. As they went about the task of assembling these symbols and ideas into a performance, they also begin to incorporate other aspects of the town's culture from other stories into their creation. The elders had told them that Stevensville's telephone switchboard was the center of activity in town. The switchboard was the dictionary, doctor's hot line, internet search engine, television news, child care, and social events manager of the town. People would even call in to have someone help them find their lost cow or to keep tabs on their husband's errands. They used this element in their creation while they also added

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<sup>21</sup>Adapted by the author upon observation in Stevensville, Montana on April 5, 2000.

elements from a prior knowledge base of theater and its symbol systems in their performance. They took ideas from various sources and made them their own without difficulty. This level of creative potential must be the result of having five previous semesters of training in drama as well as participation in after school and summer performances.

Another example of pre- knowledge occurred during the Montana chapter of the International Thespian Society's Annual Meeting in Missoula, we presented a condensed storytelling and development workshop. The students at this convention were all members of the society and were committed after-school drama students who participated in plays and forensics competitions. Their knowledge in the domain exceeded that of their peers. These Thespian Society members and their sponsors had assembled in Missoula at The Department of Drama Dance on the campus of The University of Montana to watch, perform, and learn.

As part of this meeting a group of eight students participated in a workshop which was only one hour and fifteen minutes in length. During this workshop, we wanted to tell stories, select stories, and improvise skits from the collected stories. Since we had not communicated with these students in advance, the stories would be collected as part of the workshop. We proceeded through the collecting, dramatizing, and critiquing elements of our process with very little time for a conclusion. However, the thespian society students developed a series of scenes relating to a central fire idea. They even practiced the scenes twice before a final presentation. We could not have proceeded through our process without the prior knowledge of these students. We did not play

dramatic games or discuss simple theater. Indeed, we did not have to guide the improvisation of the group. Clearly, this workshop was successful because these students had prior domain knowledge.

## Where Do We Fit

*The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town* is a representation of the best educational outreach programming conducted by a theatre company in Montana.

According to my survey<sup>22</sup> our project was the only project which was designed to be an integral part of the larger school's curriculum; involve community outreach; and require host teacher and student pre planning.

There is a great deal of educational outreach provided in Montana by theatre companies. According to my research, eleven companies provide outreach to Montana Public Schools and there is one state arts agency. In addition, there is a well developed oral history project in *The Montana Heritage Project*.

The problem with this theatrical outreach is that it tends to be a haphazard endeavor. The Montana State Arts Council sponsors and coordinates well planned artist in residency programs. However, the results and nature of these residencies is not immediately accessible to the researcher through traditional means. If one wants to see what projects are being completed through the state arts agency in Montana, one has to travel to Helena and review the evaluations and project reports in person. This is certainly not a good way to build strength, cooperation, or cohesiveness in program offerings across the state.

In the Bozeman area there are three primary offerings in educational outreach. Shakespeare in the Parks offers seventy minute Shakespearian productions with

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<sup>22</sup>See Appendix p. 70.

workshops. The fee for this work is 750 dollars per day. The Equinox Theatre Company offers an educational outreach program in comedic improvisation utilizing theater games and other improvisation exercises. The fee for this work is eighteen dollars per instructor per hour. Thirdly, the Vigilante Theatre Company offers smaller versions of its full scale productions for school performances and talk back workshops.

Theatre companies in Montana offer a mish-mash of educational outreach opportunities. Programs vary from school to school and from company to company. There is little effort to coordinate these offerings, brag about success, or indeed even to offer each other information regarding program offerings to better the resulting whole. Coordination of these offerings at the state level would produce a stronger dramatic artist in residency program across the state.

Our program certainly was not very different from the other offerings in this regard. We did not have standards for host school participation which would lead to a similar process in each location. However, *The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town* is a good model for producing an integrated arts in residency project as a successful residency demanded host teacher and student preparation and follow up. This characteristic is uncommon in the other offerings. For example, The Missoula Children's Theatre offers a production oriented residency which results in twenty seven hours of after school and evening rehearsal with performances in one week. However, the project does not need to be tied to the larger school curricula in any way. A church group could host the residency, and it would not have any effect on the success or failure of the program in that particular town. I would argue that the overall effect of this program

produces dependency rather than inspiring the schools to create drama on their own. The small rural communities that I have visited come to depend upon The Missoula Children's Theatre workshops as their only offering in drama, and dance. This does not have to be the case. Small communities could look for talented instructors to take on these projects. However, the popular opinion is "The Missoula Children's Theatre is comes each year, and they take care of that."

The best residency offering in oral history in the state is currently entitled *The Montana Heritage Project*. *The Montana Heritage Project* provides an opportunity for teachers to receive funding, planning, and assistance in the development of oral history projects.<sup>23</sup> The program is administered by the American Folklife Center with a local Montana coordinator.

When a teacher is selected to participate in the project they are provided with monies for project supplies and consultancies. The selection of a consultant or artist is up to the host teacher. Each teacher or teaching team is required to attend a summer institute. Procedures, forms, reports, deadlines, and advice are provided to help keep each project on track and to assess the project's success or failure. Archival copies of each project are also maintained through the American Folklife Center and the Montana Historical Society.

The program generally involves students in the collection and publication of oral histories from their community's elders. Additional projects have involved the development of video productions, archeological studies, and dramatic performances.

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<sup>23</sup><http://www.edheritage.org/index.htm>

The program allows for a “... community itself [to become] the subject of study, [where] high-quality academic learning occurs as students serve the community by gathering its history and telling its stories.”<sup>24</sup>

Future cooperation between *The Montana Heritage Project* and *The Story of Our Town* would be beneficial as the two programs fit together well. *The Montana Heritage Project* teacher could collect, analyze, record, and archive oral histories while *The Montana Story* project teacher could facilitate the creative adaptation of these stories and information through dramatic means. This would be a highly successful marriage between the two projects.

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<sup>24</sup><http://www.edheritage.org/flag.htm>



## Observations

First, most of the classrooms we visited were traditional in nature. The desks were arranged in rows. The students were most often engaged in activities which comprised a logical mathematical approach to learning. They listened to lectures, took notes, read in books, produced written papers or projects, and participated in discussions.

Of the nineteen schools we visited in the three month period for our story collecting tour, fifty three percent of the schools were high schools while forty two percent of the schools served middle school students.<sup>25</sup> Thirty percent of the high schools offered a one semester course in drama while fifty percent of the middle schools also offered at least a one semester course in drama. It is important to note here that the course offering of one semester is not for all students. In Montana, where drama is offered, most schools offer only a one semester course and the course is an elective for a maximum load of twenty five students each year. Indeed, only one middle school of all schools visited made drama available to all of its students. Here the course was a six week survey of drama.<sup>26</sup>

Frankly, this is not encouraging. If one looked at an above average Montana school where enrollment is approximately 250 students in grades nine through twelve, the drama course taken by twenty five students for one semester represents two percent of an individual's total academic training during high school. Conversely, a course offering in math or English may represent seventeen percent of the student's academic training in the

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<sup>25</sup>Totals do not equal ten percent because one school served elementary students.

<sup>26</sup>See Appendix B, p. 75.

subject if the student takes advantage of the full four year course offerings provided. Additionally, this particular school allocates nineteen percent of its resources to the teaching of math or English. Here there are three teachers in each math or English department and the teachers each teach five courses or ten semesters per year in their content area. The drama teacher on the other hand, teaches a one semester course in drama while teaching nine other semester units in English. Therefore, the school's allocation of resources to drama represents one percent of their total commitment to drama as compared to all other course offerings for the year.<sup>27</sup>

According to a 1997 study in drama done as part of The National Assessment of Educational Progress or NAEP, ten percent of all eighth grade students receive instruction in drama and or theater three or four days per week.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the most discouraging news to theater educators across the nation is that the NAEP assessment settled on thirty hours of instruction as representative of a student's baseline knowledge in the domain. These thirty hours of instruction were a basis for assessing theater instruction in the schools. Frankly, as a teacher, thirty hours is barely enough time to begin to discover a student's interests, goals, and desires-- hardly a place to take stock of how a program is doing. A high school English student receives 188 hours of instruction in language arts while attending one year of high school. Students who participate in a performance rehearsal process residency conducted by the Missoula Children's Theater across

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<sup>27</sup>See Appendix A, p. 74.

<sup>28</sup>Persky, Sandene, and Askew, The NAEP 1997 Arts Report Card: Eighth-Grade Findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center For Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1999), p. 145.

Montana and the nation receive twenty to twenty seven hours of *instruction* through this residency program alone.<sup>29</sup> And students who participated in *The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town* typically received from twelve to eighteen hours of instruction in drama.

Secondly, this project shows that the dramatic arts can be an integral part of a process where the use of the multiple intelligences is part of the design for teaching and learning. Students wrote their interviews as essays, scripts, or outlines. They used their skills in English. Students interviewed elders. They used their skills in speech. Students conducted research, placed events in time, and they related these events of the individual's existence in a culture to that of the larger society at the time. They used their skills in history. Students also operated cameras, used computers and tape recorders. They used their skills in technology. While developing skits, the students used skills in socialization, the use of the body, expression, communication, speech, projection, team work, directing, and composition. They used their skills in drama. Finally, the project provided for the integration of the visual arts to augment and reinforce other concepts before an audience. They used their skills in the visual arts. In this way, *The Montana Story Tour* provided for the integration of many skills, domains, and intelligences within the learning process.

This sort of integration in teaching and learning is important as it provides for a range of achievement which is not limited by one or two intelligences which concentrate

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<sup>29</sup>Personal interview with Jim Carron at The Missoula Children's Theater September 27, 1999.

mainly on an individual's success in the logical and mathematical. For example, Aiken Elementary School in Aiken, South Carolina adopted a model of instruction which included the weaving of the arts throughout the mandated state curriculum. The school's adoption of an intrinsic arts model showed promising results. At Aiken Elementary two in five entering first graders have Chapter One eligibility rates which are four to six points higher than their peers in the rest of the school district. However, "... median national percentile ranks place fourth grade Aiken [elementary] students almost twenty percentile points above [other] Aiken [School District] and South Carolina students overall in reading, language, and mathematics."<sup>30</sup> In other words, in four years at Aiken, the students go from being behind their peers to being in front of them. This and other data from Understanding How the Arts Contribute to Excellent Education would suggest that the use of an intrinsic arts teaching model provides an opportunity for students not only to succeed but to achieve at a higher rate of success than those students who do not participate in an arts model.

Third, the arts can be used to strengthen and enliven knowledge of community and place. The students who participated in *The Montana Story Tour* headed out to an elder's home. They took with them prepared questions, a video camera, and note pads. One student asked the questions across the kitchen table in the elder's home while the other students observed, operated the camera, and took notes. Most of their discussion focused on what this older person did for fun among the challenges in moving to

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<sup>30</sup>Bernard J. McMullan et al., Understanding How the Arts Contribute to Excellent Education. (The National Endowment for the Arts, 1991), p45.

Montana and the struggles typical of the decade of their arrival. The students captured stories from real people-- tangible, alive, and inspired. The elder who sat across from them felt honored to be interviewed. Indeed, one commented later to their teacher that: "No one ever asks me any questions. Thanks."<sup>31</sup>

Fourth, one of John Fowler's very relevant points is that the arts represent a group of symbols within a system which have the power to encapsulate images, sounds, actions, events, and other associations from a particular era. He uses the example of the Charleston being evocative of the 1920's while a Strauss Waltz might evoke Vienna in the 1860's. Knowledge of this encapsulation, however, is not intrinsic-- as with any other aspect of culture it requires education.<sup>32</sup> In *The Montana Story Tour* we saw the students begin a process of research which will give them the potential later to connect an elder's stories through drama, writing, and storytelling to ideas presented from their teachers in lectures, books, and movies. Ultimately, they will remember these stories in their bodies because they have created and enacted something. The learning process is enriched, and we are beginning to teach these students about the movements in a culture which represent rural Montana. Indeed, a sense of place, belonging, and time.

Fifth, using drama as a teaching tool allows for cross curricular teaching and creative possibilities. As we saw in Corvallis, Montana. Visual art, historical research, oral histories, writing, and acting can come together as tools in a creative and distinctive

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<sup>31</sup>The author's observation in Rudyard, Montana.

<sup>32</sup>Charles Fowler. Strong Arts, Strong Schools. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 28.

process. The performance in Corvallis specifically featured, in its use of scenic projections, both original student artwork and archival photographs. One scene for example, represented *The Sandwich Thief*. Here the basic idea involved a thief who stole sandwiches from two lockers. The victims returned home each night to ask their mother and father for help in catching the would be criminal. To facilitate these rapid changes in location: hallway of lockers, cafeteria, and home– the students used three pieces of original art to tell the audience where the characters were at a given moment. A student artist had to draw these pieces and in so doing she also encapsulated in the drawing her unique understanding of the symbol systems and cultures at work as represented in her experience and the experience of the story. The result was a stronger, richer and more layered performance as different symbol systems– drama, and visual art– were used to tell a story.

Sixth, students should work in a way which emphasizes their individual strengths over that of their weakness where the use of drama as a teaching tool allows for individual differences in skill, knowledge, and purpose. Such group process work allows for an incorporation of the individual's strengths because the group has greater flexibility in the assignment of tasks over that of the individual taking on the same project. As we saw in the Stevensville students' representation of the *Great Creamery Fire*, an idea– that of using the hands and body to represent the flames of the fire– can start with one student and then be adapted and learned by the others in the group. The group's creation is stronger in its resulting communication and performance than that of the single individual completing the same project.

Similarly, while playing a dramatic game such as *Change the Object*, students can learn from each other. Some students will be more successful in communicating their ideas. Their success in the game provides an opportunity for other students in the group to catch on to the symbol systems and conventions at work. Since the exercise is represented as a game, other students in the group begin to say, "Oh, I get it." What is amazing here is that the students begin to understand and use a great deal of information in their portrayal of various stories. They begin to tap into an entire array of social and object skills and knowledge which has been gained throughout their lifetime in interacting with people and things.

Seventh, an artist in residency program must be flexible if it is to be successful. As we saw from the selected workshop and diary entries, none of the workshops or residencies was exactly the same. Certainly, there were familiar points in the creative process in each. However, the artists and teachers adapted particular strategies to different school situations. In Stevensville, the artists and students had to finish up collecting, recording, and understanding some of the remaining oral histories before they could proceed to develop skits. While in Moore the teacher and his students had covered these elements in the creative process before the artists' arrival. With this residency program such flexibility was fundamental. Again, asking the Corvallis sixth graders to develop the same level of performance as that created by the Stevensville third year drama students would have most certainly set up the Corvallis sixth graders to fail.

Eighth, such educational experiences can also be related to service. Again, the students not only honored the elders and teachers in their community by collecting

stories; they also honored these community members with their performances. In Savage, for example, the students used their skits to create a desert theater showing for the elders who had contributed to the project. Here the students received a standing ovation for their interpretations of the stories and they raised in excess of 300 dollars for their efforts. In Corvallis the students presented two performances, each of which was attended by approximately 100 people. Again, the students received accolades for their efforts and community members asked for copies of the stories and of the performance.

Ninth, host teacher preparation and planning was key to having an artist residency program which was intrinsic to the school's curriculum. After all, our program of instruction requires a good deal of time in order to get started. Hearing the students' collected stories and beginning to develop and choose skit material requires at least half a day. Where we were most successful we had at least two full days with the students. At the end of this time, we were able to have developed skits, related to a theme, ready for rehearsal which would lead to performance. When the host teacher was not prepared, we appeared to be a *fun time* arts program just as Fowler relates in his criticism of residency programs in Strong Arts, Strong Schools.

Tenth, while creating these stories, the students saw the positive aspects of homework. In a sense, they were tricked into this observation. By interviewing and reaching out into their community, the students studied a particular place, era, and time in a culture. They didn't know this at first. However, when they brought this knowledge represented by stories back to the group, the students were rewarded for their knowledge. As Dewey asserts experiential education must make use of the knowledge possessed by



the learner.<sup>33</sup> In addition, Charles Fowler also states that the arts represent a unique teaching tool in that by having to draw on their own inner resources, students discover their own cognitive abilities.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, the [dramatic] arts can enliven and enrich existing curricula -- ensuring student engagement in the learning process.<sup>35</sup> The arts can be used to prepare a structure for learning. For example, as was the case in Savage, Montana the period of *The Dirty Thirties* can be studied in history class while the English students set about the task of gathering, and adapting oral histories from community elders. Such an integrated approach to the use of the dramatic arts means that students must encode and decode. They must first learn about a particular period in history, conduct research, and prepare; then, they must decode that research through their own creation. Yet, when the students present their own performances, they have again encoded ideas and symbols in their creation where the audience may then interpret the work anew. "The arts are the means that humans have invented to convey their world as they experience it. Since the arts are the ways that people represent their perceptions of the world, they also are ways of knowing that world."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>John Dewey. Experience and Education. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938), pp. 43-72.

<sup>34</sup>Fowler, p. 57.

<sup>35</sup>Fowler, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup>Fowler, p. 72.

## Recommendations

In my opinion, *The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town* would benefit from a few alterations in the future. First of all, cooperation with The Montana Heritage Project would help to broaden the teachers served through *The Montana Story Tour* while also augmenting the story tour with more advisors and resources. A Stevensville, Montana history teacher has participated in The Montana Heritage project for two years. This teacher's expertise would have been helpful to our work in Stevensville. Secondly, *The Montana Story Tour* would benefit from continued contact with other educational outreach providers across the state. This knowledge of other programming would be helpful. Artists from The Montana Repertory Theatre could help to sell other programs to potential clients while also using this program knowledge to strengthen and deepen The Montana Repertory Theatre's own programs. Thirdly, *The Montana Story Tour* would benefit from the incorporation of The Montana State Arts Council's guidelines for preparing for and evaluating artist in the schools residencies. The state arts council has an extensive resource available on line at their website. Finally, it would be helpful to include more on site interaction from the community elders. In Stevensville and Cut Bank, these elders were available through various elements of the process. Participation and feedback from the elders helped to deepen the students' relationship to their community, their elders, the stories, their history, and their place.

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## Selected Photographs



A Broadus elementary student, the cowboy, rides on the back of the family horse portrayed by a Broadus High School Drama Student.



Two Stevensville High School students use an improvised interview process between a student and an elder as a frame for their series of scenes as adapted from an actual interview.

A Stevensville student acts out the role of the prank oriented burning outhouse on the streets of Stevensville on Halloween night.



## Partial List of Produced Media

### Television:

“Corvallis Stories.” KECI Missoula, 14 April, 2000

“Under the Big Sky.” KPAX Missoula, 19 March, 2000

### Newspaper:

“Going back in time: Savage students use skits to tell about town’s history,”  
Sidney Herald-Leader, 19 March 2000, Sec A, p. 1.

“Preserving Stories,” The Missoulian, 10 April 2000, Sec. B, p. 1- 2.

“Montana Story Tour: the story of our town,” Sidney Herald-Leader, 12 March  
2000, Sec. A, p. 6.

“Remembering When,” Whitehall Ledger, 23 February 2000, p.1 and 24.



## Sample Student Work

Following is an example of written work students did in preparation for our visit in Whitehall, Montana. This particular piece was produced by a group of middle school students following their interview with Mr. Patacini.

### Interview Essay

Dynamite, vacations, and the Patacinis don't mix. While interviewing Mr. Patacini we found out a lot of interesting stuff. Mr. Patacini told us about all kinds of things when he was growing up. Some of them were riding horses, working, and vacations. Mr. Patacini had a wild and entertaining life growing up in Whitehall.

Mr. Patacini likes to tell stories about what he did years ago for entertainment. He told us about how he liked to go dancing in Butte, Three Forks, and Twin Bridges. I think his favorite part of the interview was telling us a story about his son. His story was about the time his son was riding a colt down the road with him. He told his son, Tim, about a horse fly on the colt so instead of brushing it away with the rope, Tim slapped the horsefly. The colt took off bucking and Tim got bucked off. Tim told him to ride his own horses, but had to snub the horse whether he liked it or not. Mr. Patacini had many stories he would have like to have shared with us.

Mr. Patacini told us about his daily life, too. After school he milked cows. He never had any homework to worry about. On the weekend he skated and danced for entertainment. In the winter he did about everything outside. When he was inside he ate, slept, and played poker. On the weekends he stayed out as long as he wanted, which was often until three or four in the morning. He had a very busy daily life.

Mr. Patacini liked to listen to the radio, watch TV, and go to the theater. He got his first radio in 1932. He listened to mostly Western music. He then got his first TV in 1955. He watched the Wizard of Oz and Ted Max. He remembered going to the theater and paying \$0.40 to get in. When he went his favorite movies were Gone with the Wind and Road Shows. Those were his encounters with the "new" entertainment back then.

Mr. Patacini had an interesting experience with dynamite. He was about twelve when he had his "wonderful" experience. He was playing with dynamite caps with some friends. First, they caught a mouse. He tied the mouse to the dynamite caps. The dynamite blew up, hitting him in the chest. I'm guessing that the mouse never saw the light of day again. There is still parts of the dynamite left in his chest. Let this be a lesson to everyone about playing with dynamite.

As we have just told you dynamite, vacations, and Mr. Patacini don't mix. He was a very interesting interviewee. He told us about some memorable moments in his life. He also told us about some of the things he did everyday. He has lived a long and happy life. He had a wild and entertaining life growing up in Whitehall.

## **Educational Outreach Provided By Others in Montana**

### **Research Methodology**

My method for assessing the state of educational outreach conducted by other theatre companies in Montana was to call the chambers of commerce for each major urban center in the state. I asked each chamber to provide a list of the theatre companies in operation for each area. I further asked for professional, community, and college or university based programs. Billings, Missoula, Butte, and Bozeman responded. From this list I called each organization to inquire of their educational outreach or artist in residency programs to Montana Public Schools in 1999 and 2000.

Following is a summary of those responses:

### **State Wide**

Montana Arts Council

<http://www.art.state.mt.us/>

Operates a program entitled Artists in the Schools and another program entitled Arts-Pros. The artists in the schools program facilitates the placement and funding of artist in residency programs in drama and the other arts. The program has standards for workshop development, student contact hours, length of residency and presentation. Further information is available via the agency's web site.

### **Bozeman Area**

Bozeman Chamber of Commerce

406-586-5421

Equinox Theatre Company

<http://www.equinoxtheatre.com>

406-587-0737

In 1999, Equinox Theatre Company completed 5 two week residencies in Bozeman area elementary and middle schools. Said residencies comprised two weeks of instruction in improvisation and theater games. The artist worked with five to six classes each day. Equinox Theatre Company also operates a fee based after-school program as well as a summer day camp in drama. The fee for these workshops is twenty dollars per hour.

Shakespeare in the Parks

406-994-3901

In 2000, Shakespeare in the parks will conduct a twenty nine day tour with school based performances and workshops. This is a fee based program with a cost of 750 dollars per day. The troupe performs in the school and conducts workshops. Workshops may be on any topic related to the production and understanding of Shakespeare. There is no limit as to the number of students contacted in each workshop. The residency is for one day only.

Vigilante Theatre Company  
406-586-3897

In 1999 the Vigilante Theatre Company put on two performances each of which had smaller cut performances in schools. Wolf one of the productions was an original work which examined the reintroduction of wolves in native habitat. The smaller version of the full length play was presented in 10 schools with workshops as well.

Playmill Theatre Company  
West Yellowstone  
406-646-7757

The Playmill Theatre Company is a summer musical production company only. No educational outreach is done through out the school year.

**Butte Area**  
Butte Chamber of Commerce  
406-723-3177

Mother Load and Orphan Girl Theater  
406-723-3602

The Mother Load Theater is primarily a booking and host agent for touring companies. The Orphan Girl Theatre Company, however, is primarily a children's theatre company using children and adolescents as talent in their productions. In 1999, for example, The Orphan Girl Theatre Company presented Bang Bang You're Dead, a William Masterson production which examines a school shooting. The production cast included young people and toured to eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and hosted a visit for students of a local treatment center.

**Helena Area**  
Helena Chamber of Commerce  
406-442-4120

Myrna Loy Center for The Performing Arts  
406-443-0287

The Myrna Loy center is primarily a hosting and booking agent for touring companies. Educational outreach opportunities may be provided by said touring companies if available.

Grandstreet Theatre  
406-442-4270

The Grandstreet Theatre Company offers classes for fees after school as well as varied artist placements in schools. The theatre company did not return requested information.

**Billings Area**

Billings Chamber of Commerce  
406-245-4111, 252-4016

Alberta Bair  
406-256-8915  
<http://www.albertabairtheater.org/>  
Education Director, Bess Fredlund

The Alberta Bair while primarily a hosting and booking agent does provide a well developed educational outreach program with three components. The programs elements include: professional development for teachers, performances for schools, and workshops by visiting artists and performers. The professional development workshops for teachers are taught by local and visiting artists and are designed to “help them integrate the arts into their [the teacher’s] teaching situations by reinforcing classroom curricula.”<sup>37</sup> The performances for schools portion of the Alberta Bair’s educational outreach program hosts matinees specifically designed for students at discounted rates. Study guides are available. The outreach portion of the program seems rather poorly developed as indicated by: “Occasionally, the visiting performing artists are available to speak, teach and / or perform out in the community. These events are scheduled whenever possible, often with little advance notice.”<sup>38</sup>

Venture Theatre  
406-655-4224

The theatre company did not return requested information.

**Missoula Area**  
Missoula Chamber of Commerce  
406-543-6623

Missoula Children's Theatre  
406-728-1911  
<http://www.mctinc.org/>

The Missoula Children’s Theatre Company operates script based production workshops in all of the United States as well as seven foreign countries. The residencies last one week, occur after school and in the evening, and produce a play using elementary aged children and a male female actor director team. Typically, productions center on traditional children’s stories and fairy tales with new adaptations. The plays are musicals and the sets and costumes are provided for the students. A typical student receives twenty seven hours of instruction through the program.

University of Montana-- Missoula, Department of Drama Dance

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<sup>37</sup><http://www.albertabairtheater.org/educ.htm>

<sup>38</sup>ibid

406-243-4481

<http://www.sfa.umt.edu/drama/>

The department places students in schools for limited projects at the request of interested students and schools. I personally participated in one such placement where I worked with three ninth grade English classes on adapted performances for Romeo and Juliet. The residency took place for two days each week for a period of five weeks.

Montana Repertory Theatre Company

406-243-6809

<http://www.umt.edu/mrt/mrt.html>

The Montana Rep has conducted a variety of educational outreach programs in drama and has a part time educational outreach coordinator as well as a part time grant writer. Most notably, the company provides workshops and training as part of its local and national touring productions. A Grand Night for Singing, for example, provided workshops in voice while the tour production of *It's a Wonderful Life* also provided workshops in dramatics and acting. The company also has produced well developed artist in residency programs which have taken a number of forms. In addition to the most recent outreach effort of *The Montana Story Tour: the story of our town*, the company has also developed what was called *Literate Theatre*. This project trained a group of 10 undergraduate and graduate students in classroom outreach and facilitated the work of these students in local English classrooms. The residencies took place mainly within English and Language Arts classes in public schools. The goal of *Literate Theatre* was to use dramatic teaching and learning activities to illuminate the English text being studied in each class at the time of the residency.

YMCA/Flagship Schools

406-721-9622

Through the Flagship Program the YMCA conducts long term after-school residencies in local elementary schools. Two artists work at each school with students in the study of improvisation, theater games, and the students and artists produce a final presentation each semester.

Hamilton Players

406-375-9050

The community theater in Hamilton, Montana hosts a two week summer day camp experience for children with a final production.

## Appendix A

Courses as Compared to Allocated Resources at Glasgow High School Glasgow, MT

<b>Glasgow High School</b>			
<b>Subject</b>	<b>FTE</b>	<b>Sub/Yr</b>	<b>% of Total Resources</b>
<b>Total Courses</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100%</b>
English	3	30	19%
Math	3	30	19%
Science	3	20	13%
Home Ec	1	10	6%
Business	1	10	6%
PE	1	10	6%
Choir	0.5	4	3%
Band	0.5	4	3%
Drama	0.2	1	1%
Special Ed	1	10	6%
Art	1	10	6%
Industrial Art	2	20	13%

## Appendix B

List of Schools visited, grade level, and the number of semesters in drama at each school.

<u>School</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u># Semester</u>	<u>Sections</u>
Whitehall	Middle	1	3
Lolo	Middle	none	
DeSmet	Middle	none	
Rudyard	HS	none	
Moore	HS	1	1
Lewistown	HIS	1	1
Poplar	HIS	none	
Savage	HIS	none	
Lone Rock	Middle	none	
Victor	HIS	none	
Great Falls	HIS	2	3
Shelby	Middle	none	
Cutbank	HIS	none	
Stevensville	HIS	2	3
CS Porter	Middle	1	1
Corvallis	Middle	6 wks	
CS Porter	Middle	1	1
Broadus	Elm	none	
Hardin	HIS	1	1

## Appendix C

Percentage of schools visited offering drama as compared to all schools and as compared to like schools.

<b><u>Drama Offered</u></b>		
<b>All Schools</b>	<b>19</b>	
None	10	53% No Drama Offered
1 Semester	6	32% Students May Take One Semester
More Than 1	3	16% Students May Take More Than One Semester
High School	10	53% Percent of Schools Visited
Middle School	8	42% Percent of Schools Visited
<b><u>Only High Schools</u></b>		
HIS 1 Semester	3	30% Students May Take One Semester
HIS > 1 Semester	2	20% Students May Take More Than One Semester
<b><u>Only Middle Sch</u></b>		
MS 1 Semester	4	50% Students May Take One Semester
MS > 1 Semester	1	13% Students May Take More Than One Semester