

7-1-2014

The One Voice Project

Amanda Rose Hartley Villarreal
Central Washington University

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WHEN WE STAND UP AND SPEAK WITH

ONE VOICE

WE CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

MAY 15, 2014 AT 12:30 PM

THE DENVER CENTER FOR PERFORMING ARTS
1101 13TH ST, DENVER, CO 80204

MAY 15, 2014 AT 6 PM

ELLIS ELEMENTARY
1651 S. DAHLIA ST, DENVER, CO 80222

A PLAY WRITTEN, PRODUCED & PERFORMED BY

EVA SCHLUE, MATTHEW OLIVAS, MUGABE GANY, SARA SHAWIDHI, TUFF LOVE,
ALIYAH JONES, ELIZABETH SERRATOS, JULIE MADEY, KATARINA BURSAC,
MADISON MONTOYA, SIERRA ZUCKER, AMNA ANDROVIC, TIPPY TEAWDESWAN,
DANIEL SERRATOS, DEJA THOMAS, ISHMAEL DOMINGUEZ, SADE REESE, SARA ZUCKER

DIRECTED BY AMANDA ROSE VILLARREAL

The One Voice Project

A Project and Process Report

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Theatre Production

By

Amanda Rose Hartley Villarreal

July 01, 2014

McConnell Hall 117

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

We hereby approve the project report of

Amanda Rose Hartley Villarreal

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts:

Theatre Production

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

7/2/14

Date of Signature

Professor Christina Barrigan, Committee Chair

7/2/14

Date of Signature

Professor Michael Smith

7/2/14

Date of Signature

Professor George Bellah

ABSTRACT

PROJECT REPORT

The One Voice Project

Ellis Elementary, Denver Public School District

Directed and Designed by

Amanda Rose Hartley Villarreal

Written in Cooperation with Ellis Elementary Students

January of 2014 through May of 2014

Ellis Elementary is an inner-city school that serves a multi-lingual population and serves a demographic consisting primarily of international refugee groups and low-income households. 97% of Ellis Elementary students are on the free lunch and breakfast program, and the school is labeled as a hard-to-serve community because of its student demographic. These students have not grown up exposed to the arts, and many perceive theatre as being elitist and unapproachable. This project will aim to help these students realize that theatre can be a means of expression not only for the dominant culture, but for their own voices and experiences. This project will aim to introduce Ellis students to the theatrical devising process, in an attempt to help them analyze their school culture and their own behaviors and to communicate their desire for social change within their community.

CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Graduate Studies

Final Examination of

Amanda Rose Hartley Villarreal

M.A. Central Washington University, 2012

For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Theatre Production

Committee in charge

Professor Christina Barrigan

Professor Michael Smith

Professor George Bellah

McConnell Hall

Rm 117

Wednesday, July 02, 2012

Courses presented for the Master's Degree

Course No.	Course Title	Number of Credits	Instructor	Quarter Completed
TH 536	Advanced Movement: Rasaboxes	3	Forier Edie	Summer 2011
TH 501	Introduction to Graduate Studies	1	Bellah	Summer 2011
TH 540	Graduate Directing I	3	Smith	Summer 2011
TH 583	Settings and Properties	3	Barnett	Summer 2011
TH 510	Studies in Dramatic Literature	4	Hubbard	Summer 2011
TH 539	Directing and Teaching Young Actors	3	Forier Edie	Summer 2011
TH 568	Lighting Techniques	3	Barrigan	Summer 2011
TH 544	Acting Styles Application	3	Hubbard	Summer 2011
TH 542	Musical Theatre Directin	4	Brown	Summer 2012
TH 502	Intro to Creative Project	1	Bellah	Summer 2012
TH 511	Theory, Literature, and Criticism II	4	Hubbard	Summer 2012
TH 565	Mask and Makeup Methods	3	McMillen	Summer 2012
TH 566	Creative Costuming Methods	3	McMillen	Summer 2012
TH 541	Graduate Directing II	3	Hubbard	Summer 2013
TH 502	Intro to Creative Project	1	Bellah	Summer 2013
TH 600	Capstone Practicum	1	Hubbard	Summer 2013
TH 521	Integrating Drama into the Curriculum	3	Newhouse	Summer 2013
TH 700	Master's Thesis Project	6	Barrigan	Summer 2014

Total Credit Requirements:

52

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Amanda Rose Hartley Villarreal

Undergraduate Study:

Saint Edward's University 2005-2009

University of Georgia Summer 2006

Gonzaga University Summer 2007

Texas Education Agency 2009-2013

Graduate Study:

Central Washington University, 2011-Present

Professional Experience:

Junior High School Theatre Teacher and Director August 2009-May 2013

Elementary Theatre Teacher and Director August 2013-June 2014

Fort Collins Children's Theatre Technical Director April 2014-July 2014

High School Technical Director and Auditorium Manager June 2014-Present

Colorado State University B.R.A.I.N.Y Program Assistant May 2014-Present

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Section 1:

Preliminary Information

MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT PLAYSCRIPT APPROVAL FORM

(PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE READ THE PLAY SELECTION CRITERIA SECTION IN YOUR GRADUATE HANDBOOK)

Student Name Amanda Rose Villarreal **Anticipated Production Dates** Spring 2014

SCRIPT TITLE The One Voice Project
PLAYWRIGHT(S) [If musical, list lyricist/composer] Amanda Villarreal and Students: To Be Determined
NUMBER OF ACTS 1 APPROXIMATE TOTAL PLAYING TME Less than 40 MIN.

CAST (fill in with the appropriate numbers)

MEN 0 WOMEN 0 CHILDREN t.b.d OVER 40 none

ROLES REQUIRING PEOPLE OF COLOR t.b.d ROLES COULD DOUBLE most roles

TOTAL NUMBER OF CAST t.b.d

OTHER CASTING CONCERNS:

ARTISTIC STAFF (check those needed for this play or production idea) double click on grey box; select checked to mark or use a pen

MUSICAL DIRECTOR DANCE CHOREOGRAPHER FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER

DIALECT COACH SPECIALTY HIRE (specify what kind)

ORCHESTRA/BAND (specify what size) _____

Will you be fulfilling any of the above? -- ALL If so, which?

Will a guest artist be fulfilling any of the above? We may partner with community performers for improv workshops If so, which?

SCENERY/PROPS (check those needed for this play or your concept of the play)

UNIT SET? YES NO NUMBER OF LOCATIONS _____

HISTORICAL PERIOD modern day GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION Colorado

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SET CONCERNS OR SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

The set will consist primarily of a blank stage, with small props and set pieces being moved and reorganized between different scenes or vignettes to communicate the various settings, which will be designed and determined as the students progress in writing the script.

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PROPS t.b.d, limited by bus transportation PERIOD _____

DIFFICULT OR UNUSUAL PROPS? YES NO

DESCRIBE:

SYNOPSIS

This process drama is intended to guide inner-city students of diverse ethnic backgrounds in the discovery of theatre as a viable form of expression in their lives. Many of the students at Ellis Elementary see theatre as an aristocratic art form that is intended for wealthier members of society. Through the course of a 6-week unit, these students will be introduced to different types of performances, from pantomime to monologues, making theatrical performance a less foreign experience. Once they have gained a familiarity with theatre and with different types of performance, the students will be invited to write theatrical performances of their own. These scenes and short plays will aim to communicate not the stories that already seem so elitist to the students, but the stories of their own lives, fears, hopes, and experiences. Through the final performance of these pieces, the students' thoughts, feelings and efforts will be validated. My goal is for this validation to teach the students that creative outlets exist and are far better than the alternative emotional outlets that are common in our area, such as consumption of drugs, participation in crime, or even self-harm.

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

**When We Stand Up and Speak
With One Voice
We Can Change The World**

**A Play
By 19 Students from Ellis
Elementary**

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Scene 1: Nightmares

Lights up on the “Languages” as they speak.

Ishmael-Spanish: Some things I see in my life make me happy.

Katarina-Serbian: Some things I see in my life make me afraid.

Sara S-Arabic: Some things I see in my life make me angry.

Tippy-Thai: Some things I see in my life make me sad.

Everyone: We are young, but we have great hopes and dreams.
We are young, but our nightmares are alive.

1st Dream Theme: Running from monsters.

This scene is a pantomime of someone running in slow motion while a monster becomes bigger and bigger. Eventually, the monster catches up to the runner, and the runner screams and wakes up.

2nd Dream Theme: Getting Kidnapped and Being Alone

In this scene, someone has been kidnapped and is tied up to a chair. The kidnapper threatens to kill all of the other people in the room, but the person tied to the chair tries to convince the kidnapper to let them go, and kill him/her instead. Finally, the kidnapper holds the gun up to the person’s head who is tied to a chair, and pulls the trigger. But this makes all the other people in the room disappear, and the kidnapped person is left alone, tied to the chair.

3rd Dream Theme: Protecting Family

In this scene, two people are running away from something. “Landmines” explode around them, and “creatures” reach up to grab their legs. The older sibling falls and the younger sibling comes to help, but the older sibling yells “GO!” and the younger sibling runs away as the “creatures” hold down the older sibling.

Ishmael: I speak Spanish.

Katarina: I speak Serbian.

Sara S: I speak Arabic.

Tippy: I speak Thai.

Ishmael, Kat, Sara and Tippy: We are young, and we speak many languages.

Everyone: But when we stand up and speak with one voice, we can change the world.

Benjamin: Our nightmares don’t have to be real!

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Scene 2: Ending Racism

Spotlight.

Ishmael: There is racism in my life.

Kat: There is racism in my school.

Sara: There is racism in the world.

Tippy: There is racism all around us.

Everyone: Racism is everywhere.

Lights

Lawyer: Black shirts on the left, white shirts on the right!

Everybody separates to their side.

A white shirt kid texts a black shirt kid

Tuff: Did you just text one of them?

Aliyah: Yeah, so?

Julie: Their shirts aren't like our shirts. They look different. You shouldn't talk to them.

Aliyah: But she's my friend.

Julie: But they're not like us!

Eva: What do you mean, we're not like you?

Tuff: You're different!

Eva: What's that supposed to mean?!

Madi: walks into the room wearing a color. Hey guys! What's going on?

Lawyer: yells at 4 Black shirts on the left, white shirts on the right!

Madi: Where do I go? Mine's not black or white.

Daniel: I saw you play soccer. You're really good. You're on our side!

Matthew: Hey that's not fair, we're good at soccer too!

Mugabe: She should be on our team!

Matthew: We want her to be on our side!

Mugabe: No! She should be on our team!

Matthew: She's on our side!

Mugabe: No!

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Daniel: Wait wait wait! I know how to figure out what team you're on! Answer this question. Do you like rap music?

Madi: Yeah! I love rap!

Daniel: Then you're definitely on our team!

Sara Z: Wait a minute, I like rap music too!

Aliyah: Why are you guys even fighting? Don't you see we're just like each other? We all like the same things!

Everyone: Ohhh....

Aliyah: stands up and goes to the lawyer Why are you separating us? We should all be getting along! Goes to stand by kid 4.

Lawyer: My bosses told me to separate you. That's how things have always been. We need to keep it that way. Tries to push the kids apart.

Madi: This is ridiculous. I'm gonna stay right here!

Tuff: I want to stand with them, too!

Lawyer: You can't do that!

Eva: Let's get rid of the border and all stand together!

Lawyer: Hey! I said, You can't do that!!!

Everyone: Who's gonna stop us?

Ishmael: Rules made racism.

Kat: Laws made racism.

Sara: People wanted to change.

Tippy: People made change happen.

Everyone: Change happened, but we act like it's the same.

Scene 3: Languages

Lights

Tuff: Bullying happens a lot. It can be racism, name calling, cyber bullying, or excluding people because of their language. We are going to teach you about language bullying today.

Benjamin: I speak English and Spanish and they are both good languages. But sometimes people are mean to me because I'm speaking a different language. What should I do?

Elizabeth: There are a lot of languages in our world.

- French Francois
- Hebrew Hebrew
- Spanish Espanol
- Thai Phas'a thiy
- Bosnian Bosanski
- Arabic Amhari
- German Deutsch
- Tajik Tajikia
- Sudanese Sudan
- Uzbek Uzbek
- Chinese Zhongguo de
- Serbian Serbski
- Indian Malayalam
- Vietnamese Viet

There are people on phones talking in their own languages. Some are just sitting and talking to each other in their own languages! They are all saying "Hi mom will you come pick me up from school? I got a good grade on my test today. Hi mom will you come pick me up from school? I got a good grade on my test today. Hi mom will you come pick me up from school?"

People who don't speak another language speak in gibberish to make the sound confusing.

They keep talking until the person in the middle curls up into a ball covering their ears because they are so confused, left out and annoyed.

Everyone stops talking and stares at the person in the middle.

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Sierra: Sometimes when people around us speak other languages, we feel very excluded and awkward and confused. It makes us feel alone. People can feel scared even if you are speaking in English. The world is intimidating if one of us does not understand.

The people pass a whisper around the circle.

Sierra: Sometimes, when people speak other languages, we think they are gossiping, or saying bad things about us, but they are not.

Amna: We should all speak the same so we can understand each other.

Tippy: But we are all equal. Our languages are all unique and we should be able to speak them. We shouldn't have to forget our languages!

Daniel: but that person only speaks English. And we all speak English, too!

Eva: Hey I can understand you now!

Kat: Duuuuuuhhh... that's because we're speaking English now! Didn't you know we can speak English?

Eva: I didn't understand you before and it made me feel overwhelmed and nervous. So you don't have to be so mean to me.

Benjamin: We can all speak our Awesome languages at home still, because we speak lots of languages and have mad skillz! But when we're together we can all speak the same language to help us get along.

Eva: That would be great! Let's be friends!

All: Let's be friends!

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Scene 4: Bully Circle/Name Calling

Spotlight

Ishmael: We say we don't want to be mean.

Kat: We say we want to be friends.

Sara: And friends stick together, right?

Tippy: Isn't helping your friends good?

Sara Z: Standing up for your friends is a good thing.

Everyone: But when groups of friends fight, trying to be nice can turn into bullying.

Lights.

The 3 Friends Enter

Sade: That was so funny! Did you see when Manuel fell?

Sara Z: Yeah that was so funny! I can't believe you pulled his chair!

Amna: It was such a good joke!

They laugh and high five. Two other kids come in.

Benjamin: What're you guys talking about? That was so not cool.

Deja: I wish that would have happened to you guys, then your head would have cracked and I wouldn't have to look at your ugly face.

Deja and Madi: U-G-L-Y You aint got no alibi, you ugly! Yeah yeah you ugly!

The mean kids laugh

Sade: Shut up, Oompah Loompah!

Deja: I'm not from the Chocolate Factory. I'm from Jamaica. Leave me alone!

Julie: Yeah leave her alone! You don't fit in anywhere. You're shorter than me and I'm a 3rd grader!

Sara Z: Leave me alone! I am who I am!

Benjamin: We'll leave you alone when you stop being mean to Manuel and other kids in the class.

Deja: Yeah! You're mean to our friends so we're going to be mean to you!

Sade: You're mean to us, so we're going to be mean to your friends!

Julie: We're only mean to you because we're standing up for our friend. You started it!

Sara Z: Pulling Manuel's chair was a joke! We weren't even being mean!

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Deja: Manuel didn't think it was so funny. You WERE being mean!

Sade: Was not!

Benjamin: Were too!

Sara Z: You started it!

Julie: Did not!

Sara Z: Did too!

Benjamin: You guys are jerks!

Sade: You guys are bullies!

Ishmael: You bullied our friend!

Amna: STOOOOOOP!!!!!!!

They all stop arguing and look at Kid 2.

Sara Z: You're on our side, right?

Amna: I was before, but this is crazy! We're all going in a circle and this bullying is never going to end! Don't you see if we keep doing this we will always keep hurting each other and it will never end?

They all think for a minute.

Sade: I never thought of it that way.

Ishmael: I guess you're right.

Amna: We hurt each other to get back at each other, but then they want to get back at us and it will never end if we keep acting this way. We need to find a way to get along!

Sara Z:um.... I like to dance.... Does anybody else like to dance?

Deja, Ben and Julie: We LOVE to dance!

Sara Z: What are we waiting for? Let's Boogey!

ONE TRIBE

Scene 5: Words Hurt

Last scene starts with all the students on stage. Each student points, and says the worst insult that other people have said to them. After each line, the ensemble mimes getting hit.

Madi: You're stupid. You can't even speak English!

Tuff: You're fat as a pig!

Matthew: You're uglier than a broken tv

Mugabe: You're a butthead

Sara S: You're uglier than ugly with a capitol u

Deja: You look like a girl

Daniel: You can't play with us! You're too small.

Aliyah: I hate you, fatty!

Sade: You're a fat cloud!

Benjamin: You're a freak.

Sara Z: You should jump off a building

Julie: You're a booger eater!

Eva: You are dopey and dumb! You'll never be good at anything.

Elizabeth: You should go walk off a cliff!

Kat: Your accent makes you sound like an idiot!

Tippy: Nobody wants to hang out with you

CC: You're one of the stupidest people in the world. You're a beach.

Ishmael: You can't do it. In fact, you can't do anything. You're uglier than slinderman!

Amna: You're dumb and nobody likes you!

The students stand still for a moment, and then each student says the worst insult that they ever tell themselves. Each student points to themselves while they say their line, and then fall, as though they've died.

Kat: I am unwanted and unneeded. Nobody loves me.

Mugabe: I am miserable. I'm the worst script writer in the world.

Tuff: I am a cold hearted person. I'm a jerk. I'm evil.

Daniel: I'm a crybaby. I'm stupid.

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Sade: I'm a horrible person. I am miserable. I make everyone mad.

Aliyah: I hate myself because of my height and my weight and the way I look.

Julie: I'm a disgrace to everyone.

Deja: Nobody cares about me.

Ishmael: I am dumb and ugly. I wish I could kill myself.

Matthew: I am a bad person. I am bad.

Sara S: I feel like I'm the only person who shouldn't exist and I want to cry so much.

Sara Z: I'm a dirty, horrible person.

Amna: I'm so dumb. I feel like giving up.

CC: I am horrible. I can't do anything right..

Madi: I'm invisible to everyone and I won't ever have friends.

Eva: I don't deserve to be loved.

Elizabeth: If I kill myself, nobody will miss me.

Tippy: I can't be myself because everyone will hate me.

Ben: I hate myself.

After all characters have "died" the lights turn off. The languages come to the front of the stage, and say:

Ishmael: People are bullies when they are mean to us.

Kat: Sometimes we are bullies to ourselves.

Sara S: When we bully ourselves, we are meaner than other people.

Tippy: When we hurt ourselves, it's worse than when other people are mean to us.

Ishmael: Bullying ruins friendships

Kat: Bullying ruins our feelings about ourselves

Sara S: Bullying ruins our personalities

Tippy: Bullying can even hurt our families

Everyone: We can't stop others from bullying

Benjamin: But we can start by changing ourselves! And if we all stand up and speak with

Everyone: One Voice!

When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice We Can Change The World

Benjamin: We can change the world!

Everyone: We can change the world!

Man In The Mirror

The End!

**GRADUATE COMMITTEE AND OPTION APPROVAL FORM
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
(Submit the original)**

Note: This form is to be completed as soon as the student has formed a committee and selected an option from the list below. Submit original to the Office of Graduate Studies in Barge 305.

Name: Amanda Rose Hartley Birth Date: _____
 Address: Villarreal Student ID: _____
 Email: _____

Check option: _____ Indicate credits to be received for the thesis or option:

- Written Exam*
 - Project
 - Creative Project
 - Studio Project
 - Portfolio Review
 - Thesis (standard)
 - Thesis (journal-ready)
 - Provide journal guidelines plus a recent article from that journal in student's field of study.
- | | Course No. | Title | Credits |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| | TH 700 | Master's Thesis Project | 6 |
| | Course No. | Title | Credits |
| | Style Manual for Thesis/Project | | |

*Students taking written exam option may omit items 1-5 below.

1. Proposed Title (and title of targeted journal if appropriate):
Ellis Process Drama: The Exploration of Theatre as a Means for Social Change

2. Purpose of Study:
Through character building activities and the exploration of theatrical performance techniques, elementary students will be introduced to a new form of expression.

3. Scope of Study:
Documentation includes the pre-production planning and research, in-rehearsal journal and educational experiences, and all aspects of the devising and performance of a theatrical production through which students will explore theatre as a viable form of expression.

4. Procedure to be used:
The play devising process will be divided into three components: Planning, Practicing, and Performing

5. Does the procedure involve collection of data obtained from
 Human Subjects (including use of surveys)? Yes** No
 Use of Animals? Yes** No

** If yes, your procedures must be approved in writing by the Human Subjects Committee or the Animal Care and Use Committee before you initiate your research.

<u>Christina Barrigan</u>		<u>7/15/13</u>
Committee Chair (typed or printed)		Date
<u>Michael Smith</u>		<u>7/15/13</u>
Committee Member (typed or printed)		Date
<u>George Bellah</u>		<u>7/15/13</u>
Committee Member (typed or printed)		Date

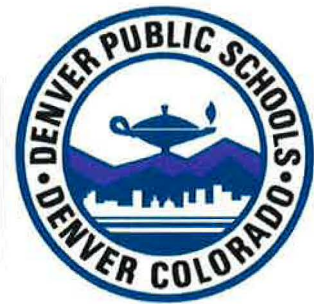
Approved by: <u>SIGNATURE ILLEGIBLE</u>	<u>6/10/14</u>	Approved by: _____
Dept Chair/Designee (signature)	Date	Dean of Graduate Studies
		Date

*in the case of interdisciplinary programs, this form should be signed by the relevant Program Director/Co-Director AND relevant Dept chair. In cases where they cannot agree to sign for approval, the approval will be made or denied by the relevant interdisciplinary program advisory committee. GS&R 04/10

Please Note: Signatures have been redacted for security reasons.

Ellis Elementary School

1651 South Dahlia Street
Denver, CO 80222
Work 720-424-7700
Fax 720-424-7725



Mr. Khoa Nguyen
Principal, Ellis Elementary
1650 So. Dahlia Street
Denver, CO 80222

To Whom It May Concern:

Amanda Rose Villarreal has proposed to complete a drama project with her drama club that emphasizes our Unified Improvement Plan by supporting rigorous content in her drama curriculum. This project will include a play written by students. We at Ellis Elementary are pleased to have this project added to our curriculum.

We have met and discussed the parameters and goals of this project, and the project has been approved for implementation during the spring semester. Ms. Villarreal's project will have students working together to write a play about the culture and their experiences at Ellis Elementary. The play's plot will be determined by the students, but the focus of the play will be ending bullying. Ellis's administration supports the development of this project in hopes that its completion will add character education to our curriculum in the drama classes and in drama club. This project will help Ellis Eagles S.O.A.R.

Khoa Nguyen

Please note: A signature has been redacted due to security reasons.

Principal
Ellis Elementary
khoa_nguyen@dpsk12.org
720-424-7702

PROJECT PARAMETERS FOR PROCESS PROJECT

The audience for our one performance will consist of Ellis Elementary students, parents, faculty, and community members; this demographic includes a diverse array of individuals. Our audience may include speakers of over 30 different languages that are represented in the Ellis student population. Individuals in our audience will range in origin from Denver natives to individuals who are political refugees from other countries; our audience's socio-economic statuses will cover a similarly wide range.

These same populations will fill the cast and crew, but more specifically, the cast and crew will be members of the drama club that meets weekly on Wednesdays. These students will have all completed the 4-week drama class unit prior to beginning work on this project. These students, never having worked together before and ranging from first to fifth graders, will complete activities and lessons aimed at helping them become a cohesive ensemble. This group cohesion will be a massive emphasis in the project, because my drama club students will be paired with other students nominated by my administration. Jordan Glaude, our school's social worker, has identified a lack of empathetic awareness and collaborative abilities within Ellis's population. This community-wide disparity will be addressed within our project; Jordan will identify students who are severely lacking in empathy and/or social skills, and these students will work together with students from Ellis Elementary's drama club population. This combination of students will meet on Wednesdays as a Script Writing Club. This group will work to become a collaborative ensemble, combining the drama club students' cultures with the cultures of the students nominated by Jordan.

Once they are able to work together as one unit, the members of the new Script Writing Club will work together to develop an original dramatic production. This production will not originate from ancient or aristocratic cultures, like the musical revue or Shakespeare

productions completed earlier in the year at Ellis Elementary. Instead, it will originate from the cultures and experiences of our club members themselves.

Writing a play based upon their own experiences will serve multiple educational goals. For the students who are also members of the Shakespeare Club, which meets on Mondays, this process will help create connections between their theatrical experiences while working on a production of *Macbeth* and their personal lives. This will hopefully teach these students that theatre is a viable form of communication for all individuals, not simply for established and respected playwrights. These students will hopefully also create connections between the Shakespearean stories that they have studied in Shakespeare Club and the stories and experiences that they create in Script Writing Club. Creating connections between behaviors of contemporary students and the actions taken in the Shakespearean play will allow students to better understand the literature with which they have been working.

This process will also support the learning and development of the students who are nominated by Jordan Glaude. This process aims to impact the affective filter of these students in a positive way. The hypothesis of affective filter was written by Stephen Krashen to describe the role of emotion within the process of learning a second language. Denver Public School District (DPS) requires that all teachers complete twelve credits worth of collegiate coursework in the study of English Language Acquisition, or ELA, within their first year at the district. One of these classes is titled “Sheltered Instruction for the English Language Learner”, and this course is an in-depth study of Krashen’s six hypotheses. This specific hypothesis states that the affective filter is an obstacle to a student’s ability to learn a second language. According to Krashen, this filter is controlled by a student’s emotions and can “prevent input from reaching the language acquisition part of the brain” (Bilash). This hypothesis suggests that when students are anxious, afraid, or feel isolated or culturally

devalued, the lessons learned will not be retained. Conversely, however, when a student feels safe and supported in his or her learning environment, the student is able to learn and develop skills faster and with deeper understanding.

This dramatic process aims to positively effect students' affective filters by creating a sheltered environment in which students are encouraged to participate at their own comfort levels. Our process will also include multiple forms of communication, including writing, oral discussion in small groups and as a whole ensemble, drawing, and pantomime. By using many forms of communication, our process will help English Language Learners (ELLs) to understand the curriculum and the stories shared by others. Another way that this process will aim to lower students' filters is through the use of play-to-learn activities. These activities engage students through a game format, creating a fun and supportive learning environment. Using games and theatre activities for education is important, because when "the environment permits it, anyone can learn whatever he or she chooses to learn; and if the individual permits it, the environment will teach everything it has to teach. 'Talent' or 'lack of talent' have little to do with" a student's success in education or in theatre (Spolin 3). Theatre activities can be used to create an environment in which students feel comfortable permitting themselves to learn. Many theatre activities will be used in this process; the games will be chosen and designed to help students learn lessons about themselves, about working as an ensemble, and about the theatrical process and performance techniques. By introducing these lessons as games, or play-to-learn activities, rather than as formal instruction, students will be highly engaged and less intimidated by the academic content hidden within the activity. This will lower students' affective filters while allowing them to learn intuitively from the environment of the project, rather than forcing them to learn through formal instruction.

Once the students' affective filter is adjusted so that the students feel comfortable working, writing, and learning together, the members of Script Writing Club will devise, practice, and perform a dramatic production. By performing the finished play for others, the students' efforts and experiences will be validated. The students will be able to take pride in their efforts and to see the results of their hard work and personal growth. This process, in its entirety, will aim to inspire empathy, encourage collaborative behaviors, and provide students—especially ELLs and transient students—with a safe and inclusive social and educational environment.

This production will be mounted at Ellis Elementary in Denver, Colorado, and it will open in May, following the completion of the Shakespeare Festival performances. The school is currently working with local theatres in Denver to form an alliance that would allow the students to perform their devised piece on a “real” stage, outside of their elementary school. However, an outside performance is still being negotiated with Denver area theatres and with Denver Public Schools (DPS) administrators.

If use of an out-of-school stage is approved, this outside performance would occur as an educational field trip. My preference would be for this event to be a workshop setting, created to provide feedback, support, and validation for my students. I would also like to find a setting that will allow me to create lesson plans to be implemented by theatre artists within the community because I believe that my students would value and appreciate an opportunity to learn from people that they consider to be professional actors. The majority of my students have never seen a play outside of Ellis before. I have attempted to change this by bringing the fourth and fifth grades to preview performances at G.W. High School, which is located nearby. The students talked about this experience for weeks afterwards, stating that this was the first “real” play they had ever seen. I am therefore working to create connections within

the community so that the Script Writing Club students will be able to perform on a stage and with an audience that they would consider to be “real”. I want my students to end this process feeling that they have created something worthwhile and something that can be valued by the community. This will be especially important for the students nominated by Jordan; I want these students to see that they can fit in at Ellis, and that they can set goals, work hard, and accomplish great things within their community.

Because many of our students’ parents work multiple jobs, I have been told that parents have difficulty attending performances and events prior to six o’clock in the evening. This has been proven multiple times in my own experience as well. The specials teachers have begun hosting monthly student showcases, and although the entire school performs on these days, our largest audience consisted of twelve families. Therefore, if we are able to perform at an outside theatre during the day, I expect that our audience will be very small. I will contact other schools within the district and other individuals within the community, but no matter what our daytime audience looks like, we will host an evening performance for parents at Ellis Elementary.

The Ellis Elementary auditorium is small, and also doubles as the indoor recess location as well as the custodial storage closet. This causes difficulties, because all custodial equipment, ranging from simple tools and ladders to power washers and other mechanical custodial equipment, is stored within the auditorium. Much of the custodial equipment is stored upstage, immediately behind the upstage curtains. The already small stage, then, becomes smaller, losing use of the backstage area built into the space. Custodial equipment also fills the two onstage storage closets, making this space inaccessible for theatrical or classroom purposes.

Ellis Elementary’s lighting setup also introduces interesting challenges for producing

a performance; the downstage area is lit by two rows of colored lights that are dead hung directly from above. These lights do not include all of the primary colors for light, so mixing of colors is odd. The lights alternate between white, amber, red, and blue. The lighting instruments are not colored through the use of interchangeable gels, but through colored glass lenses that are permanently affixed to the instruments. Furthermore, the building's custodial manager has informed me that at elementary schools within DPS, drama teachers are not allowed to adjust their own lighting equipment. According to district policy, a DPS custodial staff member must do this for liability purposes. The lights are run by breaker switches, and cannot isolate areas of the stage. Each switch controls all of the lights of one color at a time. Even when all of these lights are on, however, the upstage area is not lit. This occurs because we only have two rows of the stage lights, and the rest of the stage is lit entirely by white fluorescent bulbs. The way in which the stage lights are set up and controlled will not allow the stage to be lit in a unified manner, which creates interesting and challenging dissonance in the space.

Ellis Elementary is the home of a small auditorium that seats slightly over 200, and the theatre program in the past has been minimal. Stock scenery includes 6 small, plastic, cubical chairs, each of which is about 12" tall and brightly colored. The theatre department also owns one large plastic box made of brightly colored puzzle pieces with holes on all sides, meant more for young children to crawl through than for performance use. Ellis Elementary does not have any stock costume pieces, aside from a few items that I purchased at a wholesale Goodwill earlier this year. The "costume box" consists of brightly colored scrubs and gaudy women's clothing—primarily shirts and dresses. However, the district of Denver Public Schools has a costume warehouse, which includes a very large array of costumes which can be rented by any DPS employee.

The auditorium is spatially limited. Theatre classes are held on the stage, behind the grand drape only; classes do not have access to the three stairs leading up to the stage, or to the auditorium's seating area. These areas, as well as the "backstage" area, are used for custodial storage of machines, chair racks, and ladders, as previously mentioned. There is no scenic shop or construction area, so when sets are in process, the materials and projects share space with the students, rehearsals and classes—including Early Childhood Education (ECE) classes through fifth grade classes. Wing space is limited to approximately five feet on stage left and on stage right, but the stage right wing also houses the breaker box for lights, the sound cabinet, and two breaker boxes that are used by custodial staff only. This is also the area in which the classroom's computer is housed; it sits atop a podium near the grand drape on stage right, where it is within a cable's distance to the projector connection. In the left wing, all of the theatre class art supplies are housed in a wooden cubby setup, and the teacher's desk, file cabinet, and phone are housed in this area, as well. Our backstage area is only twenty-four inches deep, but students are not allowed to pass through this area, because two of the school's custodial extension ladders are hung on this wall behind the curtain. Other ladders occupy this space as well, but rather than being hung behind the curtain, these others are simply leaned against the back wall.

Aside from physical challenges, our population introduces challenges for creating a devised piece. Many of the students at Ellis speak little to no English; each grade level features one classroom that is taught entirely in Spanish, and Ellis also educates a large population of Arabic speakers, Turkish speakers, Russian speakers, and speakers of Bosnian, Serbian, Mandarin, Vietnamese, and Korean. This makes working together in an ensemble a challenge at times, because the translators and paraprofessionals who speak these languages to help the core classroom teachers communicate do not come to the specials classes, and

will definitely not be present at the after school meetings of the Script Writing Club. The current drama club membership includes two students who speak Turkish primarily, many students who speak Arabic and English at differing proficiency levels, and a very large population of students who only speak Spanish in their homes. Due to the varying lingual backgrounds of the students in drama club, devising a script may have many challenges. However, the addition of students' home languages to a predominantly English project will be welcomed. After all, this project is meant to teach students that theatre can be a form of expression, and to help students find ways to communicate through movement and to work together with diverse individuals. Students will be taught that theatre can communicate a story or a message, even when the actors do not share a language with their audience.

Linguistic challenges aside, our students and their home lives can be an obstacle to accomplishing our goals. Our school serves a very low socio-economic population. According to Beth Schwisow, Ellis's DPS Area Supervisor, out of the 635 students attending Ellis Elementary for the 2013-2014 school year, 537 students qualify for free lunches. Meanwhile, 57 students qualify for reduced-price lunches, and only 41 students out of the entire school have a family income high enough to require these families to pay for student lunches (Schwisow). Many of our students' parents work multiple jobs, leaving very little time or energy for supporting schoolwork, let alone extra curricular activities or the arts. Many of the students at Ellis are considered "transient" students, meaning that they move from one hotel to another, living off of hotel vouchers provided to them by the school's social worker, or meaning that they live in motor vehicles of one sort or another. Less than half of the drama club students had a parent or family member who was able to attend our fall musical. Many times during the fall semester, I would wait with a student for hours after our drama club meeting had ended, because teachers are not allowed to drive students home.

Twice, we waited so long that the school's alarm was going to be activated, and I had to call the school's social worker to deliver the children to their parents' work places. However, I am going to attempt to combat this lack of support in the spring semester. Our school follows a system called the Parent Teacher Home Visit, or PTHV. In a visit conducted through this process, two teachers visit a student's home to speak with their parents. At the meeting, no grades or discipline may be discussed. The visit's goal is to establish a relationship with the parents, to encourage their support in academic and extra curricular pursuits. I have set a goal to, as part of this process, visit with the families of at least 50% of my drama club students who will be participating in this project.

As previously mentioned, the population of my project will not simply be drama club students. This process is set up to help students who are having difficulty acclimating to the English language or to American culture. Therefore, during the spring semester, the current drama club will be divided into two groups, and other students will be added. Students placed in Shakespeare Club will be performing scenes from Macbeth, and five to ten gregarious leaders from drama club—nominated by their teachers—will also be invited to participate in this project. The other students participating in this project will be nominated by Jordan Glaude, the school social worker. She will nominate students who have not found their niche at school, who are struggling to adapt socially. This way, the leaders from drama club, who are outgoing individuals, will be able to encourage their struggling peers to participate, gaining confidence in their language acquisition and developing social skills along the way.

SCHEDULE

Week 1-Wednesday, January 9: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Student Introductions and Name Game
- Introduce teacher-in-role and whole-group improvisation
- Cross the Line activity
- Debrief
- Social Contract

Week 2- Wednesday, January 15: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:30

- Share Circle
- Ensemble Building: Invisible Maze
- Boggle
- Debrief
- Zen Garden
- Debrief
- Teacher-in-role
- At 5:00 begin parent informational meeting, runs most likely 30 minutes

Week 3-Wednesday January 22: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Values-based mime performances: Plan, Practice, Perform
- Record values-based performances
- Introduce sentence stems for feedback
- Practice sentence stems for feedback
- Teacher-in-role; what values are most important?

Week 4-Wednesday, January 29: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share circle
- Play-to-learn: blindfolded emotions activity
- Debrief
- Plan, Practice, Perform: mimed scenes based on share circle and activity debrief
- Group Feedback
- Improve scenes, perform and record.

Week 5- Wednesday, February 5: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Teacher-in-role review
- Whole group in-role debate
- Small group in-role improvise
- Plan, Practice, Perform: scenes with dialogue
- Feedback
- Whole group in-role as researchers to elect scenes

Week 6-Wednesday, February 12: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share circle
- Small groups, in-role, identifying themes and presenting thesis
- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform
- Debrief and give feedback
- Students-in-role as researchers
- Students-in-role as playwrights
- Teacher-in-role

Week 7-Wednesday, February 19: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform
- Debrief and give feedback
- Students-in-role as researchers
- Students-in-role as playwrights
- Teacher-in-role

Week 8-Wednesday, February 26: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Teacher-in-role
- Whole group in-role discussion
- View all recordings
- Whole group in-role debate and provide feedback for videos
- Plan, Practice, Perform: expanding previously recorded scenes

Week 9-Wednesday, March 5: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Whole group in-role as researchers
- Whole group in-role as playwrights
- Whole group in-role split for debate
- Whole group in-role as researchers: nominating and voting
- Whole group in-role as playwrights: nominating and voting

Week 10-Wednesday, March 12: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle

- Teacher-in-role
- Group debrief
- Whole group in-role split for debate
- Whole group edit dialogue, expand and finalize scenes
- Place scenes in order and finalize whole play

Week 11-Wednesday, March 19: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Individually complete finished script handouts
- Whole group view chart for parts desired
- Whole group in-role work to cast the play
- Debrief

Week 12-Wednesday, March 26: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Distribute scripts
- Read-through

Wednesday, April 2: Spring Break. No Meeting

- Possible Edmodo survey

Week 13- Wednesday, April 9: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Share Circle
- Block and review scene 1

Week 14-Wednesday, April 16: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Review scene 1
- Block and review scene 2

- Block transition between 1 and 2

Week 15-Wednesday, April 23: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Review scene 1, transition, and scene 2
- Block and review scene 3
- Block transition between scenes 2 and 3

Week 16-Wednesday, May 1: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-4:30

- Block and review scene 4
- Block and review scene 5
- Block transition between scenes 4 and 5

Week 17-Wednesday, May 7: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-4:30

- Run whole show
- Notes
- Run show again and record

Week 18- Monday, May 12: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-4:30

- Watch video
- Whole group feedback and self evaluation
- Run through whole show
- At 4:30 begin parent meeting

Week 18-Wednesday, May 14: Script Writing Club Meeting 3:00-5:00

- Dress Rehearsal
- Notes
- Run show again as a stop/start

Week 18-Thursday, May 15: Performance at Denver Center of Performing Arts

EVALUATION OF THE “ONE VOICE” PROJECT AS EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The core values of Denver Public Schools include putting “Students First”, “Integrity”, “Equity”, “Collaboration”, “Accountability” and “Fun” (DPS Values). This process drama highlights each of these in an educational experience that engages the whole student as an academic learner, as a creative individual, and as a member of a diverse school community.

This project supports the first of DPS’s core values by allowing them to communicate their own stories, fears, and dreams through a theatrical production, rather than forcing the students to perform in a production that was written for the dominant culture. By allowing the students to create their own theatrical production, this project truly puts students first, allowing their voices to be heard, encouraging a personal connection to the educational process of performing in a production and linking their academic learning in the areas of writing and social studies to an engaging experience that will be entirely student led.

This process will also encourage the development of integrity. DPS defines integrity as telling the truth and keeping promises. In the environment of an ensemble writing, rehearsing, directing and performing together, students will be encouraged, and will encourage one another, to fulfill their promises and responsibilities. Students will hold one another accountable as they work together to create a play, and students will develop personal connections within the culture of our ensemble. By pairing outgoing and successful drama club students with students who are struggling socially and academically, the drama students will be encouraged to develop respect for their quieter peers as they learn about one another, and the quieter students will be encouraged and supported in participating more actively. Students will support each other in an environment that increases student integrity by promoting student ownership in the development of our production, as well as fostering a

deepened respect for one another as they learn about each others' backgrounds and create connections with one another, despite cultural differences.

Equity will be promoted through this educational experience because our diverse population in drama club will be encouraged to create a production that highlights each of the student body's different ethnic, religious, linguistic and socio-economic populations. Students will be encouraged to design pieces that tell their own stories, highlighting the experiences of all students while promoting no specific culture, language, or ethnicity as the dominant, correct, or best group.

Collaboration will be heavily supported through this educational process. Drama Club is comprised of students ranging in age from six years old to thirteen, and students will need to work together to support one another in telling their stories. Because students range in age and English Language proficiency, students will work together to combine storytelling methods, performance techniques, and languages into one finished product that allows the students' multiple languages and styles into one voice, communicating the stories of the community surrounding Ellis Elementary.

Accountability is defined by DPS as the ability to grow from successes and to learn from failures. In creating a performance that communicates the story of Ellis's student population, the Drama Club members will work together to experiment in story telling methods and performance techniques, critiquing one another to help the ensemble grow and to create the best possible final performance. Students will learn to offer constructive criticism, to assess the success of a performance, and to brainstorm methods for the improvement of the product. This way, the ensemble will work and grow together, becoming accountable for individuals' work and the group's work as a whole.

The final DPS core value is fun. This will be emphasized throughout the process, for

without fun, an ensemble is just a machine, not a cohesive group that has bonded and can work together towards success.

CONCEPT STATEMENT

Our final performance is intended to be a celebration of the individual cultural and linguistic backgrounds of our students, while bringing these cultures, languages, and experiences together to teach students that theatre is a safe environment and a form of expression for everyone. Therefore, our performance space should be transformable. A blank stage can become the representation of many individual cultures through the use of color and simple props in each scene. Students' bodies and voices should create the majority of our environments; extravagant costumes and set pieces should not be present, as the final production of our devised piece should help the students and audience alike realize that theatre is not for the wealthy, for the elitist, or for the dominant cultures, but that theatre can happen anywhere and everywhere, and that theatre is a form of expression that is available to everyone.

Section 2:

Pre-Process Planning

Written Process Drama Lesson Plan

OVERVIEW:

Learning Area	Context	Students' Roles	Frame	Teacher's Role	Sign
Drama can be used to create connections between different social groups	A play presenting youth problems to politicians	Present day researchers and playwrights...	...who must work together to create a presentation that will help politicians understand	Present day politician and messenger of the governor who doesn't understand students	Hook: letter from the governor asking for help Other prepared sign: notebooks Teacher's sign: Clipboard

THEME AND LEARNING AREAS:

- Drama can be used to create connections between different social groups.
- How can youth use theatre to communicate and to enrich their communities and themselves?
- How can theatrical pieces be created that bridge language barriers to connect multicultural students at Ellis Elementary?
- How can theatrical processes be used to educate others in our community?

The aforementioned questions and learning areas for students have been selected to reinforce the learning environment of the process drama while guiding students to inquire, observe, and explore educational and character-building goals supported by Ellis Elementary and Denver Public Schools (DPS). Ellis and DPS emphasize student literacy by focusing on writing in all curriculum areas, which will be accomplished by the students writing vignettes that illustrate their lives and their struggles to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers as an elementary community. In researching, observing their community, and writing summaries

of their discoveries, as well as in writing scripts, monologues and vignettes to perform, students will be developing character, reinforcing equity, and practicing integrity, all while improving student literacy by writing in fictional and nonfictional styles.

Our primary focus will be the first learning area listed. Throughout this process, students who already have positive leadership skills—as identified by their grade level teachers—and who participated in drama club during the fall semester will be partnered up with other students in an attempt to create connections across social groups at Ellis Elementary. These other students, nominated by Jordan Glaude, the school's social worker, to join the Script Writing Club, will be from diverse backgrounds, grade levels, and social groups. In this process, ensemble-building activities will be used to create connections between all of the students in the Script Writing Club as our first step in proving that drama can create a sense of belonging for many diverse individuals. After this has been accomplished, the students will work together to create a dramatic piece—perhaps a play, perhaps a series of vignettes—to inspire others within their community to overcome differences and create a more accepting environment at Ellis.

DRAMATIC ROLES:

Students will take on the collective roles modern-day researchers and playwrights. The role of the researchers will be to help students identify patterns and themes in interactions that they witness and in their personal experiences, and to assess the needs of their community based on these observations. Once the students have discussed their observations and assessed the needs of their community, then their roles will shift from researchers to playwrights. The focus of the students' role as playwrights will be to create imaginative and evocative dramatic performances that attempt to inform the community of ways to solve the problems that the students identify while in the role of researchers.

By taking on the collective group roles of researchers and playwrights, students are not placing higher value upon one culture or social group that they observe within the Ellis community. These collective roles will allow students to distance themselves from their own social groups in order to assess the needs of the community as a whole. As researchers, students will be encouraged to look at patterns and data only, distancing the students from their own emotional personal experiences. This will allow students to discuss treatment and equity between all social groups, helping the students to understand the experiences of others and to develop empathy for other groups and individuals within their community.

Similarly, the collective role of students as playwrights provides distance, so that students can experience events vicariously and tell stories from points of view that are not typically their own, without feeling that they have betrayed or abandoned their own culture or social group. Also, through having students work in tandem to write the roles and consider the viewpoints of other cultures, the students will be encouraged to assess their own treatment of others, and students will be inspired to act more equitably with others in their community.

The teacher's role as a messenger from the governor will allow the teacher to facilitate writing by asking guiding questions to clarify students' communication. This role will also help maintain focus in the writing and to motivate the students' progress when students become distracted or become too focused on one point. The teacher will also, at times, take on the role of lead researcher or the playwright's editor, in order to better facilitate and encourage the students' own improvisational processes. In the role of the governor's messenger, the teacher will provide students with a unifying goal by asking the students—in their roles of researchers and playwrights—to assist the governor's office in identifying problems and developing solutions. This will allow the students in Script Writing Club to become an ensemble by connecting the students through their in-role goal. This in-role

objective will inspire students from different linguistic, cultural, and social subgroups to work together throughout the process.

FRAME:

Role: Students play present-day researchers and playwrights . . .

Frame: . . . who must work together to create a presentation that will help politicians understand how to solve the social problems at Ellis Elementary.

Collective Concern: A messenger has delivered a request from the governor. The governor's office has heard that students at Ellis Elementary are not treating each other with equity. The governor wants to create a peaceful community in Ellis, so that the students there can be an example for the citizens of Denver. The governor believes that students are the future, and he wants to ensure a peaceful future for Colorado by focusing on Ellis Elementary first. The researchers and playwrights hired by the governor's office must observe and identify patterns of behavior at Ellis Elementary that cause problems and create a presentation that will help the governor and other politicians understand what actions to take in order to solve the social problems that exist in Ellis, in Denver, and in the greater community of Colorado.

To create dramatic tension, the frame of this process drama grants all of the characters with the collective concern of identifying problematic behaviors and discovering potential solutions that may alleviate future problems. In order to identify the types of treatment that create continued antagonism within the community, the researchers must observe a small focus test group—students at Ellis Elementary. By observing the way that this small community interacts with one another, the researchers must identify patterns in behavior and recurring problems. Then, these researchers must present their findings to a group of playwrights, who must create a motivational piece that will inspire change within

not only Ellis, but the greater communities of Denver and Colorado. The researchers must rely upon the playwrights to communicate their findings in a moving way that will motivate politicians to take action, and the playwrights must rely upon the researchers to identify the community's needs and create solutions that can be communicated through a play.

We will do this by exploring how each culture represented in our group feels sometimes marginalized, and how those cultures might feel about negative stereotyping that exists within American media, the City of Denver, and the community surrounding Ellis Elementary. Students will research their own family history and discover stories of marginalization and struggle within their heritage, and these stories will be used as the springboard and writing prompts for our performance pieces. Similarly, students will share their own observations regarding treatment of others in their community, and use these personal experiences as the basis of scenes developed to inspire change. Students will write collectively and individually in turn, assessing their own social behaviors through individual writing and then collectively working to understand others' cultural experiences and design solutions in order to change their community.

SIGN:

- Letter from the governor
- Photograph and video of the governor
- Notebooks
- Clipboard

The hook for this process will be the letter from the governor. This letter, written by the teacher, will be a plea for help. In this letter, delivered and read by the teacher-in-role as the governor's assistant, the governor's office will be seeking the help of a respected group of researchers in identifying social problems at Ellis Elementary and creating potential

solutions to these problems. This hook is created to allow students to feel that this process and their experiences will be valued by the governor, and therefore that their efforts are not only worthwhile, but that their efforts are also capable of benefitting society. The purpose behind this is to allow the students who are nominated into our group to feel that the dramatic process can be meaningful to them, and not only to the students who have already been in drama club.

The other prepared sign for this process drama will be student notebooks. Every student in Script Writing Club will be given a personal notebook. These notebooks will be called drama journals, and will be used by the students in both the in-role persona of researcher and that of the playwright. As researchers, students will note their observations and experiences in the drama journals for a weekly discussion. As playwrights, students will use their drama journals in the 3P process that is taught during drama classes and which will be re-introduced at the beginning of our first Script Writing Club meeting. Students will also be able to use these journals outside of their in-role personas to communicate their needs to the teacher in a private manner.

The teacher's sign will be a clipboard. The clipboard will help students identify when the teacher is in the role of the governor's assistant or lead researcher. The teacher will also use the clipboard to keep notes regarding student participation for student growth and measurement purposes, themes and values identified for the play, or ideas shared that may need to be revisited during debriefs or when writing other scenes. This will allow the teacher to better facilitate the students' processes by remembering what has been discovered and what still needs to be discussed.

STRATEGIES:

Meeting 1 Strategies:

- Group discussion- What is a playwright? Have students define the term in their own words, to help students later understand their collective role.
- Teacher-in-role: A politician, the governor's assistant, has been sent by the governor to find out ways to create peace in the community. As a team of researchers, the students' goal is to identify patterns of mistreatment that occur at Ellis Elementary and discover solutions to stop these problems from occurring. The governor gets bored listening to presentations, so the researchers must work together with a team of playwrights to create an entertaining play that will help the governor understand the emotions that students feel and the experiences students have every day.
- Whole group improvisation with teacher-in-role as lead researcher: How can we make politicians understand what students go through?
- Out-of-role whole group discussion: Does everyone at Ellis have the same experiences? Whose experiences deserve to be told the most?
- Play-to-learn activity: Cross the Line

The Cross the Line activity is developed to help students identify similarities in experiences and to develop empathy with their peers. This activity allows an opportunity for students to discover commonalities with others from different grades, others from different cultures, and with those who speak different languages. In this activity, all students stand in a shoulder-to-shoulder line, silently. Students must remain silent throughout the activity, in order to encourage students to think and to internalize and process their observations, rather than to mock others. The teacher will read a series of statements, and students step forward when that statement is true for them. The teacher asks students to be as honest as they feel comfortable being. The teacher uses limited phrases that are neutral in tone and do not pass any value upon one group or another.

After beginning the activity, the teacher will say “Step forward if you . . .” completing this sentence with a phrase that students may identify as true or not true about themselves. Once students have stepped forward, the teacher will ask students to notice who crossed the line, and notice who did not. Then, the teacher will say thank you, and ask the students to return to their original positions. The teacher will follow this activity by leading a debrief session. In this session, the teacher will ask students if they had anything in common with anyone else, if anything they learned surprised them, and if anything they learned changed the way that they think about their peers. The teacher may also ask students what they learned about themselves through this activity and what they learned about the ensemble during this activity.

- Whole group debrief of activity and share circle, including the creation of a social contract
- Teacher-in-role as politician: Now, have you decided whose stories deserve to be told?
- Individual journal prompt response: List five things that describe who other people think you are. Separately, list five things that describe who you really are.

Meeting 2 Strategies:

- Share Circle: discuss journal prompt
- Play-to-learn activity: Invisible Maze

The Invisible Maze activity is an ensemble-building activity that asks students to nonverbally communicate in order to collaboratively discover the correct path through a grid on the floor. The grid and path are predetermined by the facilitator, and students attempt to find the predetermined path one at a time, by stepping into touching squares. When a student steps into the correct square, the facilitator says,

“congratulations, you may continue.” However, when the student steps into a square that is not the indicated next step on the map, the facilitator says “please go back the way you came.” Once a student has gone back as instructed, the next student attempts to follow the path that was established by previous students and discover the next step. Students find the correct path through trial and error, discovering that mistakes must be made in order to narrow down options to the best choice. Students also learn that they must pay attention even when it’s not their turn, so that they do not make the same missteps that their predecessors have made. When the maze’s path has been completely discovered, every member of the ensemble must pass through the maze in order for the whole ensemble to be successful. Follow this process with a group debrief conversation.

- Whole group debrief
- Play-to-learn activity: Zen Garden, focus on physicality
- Whole group debrief
- Teacher-in-role as politician: The governor wants to know how you will tell him about what you’ve discovered. What have you decided?
- Individual journal prompt response: Draw, describe, or tape pictures or symbols that are important to you.

Meeting 3 Strategies:

- Share Circle: discuss prompt and symbols
- Small group in-role as researchers: What patterns or themes were apparent in the share circle?
- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform activity: Choose one of the themes identified from the share circle and create a Zen Garden-like nonverbal image that

communicates that value. Then, make your Zen Garden image come to life by creating a 10-second nonverbal scene.

- Whole group instruction: Introduce sentence stems for providing constructive feedback in English. The language prompts for feedback include the following sentence stems:
 - Level 1 Positive Feedback: I liked the way that (Name)'s group did (part of the scene).
 - Level 1 Negative Feedback: I didn't get when (Name)'s group did (part of the scene).
 - Level 3 Positive Feedback: I liked when (Name)'s group (description of physical action), because it told me that (what you understood from the scene).
 - Level 3 Negative Feedback: I didn't understand what it meant when (Name)'s group (description of physical action).
 - Level 5 Positive Feedback: I liked that (Name)'s group communicated (meaning or theme) by (physical action), because (reason).
 - Level 5 Negative Feedback: I think that (Name)'s group could have made (meaning or theme) clearer by (physical action), because (reason).
- Small group performances
- Whole group feedback session, using the posted sentence stems
- Individual journal prompt response: Draw a picture or write a story describing your favorite dream. Then, draw a picture or write a story describing your worst nightmare.

Meeting 4 Strategies:

- Share Circle: discuss prompt
- Play-to-learn activity: Blind Emotions

A few students at a time are blindfolded for participation in this activity. When blindfolded, however, the students may be able to see; the goal with the bandanas is to cover the student's face, so that the audience cannot see the student. Once three to five students have blindfolds on, they are placed on stage. The facilitator will announce an emotion, and the blindfolded students have fifteen seconds to mime that emotion. At the end of the time, the facilitator will tell the students to freeze, and the students must hold a tableau that becomes representative of that emotion for them. After repeating this process with three to four emotions, the director may move the students through their tableaux at a rapid pace, and may even shuffle or combine the emotion tableaux. This activity focuses on allowing students to explore physicality for themselves without being overly concerned about the performances of others. It also allows the audience to experience how easily body language and movement onstage can communicate stories without words. The audience is also able to observe patterns in the types of body language that are frequently used for different emotions, which may inform the decisions that these students make in future mime performances.

- Large group improvisation as researchers: What patterns emerged?
- Whole group play-to-learn activity: Blind Emotions
- Large group improvisation with half of the group as researchers and half as playwrights: What patterns were noticed in the physical activity, and how can these patterns be used to create performances about our dreams and nightmares?
- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform activity: Create nonverbal performances communicating a dream theme and a nightmare theme.
- Teacher-in-role as political messenger: The governor wants to know what students'

hopes and fears are. What are the three most frequent themes in nightmares and dreams?

- Individual journal prompt response: Write about a unique story from your family's history. Ask your parents to tell you something you didn't know about your family.

Meeting 5 Strategies:

- Share Circle: discuss prompt
- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform: Create a short scene that communicates something that is important in families from different cultures.
- View recorded performances from previous weeks
- Whole group feedback using sentence stems.
- Whole group in-role as researchers: Which scenes best communicate what we want to tell the governor? Nominate and vote upon the scenes that researchers believe should be included in the final performance.
- Whole group in-role as playwrights: Which scenes best communicate the emotion that we want politicians to feel? Nominate and vote upon the scenes that playwrights believe should be included in the final performance.
- Whole group debrief: Which scenes met both needs? Why? Which scenes really should be included in the final draft of our play?
- Individual journal prompt response: Describe the way you see students at Ellis treating each other

Meeting 6 Strategies:

- Share Circle: discuss prompt
- Teacher-in-role as governor's assistant: Present notes from previous weeks. Ask how students are going to tell all of this information to the governor.

- Whole group debate in-role as researchers: Based on what was seen today and what has been seen in share circles and scenes from previous weeks, what patterns have emerged? Of the themes and patterns identified, which social problems are most prevalent and need to be solved first? How can we solve that problem?
- Small group improvisation as playwrights: Create a scene that presents a solution to the problems that the researchers discovered.
- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform. Record the scenes.
- Whole group feedback using sentence stems.
- Whole group in-role as researchers: Which scenes best communicated a solution to the problem, and why? Nominate and vote upon the scenes that most clearly indicated a way to solve the identified issue.
- Whole group in-role as playwrights to combine, expand, and revise the nominated scene(s).

Meeting 7 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Small group improvisation as playwrights: Create a scene that presents a solution to the problems that the researchers discovered last week.
- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform.
- Whole group feedback using sentence stems.
- Whole group in-role as researchers: Which scenes best communicated a solution to the problem, and why? Nominate and vote upon the scenes that most clearly indicated a way to solve the identified issue.
- Whole group in-role as playwrights to combine, expand, and revise the nominated

scene(s).

Meeting 8 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Teacher in-role as politician: How far along are you? What do you still need to do in order to get ready to present to the governor?
- Whole group in-role, half as researchers and half as playwrights: Share progress and share what still needs to be accomplished.
- Whole group in-role debate, half as researchers and half as playwrights: Can the researchers' wants and the playwrights' desires be combined and achieved together? How can this be done?
- Based on the results of the debate, small group Plan, Practice, Perform
- Whole group feedback using sentence stems
- Whole group in-role as researchers: Nominate scenes based on the researchers' point of view.
- Whole group in-role as playwrights: Nominate scenes based on the playwrights' perspectives.

Meeting 9 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- View videos of all scenes so far
- Whole group in-role as researchers: What still needs to be discussed? What problems have not been addressed?
- Whole group in-role as playwrights: How have we addressed these issues already? How can we go into more detail to make the solutions we're presenting clearer?

- Small group Plan, Practice, Perform activity: Each group is assigned an already existing scene and must develop a clearer version of the scene to accomplish the needs identified by the researchers using the techniques discussed by the playwrights.
- Whole group feedback

Meeting 10 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Teacher in-role as politician: You've created scenes but the governor has a lot on his mind, so you will need to find a way to connect the scenes or introduce the scenes so that the whole play works together and he can understand it, even though he's worrying about other things like taking care of the homeless. If you want to convince the governor, you need to do it in an artistic way, which you've already started doing, but you also need to make sure that the play is very clear.
- Group debate with half in-role as researchers and half in-role as playwrights: How do we tie all of the scenes together? What types of transition phrases or scenes will introduce our themes and make everything clear to the audience without taking away any of the emotional content of the play?
- Whole group edit, add to, and finalize the play's script.
- Individually complete handout for parts desired

Meeting 11 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Individually complete finished play handouts
- Whole group in-role as researchers and playwrights: Cast all parts of the play based on the chart of parts desired. The teacher will have created this chart ahead of time, based upon last week's parts desired handout results.

- Students audition for specific parts via cold reads, if necessary

Meeting 12 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Distribute scripts
- Read through

Meeting 13 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Block and review scene 1

Meeting 14 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Speed review of scene 1
- Block and review scene 2

Meeting 15 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Speed review of scene 2
- Block and review scene 3

Meeting 16 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Speed review of scene 3
- Block and review scene 4

Meeting 17 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Speed review of scene 4

- Block and review scene 5

Meeting 18 Strategies:

- Share Circle
- Speed review of scene 5
- Review all scenes in order

Meeting 19 Strategies:

- Dress Rehearsal and run all scenes
- Notes
- Run all scenes as a stop/start

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS:

This process has been designed around accomplishing the primary learning goal for this project. Script Writing Club will be a combination of students from drama club and students who are nominated for participation in Script Writing Club in order to alleviate social problems at Ellis. Some of these students are nominated because they do not have a sense of belonging at Ellis, while others have been nominated because they negatively affect others' sense of safety at Ellis. Therefore, the primary goal of this process is to create a safe environment that allows students from many cultural and linguistic backgrounds to feel comfortable participating in educational activities. The hope is that providing students with a supportive social group at school will also lower their affective filter to improve students' abilities to learn in their core classrooms. The development of a students' sense of belonging and security will be measured through tracking students' willingness to share in our daily Share Circle activity. Weekly, students will be asked to share the ideas from their journal prompts. The teacher will record students' decision to share immediately, to pass and then share at a delayed time, or not to share at all. If students begin sharing more frequently or

without passing, they are making choices that communicate an increased sense of stability and acceptance within Script Writing Club.

In the state of Colorado, Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) for each curriculum area are defined by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). When it comes to theatre arts, the CDE has categorized SLOs into three main categories; Create, Perform, and Critically Respond. The CDE explains student creation as “a demonstration of learned skills in forming new theatrical works, interpreting theatrical works for performance and design, and developing characters and analyzing roles” (“Drama & Theatre Arts”). This SLO will be met as students devise, write, and interpret a new theatrical piece through improvisation and writing exercises.

The CDE also explains that “the theatre process is a product of the knowledge and essential skills gained in the study of theatre toward the expression of the human experience in story, movement, speech, and staging for an intended audience” (“Drama & Theatre Arts”). Our process drama meets this SLO by combining academic elements with the physical and emotional ability to perform. Our final product will indeed be an “expression of the human experience” by telling the stories created by students to illuminate their own experiences. The students will create, rehearse, and then perform these stories using physicality and vocal performance. This process completes this SLO.

The third category emphasized by the CDE is critical response. The CDE states that “an informed literacy, thoughtful critique, and cultural research are key aspects of the theatre arts study” (“Drama & Theatre Arts”). Our process addresses this learning goal by asking students to research their own families and cultures, requesting that students consider the experiences of diverse cultures, and write—both individually and collectively—dramatic pieces representing these stories. Critical response will also be emphasized when students

present their work and provide peer feedback and evaluations in the process of improving our performance.

ASSESSMENTS AND RUBRICS:

Much of our process will be graded through self-evaluation, reflection, and observation. Because this process is aiming to help students feel comfortable in a learning environment by pairing theatrical exercises with academic techniques, observation needs to be a primary mode of assessment. Comfort is subjective and difficult to measure, but for this project's purposes, comfort will be measured through the recordable amounts of a student's participation. According to Krashen's hypothesis of the Affective Filter, students' learning may be hindered by specific emotional variables. These variables include the students' self-esteem, intrinsic motivation, and levels of anxiety. Krashen wrote that "learners with high motivation, a good self-image, and a low level anxiety are better equipped for success" (Schütz). On the other hand, according to Krashen, when a student has lower self-esteem or a lack of intrinsic motivation, or when a student has higher anxiety, he or she has a higher affective filter or "mental block that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition". In attempt to measure whether a student's affective filter is being raised or lowered, participation will be monitored and recorded in chart that I created for this purpose (see table 1). During share circles and group debriefs, students will have three options. These options will include participating immediately when it is that student's turn, or first-round participation, passing and then choosing to participate after listening to others' ideas, or second-round participation, or passing twice and electing not to share or participate at all. During the first five weeks, each student's participation choices will be recorded. This will allow patterns of behavior to evolve. When graphed, the recorded rates and times of participation should indicate whether a student's affective filter was raised or lowered. This

may indicate when students become more or less comfortable with the ensemble.

Table 1

Participation Tracking Chart, by week and type of participation, to be completed at later dates

	1 st	2 nd	No	1 st	2 nd	No	1 st	2 nd	No	1 st	2 nd	No	1 st	2 nd	No
Ben															
Matt															
Mugabe															
Sara S.															
Eva															
Tuff															
Julie															
Katarina															
Donna															
Elizabeth															
Sierra															
Madison															
Aidan															
Serina															
Amna															
Tippy															
Daniel															
Deja															
Komildzhan															
Sade															
Sara Z															
Aliyah															
Ishmael															
Sarah O.															

After recording each student's participation in the chart above, arranging the information in a graph may indicate whether a student became more or less comfortable in

the environment, thereby showing whether each student’s affective filter was raised or lowered. Completing the graph below (table 2) for each student may reveal a pattern; if the connected input creates a line moving up and to the right, the graph would indicate that the student became less comfortable participating as his or her affective filter was raised.

However, if the line moves down and to the right, it would seem to indicate that the student’s affective filter was lowered, and he or she felt more comfortable participating over time.

Table 2

Reimaging Graph, for information gathered in the chart from Table 1, to be completed at a later point in the process

	Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3	Meeting 4	Meeting 5
Did not share					
Passed first					
Shared first					

A performance rubric will also be used throughout our process. Because these students have not all joined Script Writing Club on account of an interest in drama, our performance rubric will not be based on performance technique or ability. The majority of the Script Writing Club members have been nominated to be members of the group because

the school's social worker believed that group work would help these students develop confidence and collaborative abilities. In order to determine whether these goals have been accomplished, a performance rubric has been created to judge—as objectively as possible—a student's willingness to participate and his or her growth in ability to work with others. This rubric, included in table 3, will also be used to measure and communicate improvements in a student's confidence by measuring whether or not that student attempts to participate in performances in front of an audience, rather than measuring the student's performance abilities.

Table 3

Performance Rubric, created specifically for measuring students' progress towards the learning objectives for this process drama

	1	3	5
Collaboration	Does not seem comfortable working with a group. Self isolates or sits quietly near the group.	Seems somewhat comfortable in a group. Displays active body language quietly within the group.	Seems comfortable in the group. Shares ideas or responds to others' ideas respectfully.
Performance	Chooses not to participate in the performance. Sits apart while his/her group performs.	Attempts to participate in the performance in a limited way, using only voice or body.	Attempts to participate using both acting tools by using voice and body in the performance.
Feedback	Does not seem comfortable providing feedback to other groups; will not speak or make eye contact.	Gives feedback for other groups by providing opinion only (thumbs) and no support verbally.	Provides feedback based on opinion and supported by evidence or examples from the performance.

The majority of other assessments will be completed through observations and self-evaluations when the play's script is finalized and completed, and again after their performance of the finished play.

Section 3:

Process Documentation

August 20, 2013:

The district-wide Blue/Green Arts PD Workshop was today. There were several people there who were advertising for local theatres. I spent my lunch break talking with all of them, getting a feel for the different theaters in the area. I narrowed down a long list of theaters to a few that go out of their way to support theater education; Buntport Theater, Equinox Theater, Rocky Mountain Children's Theatre, Denver School of the Arts, and the Newman Center. When I got home, I composed emails and sent information about my project to all of these entities, attempting to find a location for my students to perform in the spring. I simply introduced myself and the project, and asked if it would be possible for us to rent their space for a minimal fee, or if it would be possible to establish educational workshops with their teams. We'll see what happens from here!

August 23, 2013:

Got a "thanks, but we're not interested" email from Equinox.

August 26, 2013:

It's the first day of school with students, and a few things happened that really riled me up about our this project. First, out of all of my classes today, only three students said that they had ever seen a play, and all of those students said that they had seen Christmas plays at their churches. I had seven classes today, each with about thirty students, and of those, none had ever seen a non-religious play. It really made me feel like trying to find an outside venue to host our project's final performance is a very valid effort.

I also got a call from the Rocky Mountain Children's Theatre. They explained that they were interested in supporting our project, and I was really excited. I didn't think it would be very easy to get people involved. The person I spoke to gave me a few date openings, and I told them that we were looking for the spring. But, it turned out that their

only openings are between now and early November, and I just don't think I could get everything organized and ready in that amount of time. Bummer. Have to keep trying!

September 9, 2013:

I re-emailed several of the theatres, including Buntport, the Newman Center, Denver School of the Arts, and a few new ones that I have learned about. I also emailed Kunsmiller Arts Academy, Audience of One Youth Theatre, Denver Children's Theatre, and Northglenn Youth Theatre. I hope I'm not being obnoxious, but I want to find somewhere that can host our performance before Thanksgiving. Since I will need to get a location, date, and time approved not only by the hosting theatre, but also by my principal and my district, I want to get that process started as soon as possible.

September 10, 2013:

Jessica Robblee from Buntport theatre responded to my email! Her theatre is very interested, as they focus on theatre education and theatre for education. Apparently, they perform at schools and invite schools to their on-site performances quite frequently. She also mentioned that Buntport does a lot of original productions and a lot of improv theatre, and that they have been looking in to starting a youth devising program. So, she asked me to email her some dates, and she said she'd talk to her board about possibly working with my students for a few days in the spring.

September 12, 2013:

Connie and Khoa, my AP and my principal, said we have to do the performance in May. Apparently, May is the only month of the year with no standardized testing during the school days, so that's one of the only times when I would be able to pull students from multiple grade levels for a field trip. I emailed this information to Jessica Robblee at the Buntport, and told her that my administration would prefer a Wednesday or Thursday, but

that any week in May would work.

September 25, 2013:

After emailing me last week to tell me that she would talk to the board at Buntport, Jessica Robblee emailed me back again today. She said that, unfortunately, Buntport's regular season has the stage occupied throughout all of May. However, she still seems really supportive of the project, because she said that she will have a friend of hers give me a call. Apparently, her friend's name is Allison and she works at the Theatre Academy at the Denver Center for Performing Arts. Jessica's email said that the DCPA often hosts student projects in order to promote the performing arts in education and to promote community involvement in the arts culture of Denver. I'm pumped!

September 27, 2013:

Allison Watrous from the Denver Center of Performing Arts called me today; we are going to meet on Friday, October 11th. That day, I will present my concept, and if she is intrigued by my idea and feels that it is valuable, maybe she'll allow us to perform at DCPA. I think I'll bring my brief, as well as maybe preparing a small presentation. I don't really know. I'm just excited to have an opportunity to actually meet with someone!

October 12, 2013:

I think the meeting yesterday went really well. Allison seemed very interested in the project and in working with my school. She said that DCPA has never hosted a school that was so far South, and when I informed her that none of my current students have ever seen a play outside of Ellis Elementary performances, she said that, in that case, she definitely wants to work together to help them have that experience. I'm really hoping this works! She seemed very eager, and asked for a range of dates. I told her that my administration had approved any Wednesday or Thursday in May for our project, and that we would need to

arrive around 9:30, which is the earliest we can arrive via bus, and that we would need to leave around 1:30, which is the district-mandated departure time for field trips. I assume that these times are determined by busses' morning and afternoon transportation schedules. Ms. Watrous said that she would speak with a few people and get back to me.

When we were done meeting and I had explained all of the aspects of our proposed project, Allison took me on a tour of the third-floor stage in the Newman Center, which is where we will be performing in May, if the stage's calendar is clear in places that align with ours. The stage is quite large, and so is the auditorium. I'm a little afraid that, if all of this works, the students may be too intimidated by the space. I will really have to build it into our process and our conversations that the space is large and can fit a large audience. I will need to get the kids used to the idea of a large stage and a large space, and I will also most likely need to prepare them, mentally, for the audience to seem small, even if it's not, because the auditorium and audience area are so large.

October 24, 2013:

So, this happened today. We have a venue and a date!

Allison Watrous
To: Villarreal, Amanda
RE: Ellis student devised project

October 24, 2013 1:32 PM
HKra Details
Inbox - Dpsk12

Hi Amanda!

Thank you so much for your email.

I apologize for my delay. We had to confer with calendars on our end.

May 15th works perfectly for us.

I have reserved the theatre and two studios for your group from 8am-3pm. I wanted to make sure we and the bases for space covered as we plan this project.

Please let me know if we need to reserve additional space or reserve different time.

Thank so much -- Allison

Allison Watrous
Associate Director of Education
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November 22, 2013:

We just finished our musical performance. With 46 students and three performances today, I am exhausted. I am so glad that I will be splitting the group next semester.

December 4, 2013:

Jordan gave me a list of students who will be in the Script Writing Club. She has not chosen any first graders, and I don't know why. From second grade, I will have Matthew Olivas and his sister Sarah, Mugabe Gany, Sara Shawidhi, and Tuff Love. I know Sara, because she was in my first rotation of students. She is a very quiet girl, but she's incredibly smart. She is shy, and I think that her shyness may be due to the fact that she speaks Arabic at home. This is simply conjecture, but I believe that a lack of confidence in her oral communication skills may explain her shyness.

Jordan nominated five third graders, as well. Four are girls; Aliyah Jones, Julie Madey, Donna Lopez, and Madison Montoya. I haven't met any of these students yet, so I will ask Jordan about them later. The fourth third grader is a student named Aidan Almanza. I had him in my second drama class rotation; he's a sweet boy who works hard and is eager to please. However, I know that he is often picked on because of his race. I have heard students on the playground tease him, because his father is black and his mother is Hispanic. I have had multiple conversations with students after I have heard them calling him a Puerto Rican. He hates this taunt, and he has a tendency to cry when students call him this.

I don't recognize three of the four fourth graders that Jordan nominated, Amna Androvic, Willy Gurley, and Slinthip Teawdeswan, but the fourth fourth grader that Jordan is enrolling in Script Writing Club is Aidan's sister, Serina Almanza. Jordan also nominated three fifth graders; Komildzhan Khatamova, Sade Reese, and Sara Zucker, the older sister of Sierra Zucker in third grade. Of these three, the only student I know is Sara, whose temper

tantrums are infamous among students and staff alike.

Since I haven't met so many of the students Jordan nominated, I've emailed her in response to the list of students she sent me. We will meet next Thursday, during my plan period, to discuss the students, as well as the individual reasons behind each student's nomination. If I am going to help them out, I need to know a little bit about who they are and what they need.

December 12, 2013:

I met with Jordan today to discuss the students she nominated for Script Writing Club. We had a pretty thorough meeting, and I took a lot of notes about each student. These notes can be found in the appendices.

During our conversation, I was really trying to get a feel for what each student will need from this process. At first, I was certain that if I simply understood the areas in which each student needs to grow, I would be able to accomplish a lot to help each kid. After the meeting, however, I am feeling wholly inadequate. I don't know how I will address so many needs and issues in such a short time.

December 16, 2013:

We had our auditions for *Macbeth* today. I was really disappointed that most of my fifth graders who worked really hard during the musical hardly had the audition monologue memorized. The auditions were dominated by third graders; Sierra, Elizabeth, and Katarina were all clear, loud, and attempted to do some sort of physical movement that aligned with the translations I had provided.

I'll start casting for *Macbeth* soon, and the teachers should be getting their student nominations to me by Wednesday. Then, I will post the lists on Friday, so that the kids can see whether they're in Shakespeare Club or Script Writing Club before leaving for the winter

break.

December 19, 2013:

I received the last of the Script Writing Club nominations from teachers today. It turns out that Benjamin Dominguez, Eva Schlue, Sierra Zucker, Elizabeth Serratos, Katarina Bursac, Daniel Serratos, Deja Thomas and Ishmael Dominguez will be our drama club student leaders. These students will participate both in our one-act version of *Macbeth* and in our Script Writing Club process drama. Now that I have names for all of the students who will be involved, I can post a cast list for both productions tomorrow. Thank goodness.

Meeting 1-January 8, 2014:

Just had my first drama club meeting. I was nervous, because I didn't know who all would come. I was afraid that, even though Jordan met with the parents of the nominated students prior to winter break, those students might feel like they aren't the stereotypical drama club kids, and might not come to our meeting. I was very pleased, though, to have twenty-three students in person; we were only missing Donna. So, it looks like I will have twenty-four students for Script Writing Club. I feel like that's a very manageable amount, and I feel like it will be a large enough group to provide a lot of diversity, which I wanted for our group.

We circled up and introduced ourselves—name, grade, and one detail about our personality or interests. I have multiple students from every grade except for first grade; Benjamin is the only first grader in our group. It was interesting to watch our introductory activity and see what types of walls each child had up. Some of the intermediate students, such as Aliyah, Sade, Tippy and Ishmael, were much quieter and much more timid than our first grader. Several of the second graders were very resistant, as well; it will be a challenge to break these barriers down.

Next, I talked a little about what we are going to do. I introduced the word playwright to the group, and I asked the students what kinds of people they think write plays. Each student shared one adjective or phrase to describe who he or she thinks playwrights are and should be. I wrote down every student's idea to compile a list, and then I took a photograph of the list and posted it on our Edmodo page, so that the students could see and refer to it later. I also asked if students understood what a scientist or a researcher is, and they did. The students were much more familiar with this term than with the idea of a playwright.

Having clarified these terms, I transitioned into my teacher-in-role part, telling the students that I had a letter from the governor. We talked about a few of the governor's accomplishments, and I told the students that his next goal was to create peace in Colorado. Then, I opened the letter on the projector, and I read it to them. The letter explained that the governor believes that children are the future of our world, and in order to create a peaceful future, he has to start by creating peace with children. The letter explained that because the governor is an adult, he doesn't understand what kinds of problems students experience on a regular basis, so he needed help.

In our group in-role improvisation, the students determined that in order to make politicians or other adults understand what kids go through, they needed to show problems that happen at school. In our conversation, the students began to argue whose experiences were more important. Sara Z demanded that we talk about the black experience, saying that black kids are treated worse than other students. I could see Sara S looking down and away as Sara Z started talking, so I asked Sara S what she was thinking. She said she's from Libya, and she thinks that people that speak Arabic are treated badly, too, because people hate them on account of their language. Komildzhan, a fifth grader who was added to our group on Monday, offered his idea that all kids who have to move to America from other countries live

more difficult lives, not just the ones who speak Arabic.

When the group was in the midst of debating whose experience was more deserving of the others, but before hard feelings began to form, I moved the group from debate to our Cross the Line activity. When we started, the students seemed a little bit nervous. Many of them were very giggly or distracted, but they soon transitioned into a state of focus and cohesion, participating respectfully. Sierra and Sara Z, sisters in grades three and five, stopped looking to see what the other was doing, and began thinking for themselves without obvious trepidation. Matthew, a second grader, stopped bossing around his second-grade stepsister, Sarah O. I could see the students beginning to think and work on their own, and I could sense the group's collective confidence and respect levels rising. At that point, I wrapped up the activity to begin our debrief.

Debriefing, or "The Share Circle" as I called it, was the crux of our first meeting. Sara Z volunteered to start, and she shared that she didn't think black kids have harder lives anymore. She admitted that she did not step forward when I said "step forward if you know someone who does dangerous drugs" because she was afraid she would be the only one, but she felt better when she saw a lot of other people step forward. She said that this taught her that she wasn't the only person who was ashamed of something bad in her family. She also said that she was surprised to see that other people might know what that's like.

When it was Sierra (C.C)'s turn to share, she agreed with her sister, saying that sometimes she lays awake at night, wondering what life would be like if her mom had done drugs before she was born, instead of afterwards. She also stated that she doesn't feel like she fits in at school, because she thinks that most people have perfect lives and she's afraid of letting people know that her own life can be scary sometimes.

Other students' shares ranged from admitting that they felt badly for bullying others

to realizing, for the first time, that they were not alone and that other students had similar thoughts, feelings, and experiences. One student, Tippy, even shared that she never invited friends to her house because her family only speaks Thai at home, and she is afraid that her friends will make fun of her family for not knowing English. Immediately, Komildzhan, Amna, Sara S, and Katarina all admitted that they have the same problem.

When our share circle concluded, I had a few students who were in tears, but the group was really supportive of one another. First all the way through fifth graders were quiet and respectful, not prying or shaming one another. A hand on the shoulder, retrieving a tissue, giving a hug... all of these are very simple gestures, but all of these demonstrate that my goal for today was achieved.

The students, strangers at first, many of whom struggled to introduce themselves at the beginning of our meeting, learned to trust one another, at least a little bit. They started to become an ensemble. This was further proved when I returned to my in-role persona of the politician, asking the students whose stories they decided to tell to the governor. Eva was the first to volunteer an answer, exclaiming that all our stories were everyone's stories! I was proud; I consider this a day one, well done.

Meeting 2-January 15th, 2014:

I don't even know where to begin with today. It started off calmly enough, with snack and attendance, reviewing the social contract, and letting the kids have time to finish responding to the journal prompts from last week. I had been hoping that, after a week's worth of time, the kids would have completed the task of answering two simple prompts. However, I found that I had overestimated the language skills and the at-home support of my students. Sara S said that she has to go to Arabic school most days after school, so she doesn't have an opportunity to study. Several of the older kids—being in fourth or fifth

grade—have to make dinner for their siblings upon getting home. And a few of my students, whom I had forgotten live transient lifestyles, do not own pencils or pens. So I set our schedule back ten minutes or so and allowed students to complete the prompt at the beginning of our meeting, some with and some without assistance. After the students completed their journal responses, we circled up for share.

Next, we played two games that I had planned to follow up our emotional Cross the Line activity from last week. We completed the Invisible Maze and played two rounds of a game I invented, called Boggle. Both of these games are team building activities that encourage students to feel comfortable messing up or venturing a guess when they aren't completely certain of the correct answer. Each activity uses time constraints to create a sense of urgency. This prompted students, by the end of the Invisible Maze activity, to start supporting each other in attempt to help the ensemble achieve their goal. Komildzhan, a fifth grader, phrased it perfectly when he told Mugabe, a very timid second grader, to “just try, man! If you get it wrong, we'll learn from it!”

Next, we debriefed. The students shared that, at first, they felt very nervous in the Invisible Maze. Aliyah shared that she didn't know where to go or what to do, and that she was afraid that she would “mess it up” for everyone else. Many of the other students felt the same way, at first. But, as the game progressed, the students said that they ceased to fear missteps. They relaxed, and felt more comfortable posturing a guess, and they stopped feeling a need to be “right.”

In our discussion, I asked why they had been afraid to guess, and all of the students agreed that being wrong, most of the time, equates to being stupid. Tippy shared that because she speaks Thai at home, she doesn't always feel comfortable speaking in class, because she's not confident in her English skills. She said that even when she knows the answers to

questions asked in her classes, she doesn't say anything or write anything because she's afraid that her language limitations make her peers and teachers think that she's stupid. She said that she liked that everyone was communicating without talking during the Invisible Maze, because she felt like she could do everything just as well as anyone else, since nobody was talking.

Other students shared reasons why they are afraid of making mistakes, as well. Tippy learned that many other students in our group feel that their struggles with learning English make them feel foolish, and she also learned that many of the native English speakers in are group are afraid of speaking up in class, too, simply because they're afraid of giving the wrong answer in front of others.

Because several students had been asking to use the restroom during our debrief, I allowed the kids to take a five-minute break once we concluded our conversation. This ended up being a huge mistake.

When we reconvened, I attempted to start Human Zen Garden, an activity that I use to try to teach elements of stage picture—levels, windows, and depth—and to introduce students to nonverbal story telling through tableaux. But, this take-turns activity repeatedly exploded into simultaneous and uncontrolled movement. I kept needing to stop the group, circle up, and re-explain the rules. We even role-played a few examples of students following and not following the rules to make sure that all of my students, including the ELLs in the group, understood the concepts of “one at a time” or “taking turns”. Despite these efforts, twenty-three students who are all excited after running in the gym and are eager to be involved, and who range in age from six to eleven years old, are difficult to control. No matter how well meaning—they all just wanted to participate—they were frustrating. Their chaotic bursts of simultaneous action and their inability to play by the rules were driving me

nuts. I stopped the activity and gave the students five minutes to work on this week's journal prompts, while I brainstormed ways to make this activity run more smoothly and while I hoped that they would calm down.

When we started the game again, with the new rules—you have to pass twice after your turn before playing again, so think carefully before you get up to participate in a round, and if a player uses running feet, the audience claps twice and that player takes a seat—operation of the activity greatly improved. The students enjoyed this activity so much that I allowed them to continue participating, inserting short debriefing conversations in between rounds rather than having one large debrief at the end. Throughout the activity, students decided that lines are boring to look at, and that having everyone stand is also uninteresting. I labeled these concepts depth and levels. The students also stated that when the audience cannot see everyone on the stage, it's difficult to understand the story. This conversation allowed me to introduce the concept of windows. The kids were enjoying this so much, and our short conversations were going so well, that we played the game until parents began to arrive.

January 18, 2014:

Today I was informed that this upcoming week's rehearsal is being moved to the gymnasium, because our superintendent, Tom Boasberg, has decided to hold a faculty meeting for all southeast elementary schools in the Ellis auditorium on the 22nd. So, that day I will have to set up for the meeting and be available for testing video equipment during my fifth grade class, then immediately move into the gym with my Script Writing Club kiddos. It's not a huge deal, really, but I wish that I had found out sooner, so that I could have easily gotten word out to the kids. Since there is no school this Monday, and since most of the club members are not currently in my classes, I might not see many of them prior to the upcoming

meeting. I'll just have to send notes to their teachers and hope that the teachers actually deliver these notes to my students. Also, the gym is such a large space that I'm a little concerned about discipline and maintaining focus in there. So, I'll have to revise my plans a little bit to include some extra focus activities in case the kids get too squirrely.

Meeting 3-January 22, 2014

Well, that was way more of a hassle than I wanted it to be. The superintendent's people, who were supposed to arrive at 2:00, didn't arrive until 2:50, and they arrived with expectations that hadn't been communicated. During my lunch period I had set up a microphone, gotten the projector ready, and set up speakers for them. But nobody had informed me that the video or power point presentation needed to be shown from a PC, rather than from a Mac. And I doubt that this so-called "need" was, in reality, much more than a preference, since everything that they were showing was on a flash drive, and since my Mac has both PowerPoint and Quicktime, the programs that they needed.

But they insisted on having a PC, so as my first and second graders—who are dismissed at 2:55—began trickling in for Script Writing Club, I appointed fifth grade students to teach the younger ones how to play Bibbity Bibbity Bop. I ran upstairs to the computer lab to get a Microsoft laptop, and by the time I got back to the auditorium, Khoa was there, ushering the students from both Script Writing Club and from my fifth grade class into the gym, right into the midst of an omniball game. All the students began running around the gym and Terri, the gym teacher, was pissed. But Khoa insisted that I go set up the laptop, so I went to the auditorium to take care of that.

By the time I got back into the gym the bell had already rung and Terri had left to go to the meeting. I had to sort through the students and send the extra kids home, which was a challenge because Terri had not put her equipment away and most of the fifth grade boys

wanted to stay and play basketball. Around 3:15, I finally had the gym emptied of all extra students, and I was left with only the Script Writing Club. We had just circled up to start our share when Khoa came in, anxious because the superintendent had accidentally muted his microphone. So by the time we actually started, we had lost twenty-five minutes of our rehearsal. Luckily, our meeting was only interrupted twice more; once, by Aidan and Serina's mom picking them up early for a last-minute, emergency funeral, and a second time because the superintendent wanted the projector off and couldn't figure out the remote.

Because of all of the shuffling and interruptions, the kids were a little wired. I started a round of shape shifters in order to get some energy out and to increase the students' focus. But the kids had been taken out of their regular location, which also took them out of their normal mindset. Sometimes it amazes me how anything different can completely stop an elementary student from functioning. We shifted to freeze dance, a more individual get-your-wiggles-out activity, and when the students were a little less amped, we tried shape shifters again. Once they were finally focused, we began our share circle.

Through today's share circle, I learned that our group has members of six different religions. I also learned that Katarina lost family members in a bombing in Serbia, and that's why her parents moved to America. She has such a positive outlook and such a happy disposition that I never would have guessed that she had witnessed her own brother's death. But the largest image or symbol that she had drawn in her journal was a peace symbol, and that's the story she chose to tell.

After our share circle, the students broke up into small groups of two or three, and began their in-role discussion. Each group of in-role researchers identified a value or a theme that they felt was made evident during our share circle. Every group chose a value on their own, and then began the Plan-Practice-Perform procedure—which the students learn when

they are in drama class—to create a nonverbal performance about the value that their group had identified.

For the most part, the groups worked really well and in a self-directed manner while I rotated through the room. Only two groups of students—both male duos—struggled to come up with ideas. One group had chosen a value, but stated that they didn't know how to communicate the idea of “comedy” without talking. I asked them a series of questions, asking what they usually do to make people laugh and what makes them laugh. I also asked why comedy is important to them, and what kinds of people they like to laugh with. The boys each had a few ideas, so I left them to discuss and debate their ideas together. Similarly, I asked the second group that was stuck some questions, until they were able to come up with ideas.

Using our Plan, Practice, Perform procedure, the kids created and presented their nonverbal values presentations. The superintendent's meeting ended around 4:30, so we moved back into the auditorium to perform and record the students' work. The values they presented included spirituality, togetherness, family traditions, confidence, making friends, teamwork, peace, special talents, individuality, sports, winning, and laughter.

By the time we finished performing and recording, we were almost out of time at our meeting. So I skipped introducing the sentence stems for today, and I will have to come back to that next week. I was disappointed that we lost so much time because of the faculty meeting and related issues, but I was really proud of my students' nonverbal performances. I thought that they put a lot of thought and discussion into identifying thematic values, and I was pleased that many of them attempted to use the lessons from last week's Zen Garden activity in their nonverbal presentations today.

Meeting 4-January 29, 2014

The kids came in dragging today. They just seemed really lethargic. It didn't help that we were missing eight of them; two were gone due to illness, and six were out due to snow and transportation issues. Today was also the third inside recess day in a row, and back-to-back inside recess days seem to kill everyone's spirits. No matter what the reason, though, I was finding it very difficult to get the kids engaged at the beginning of our meeting. So, I decided to skip the share circle for now, in favor of something more active.

We got up and started shakers. We took turns shaking both hands, each foot, head, and our whole body, starting at an eight count for each part and working our way down to one. After shakers, a few kids were smiling, but I wanted to get maximum involvement, so we started a game of The Yes Circle.

I began this activity by explaining that even when I don't feel well—I am currently struggling with a severe sinus infection—I come to school. I asked if it would be fair for me to come to our meeting and not do my best, because I'm ill. Déjà, a fifth grader, said that if I started slacking, other students would, too. Benjamin, my first grader, said that the ensemble needs everyone, so that we can “do good stuff together.” So, through discussion, the group concluded that everyone needed to try and to do their best, even if we are tired or not feeling great.

After debriefing, we got back up. I explained that theatre is a world of yes, where anything can happen and we need to let our imaginations rule. We also talked about the world of yes concept meaning that we always try, we always accept other people's ideas, and we always support the ensemble with positive energy.

Following this brief conversation, we started the game. At first, some of the students were rather timid, but as we played, I could feel the energy and enthusiasm levels rising. But then, we started losing focus, so I made a challenge out of it. The kids had to work together

to ensure that no “yes” got lost, and to ensure that nobody ended up adding any extras.

However, at the same time that the students were attempting to keep track of the yesses, I would be adding an additional “yes” every time that one was passed enthusiastically at least five times. The students’ goal was to see how many they could get going, without losing any or adding new ones.

Our energy and focus were both high after the game. I wanted to keep the focus but bring it a little tighter, so we celebrated our success of getting seven yesses going at a time with a circle of touchdown dances. Then, I said “everybody follow me,” and began rubbing my hands together. I built through the progression of a rainstorm, with patting our legs, snapping, slapping the sides of our mouths, clapping, jumping, and then reversing the process. I was disappointed when I asked what that sounded like, and first through fifth graders could only come up with answers such as clapping and snapping, or other action terms. Eventually, I was able to urge them towards onomatopoeia such as “which” and “tap!” It took a very specific question, though, to get them to a non-literal answer. I told the students right that we were going to do it again, and to yell out a type of weather that sounded like what we were doing. Eva, a second grader, exclaimed that our sounds were like rain, to a choral response of “oh!”s, but her discovery was soon followed by suggestions of wind, thunder, and hail.

Now that the students were engaged and their lethargy was somewhat alleviated, I pulled four bandanas out of my costume box. I covered the faces of four volunteers, arranged them onstage and had them physically explore different emotions. I would say an emotion, such as excited, sleepy, or scared, allowing the students time to mime the emotion before freezing into an “emotion image”. After freezing into three or four emotion images, I had the students switch between their tableaux rapid fire, focusing on having the students react, rather than over thinking the process.

In groups of four, until all the students had participated, we explored emotions and ideas through physical movement and tableaux. In debrief, I asked the kids why it was important for the participants to have their faces covered during this activity. Komildzhan shared that it made them use their whole bodies to mime, instead of relying upon their faces. Tuff, a second grader, said that it stopped them from cheating or copying each other during the activity. We discussed that for a moment, and Ishmael identified cheating as stealing someone else's idea instead of making up your own. Sade said that cheating was being lazy. And finally, shy little Sara said that the scarves helped her to not feel afraid. Aliyah agreed, saying that it felt like people weren't really looking at you when you had the bandana on.

Bringing up fear reminded Amna of our drama journal entries from last week, so we gathered up for our share circle. Because so many students were missing, I did not record today's share circle results on our participation chart. Nonetheless, we circled up and the students shared their dreams and nightmare entries. Some of the shares that really stood out to me included Tippy's nightmare about ghosts from Thailand chasing her family to America, then eating her family's souls and taking over her family's bodies. Elizabeth, meanwhile, has a recurring nightmare in which she makes her mother so angry that her mom kills herself and makes Elizabeth watch. Katarina has nightmares in which her mom has a baby boy who is stillborn, and the mom carries the corpse around and makes Katarina take care of it as though it's alive. Several kids have nightmares about being kidnapped or losing their families. C.C. has nightmares that she is running from monsters, and she sacrifices herself to save her older siblings. I was very interested to hear the students' shares. I felt that Katarina's nightmare may be inspired by the death of her older brother, and C.C.'s dream is symbolic of her older sister, Sara, constantly needing C.C.'s emotional and social support.

After our share circle, the kids grouped up and created short scenes based on their

nightmares, hopes, and dreams. However, we skipped our large-group improvisation activity, because I knew that if we did this, we would not have time for our Plan, Practice, and Perform procedure. Even with skipping our large-group in-role activity, we barely had time to perform the nightmare scenes before 5:00.

Meeting 5-February 5, 2014:

Today, I was really proud of our share circle. Only two students chose not to share at all today, which means that most of our students who have not felt comfortable sharing before were finally willing to participate. I interpret that to mean that many of my students are finally settling into the setting of drama club and are finally feeling safe in and accepted by the group.

I am also very pleased with our progress throughout the meeting as a whole. This was the first meeting that focused primarily on writing, and I was dreading the writing process a little bit. I've realized, in our past four weeks together, that the way these kids think and write is very different from what I anticipated. Rather than thinking creatively and writing with imagination, the students take a very technical approach to everything.

Because Ellis serves a low-income, refugee population, the students are constantly drilled on technically correct writing strategies. They are also quite often very afraid of sharing their ideas, because they are so intimidated by any environment that allows an opportunity to be incorrect. Because our school serves many English Language Learners, we have standardized testing every month. Our students take tests that are mandated at the national, state, and district levels. There are tests for content area academic progress as well as testing for language acquisition in both academic language objectives and in social language objectives. Because our campus's unified improvement plan (UIP) includes engaging and motivating students through self monitoring of progress, students are

constantly made painfully aware of their successes and their failures. This may be an effective educational tool, but it seems to have squeezed out any room for creativity.

Therefore, I was incredibly anxious about combining our creative Plan, Practice, Perform procedure from the past few weeks with writing dialogue. And at first, the kids were all very reluctant to follow my lead. They were very concerned with the format, and insisted that we create a topic sentence and three details. In their role as researchers, the students stated that this format best communicates a message to a reader, and that since an audience needs to understand the message of the play the same way that the reader needs to understand the message of an essay, we need to follow the same format. Even though I personally disagreed with their reasoning, they presented their ideas in-role, and I was proud of that, so I acquiesced.

In-role as the researchers, the students discussed themes from our share circle and chose the phrase “Racism is all around us, everywhere” as their topic sentence. The students also agreed upon three detail sentences;

1. Adults say racism is wrong but they still act racist.
2. Kids call each other racist names to be cool.
3. Some racism is based on language.

Then, the students selected a conclusion sentence, about which there was no debate. The conclusion sentence states that “we should end racism in this century.”

Together, in-role as the researchers, we wrote the paragraph, using the format that the students are used to. Then, we broke into groups and began the Plan, Practice, Perform routine. I had two groups create scenes based upon the topic sentence, and two groups create scenes based upon the conclusion.

I was really dismayed that while most of the students were working, Mugabe decided

to act like he was shooting people. When I asked him what he was doing, he pulled his shirt over his head and became non-responsive. I asked if he wanted to make a scene about something else, but he didn't respond. I asked if he was hungry—which is often a problem with students at Ellis—and he plugged his ears. I asked if he wanted to change groups and if someone in his group had said something mean to him. He remained non-responsive. I tried to identify the problem, but I couldn't get an answer to any question I asked. So, I told Mugabe that I was going to let him calm down on the quiet carpet, and that I would come back and try to talk to him again in a minute. As I turned to walk away, Mugabe yelled, "I hate everybody! Leave me alone and die!"

This, of course, got the whole group's attention. Several students were angry, and the rest were simply startled. I explained that Mugabe's behavior was showing very unexpected behavior; this is the preferred terminology for anything inappropriate that students may do at Ellis. We discussed, for a brief moment, that unexpected behavior should be ignored—in accordance with Ellis classroom procedures—and then we tried to continue.

The students began showing the scenes that they had created, but were interrupted by Mugabe several times. I reminded Mugabe of our social contract rule "Respect the Ensemble," and I reminded him that our expectation is that everyone in the ensemble does their own job. I then reminded Mugabe that his job, as a member of the audience, was to pay attention quietly. Matthew, another second grader, volunteered that "if you don't pay attention you can't learn," and Komildzhan pointed out that yelling and interrupting was a type of bullying, because it hurts other people by stopping them from learning. Deja, another fifth grader, said that Mugabe was acting against the lessons our play is trying to teach. That finally seemed to get through to Mugabe. He still sat with his shirt over his head, but he calmed down a little.

We resumed performing and filming the scenes that the students had created about

our concept and conclusion statements. In-role as playwrights, I asked the students to nominate scenes that best communicated the messages that the researchers had identified. Students were asked to nominate scenes that were not their own scenes, using the sentence stems that were posted on the closet door.

The nominations revolved around C.C.'s group's scene, which was based upon her experience in class. In our share circle, C.C. shared that her teacher was talking about Martin Luther King, Jr., for African American History Month. C.C. said that her class was talking about segregation and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s role in ending segregation, but she said her teacher only called on the white kids during their conversation.

The club really liked this scene, so in-role as playwrights, we decided to expand this scene for our play. I requested that, if we use C.C.'s experience as the basis for our scene, we change all of the circumstances to fiction, rather than simply re-creating C.C.'s life. The students agreed, and Sade said that this was the responsibility of playwrights, anyway. Komildzhan, then, suggested that we use a lawyer instead of a teacher, because lawyers have more power than teachers, and because adults listen to lawyers. Madison suggested that the segregation in our scene be based on "shoes or hair or something" rather than skin color, because not all of the students in our group are just black or white. The group, in-role as playwrights, discussed this for a while, eventually deciding upon using colored shirts as the basis of discrimination in the scene, because shirts would be recognizable by the audience, and because it would be easier for students to change shirt colors than it would be for them to all wear only two different hairstyles.

After the students, playing the communal role of playwright, had determined the basis for the scene, we started experimenting. Komildzhan began improvising dialogue for the lawyer, since the role of the lawyer had been his idea. Having watched *Hairspray* at G.W.

High last week, the fifth graders suggested dividing the groups with a rope. Then we went through the scene, improvising one line at a time. At first, I attempted to have the students improvise the whole scene, but they were very resistant. Guided, line-by-line improvisation worked much better, so we proceeded that way. I would ask the students questions, such as “what might this character say or do next,” or “how would your character feel about that?” As the students developed the scene, some improvising dialogue while others, in the role of playwrights, determined the upcoming actions, I typed what they were saying and doing.

After we completed our prompted improvisation and got through the scene, we sat and read what I had typed up. Then, we spent the last ten minutes of rehearsal with kids offering revisions, which is a process they learn in their core classrooms. When we were done, the kids were really excited about the scene they had created, and I was really proud of them.

Meeting 6-February 12th, 2014:

The journal prompt discussed in today’s share circle was “describe the way you see people treat each other at Ellis.” I was dismayed at first by how few students were willing to share the first time around the circle. Despite reminding each other that “don’t hide your ideas” was one of the tenants of our social contract, ten out of eighteen students present today passed, rather than sharing the first time around. But although many students had originally passed up on the opportunity to share, by the time we had gone around the circle again, everyone had shared. I concluded that the large amount of first-round passes was due to the fact that so many students wrote stories that were very personal in nature. Now, looking back, I know that at that age, I probably would have passed, too. I think it is a massive testament to the group that so many students were willing to share the second time around. All of the students’ shares circulated around a central theme of disrespect, although the disrespect of

which the students spoke took many different forms.

Komildzhan shared that even though he listens to others and tries to be respectful, most of his friends laugh at his ideas and make fun of his accent. He shared that even though his friends do not treat him well, he is still friends with them, because they all like soccer and because other kids are meaner to him than his friends are.

Tippy shared that she sees a lot of bullying at Ellis. She said that sometimes people complain about getting bullied, but that the complainers are usually bullies, too, and they bully others in order to make themselves feel better. She said that she often gets bullied because she is Thai, and that students make fun of her eyes and face, and that they call her Chinese. She said that when the bullies bully other people, she is happy, because they are finally leaving her alone.

Déjà shared that there is a lot of unfairness at Ellis, and that people don't use the golden rule. Benjamin agreed with this, stating that other kids in his grade level exclude him because he's small, and that when he gets bigger, he will always make sure that the smaller kids have him as a friend. Daniel, a fourth grader, piped up, saying that he is also excluded because of his size, which isn't fair, because it's not his fault that he's small.

C.C. shared that there's a girl in her neighborhood that hurts herself because the kids at her school are so mean to her and she doesn't have friends. C.C. said that when she tried talking to this girl and including her, the girl was really rude and acted like she was angry at C.C. for trying to be nice. C.C. said that she feels badly for this girl, but because the girl is in middle school, she doesn't try to talk to her any more, because it doesn't seem worth the effort.

Elizabeth, a third grader, shared an experience that is somewhat similar to C.C.'s. She sees a lot of bullying at Ellis, and she has pity on the people who are getting bullied.

Sometimes, she says, she wants to stand up for the people who are being bullied, but she's afraid to. She says if she doesn't join the bullies, she will get picked on, too, and she won't have any friends. So, Elizabeth admitted that sometimes she joins in, and sometimes she just ignores the bullying, because she's too afraid to do what she considers to be the right thing.

This perked Aidan up, and although he had originally passed, he asked if he could share. He said that, like Elizabeth, he too was scared to stand up to the bullies. He said that he's so scared that he doesn't even try to stand up for himself, even though he thinks that he should. He said that if everyone just stood up for himself or herself, then they wouldn't feel so much pressure to be mean to others.

Sara S., a second grader, shared that students at Ellis aren't allowed to be friends with whomever they choose. She said that some of the older Muslim students get mad at her when she hangs out with her friend Zora, who is Turkish, and she doesn't know why. Similarly, her friends from her homeroom class get angry at her when she spends time with students from other classrooms during recess.

Last to share today was Ishmael, a fifth grader. He said that nothing is fair at school, because some students get more help from teachers than other students, and that some students receive worse punishments than other students for doing the same things. He said that students don't treat each other fairly, either. He says that before school and during recess, games just turn into fighting. Others agreed with Ishmael, saying that people fight over teams, over the rules of different games, and over who is or isn't allowed to play.

After our share circle, we jumped into our roles as researchers, and discussed what patterns were identified through the stories shared. I numbered the students off and broke them into "research teams", and assigned each team the task of, as researchers, creating a sentence that summarized their findings. The students discussed in-role and wrote their

sentences, then presented their sentences as scientific findings. The students presented the following statements;

1. When our friends are mean and we join in, we turn into bullies.
2. We bully because we are afraid and we don't know what else to do.
3. Bullying is like the water cycle.
4. When groups of friends fight, friendship makes us bully each other.

After presenting these statements as researchers, the groups took on the role of playwrights once more and attempted to create scenes to present solutions to the problems that their groups—as researchers—had identified.

When the students came back from their snack break, I had all the topic sentences posted on our board. I re-shuffled the groups, breaking the kiddos into four new teams. Each team was assigned one sentence, and the groups were given time to Plan, Practice, and Perform short scenes based on their assigned sentence.

As I figured, many of the scenes were very similar. I used this to take a moment to have the group chat about diverse people thinking similarly. Eva pointed out that when different people care about a topic and work together to solve it, they will agree on what to do. She's a second grader; I was really proud to hear her say that.

All of the scenes revolved around two groups of friends fighting for one reason or another, and then solving the fight. Because all the scenes were so similar, I didn't want to have the kids vote on one, because I felt that voting for such similar scenes would inevitably end up being a popularity vote, which could hurt feelings and reverse what we've been working on.

So, I changed my tactics. Rather than having students nominate and evaluate scenes and story content, I asked each team to nominate two students from their group to be "actors",

while the others, in-role as playwrights, would judge the actors' choices. The teams nominated Ishmael, Sade, Tuff, Eva, Sara Z., Amna, Deja, and Aidan to be the actors.

This was a very off-the-cuff process, so I was pretty pleased by the way it worked. The "actors" took the stage—an area of our stage directly in front of the projection screen. Meanwhile, our "judges" sat with the members of their teams in the audience area, which was really just the other half of the stage. Then, the actors took turns improvising short bits in the scene. They improvised conversation until I told them to pause. Sometimes, they improvised only one scene at a time before I stopped them, and sometimes I allowed them to improvise short conversations before pausing. After each bit was improvised, the judging teams discussed whether they liked that bit or not, keeping in mind their role as playwrights and considering three questions;

1. Would kids really say that?
2. Does that make sense in the story?
3. Does that fit as a detail for one of our topic sentences?

If the judges, in the role of playwrights, answered yes to all three of these questions, they gave the actors a thumbs-up. If the actors got any thumbs down in response to a specific bit, they had to reimagine the scene and improvise again. When the actors received unanimous thumbs up, I typed their bit into the script, so that all the students could see our progress on the screen.

This process ran really smoothly. The actors had fun pausing and re-starting their bits in the scene, and the judges took their debates and their collective role as playwrights very seriously. I was impressed and pleased when even Mugabe began actively deliberating with his judging partners, making statements like "the bullies aren't mean enough" and providing reasons for his opinions. Seeing his enthusiasm in judging scenes made me realize that

maybe his previous angry outbursts had been due to discomfort performing and being onstage. He clearly has a grasp for story telling, and he enjoys analyzing the scenes and the dialogue. While doing this, he wasn't overwhelmed, possibly because he wasn't acting on the makeshift stage area. In the future, I think I will have to create jobs or other activities for Mugabe that will allow him to participate without feeling the pressure of a large group watching him. I can't believe I didn't think of that before! Ugh. I create accommodations like that in all of my classes every day; why didn't I think of creating scaffolded instruction and sheltered participation for our club meetings? Duh!

Anyway, the process was really effective, even though it wasn't what I had originally planned. All the kids were really engaged in writing the scene, and they were actively participating in assessing and revising their work. I was really proud of them!

However, we had issues ending the scene. The kids just couldn't come up with a conclusion that felt right. The actors weren't struggling to get unanimous thumbs-ups; they were struggling to get any thumbs-ups at all. After four improvised attempts at ending the scene, I huddled the actor-students together and coached them to just have fun, and gave them permission to do something goofy if they wanted to. My goal was to alleviate stress, but this simple suggestion yielded an instantly approved ending to our scene. The kids weren't really being goofy at all, but then Sara Z yelled "let's boogey!" and all of the actors broke out into dances of varying levels of awkwardness. Almost simultaneously, all the judges gave a unanimous round of thumbs-ups.

So, based on our ending for this scene, we ended our day with a new assignment aside from the journal prompt: find a song that represents ending fights and getting along.

Meeting 7-February 19, 2014:

Because of last week's introduction of a musical number and dance sequence into our

play, I had to skip almost all of the educational strategies that I had originally planned for today. I felt that plowing on with my original plans would take ownership away from my students and would make them feel less valuable as members of the creative process. So, I adapted this week's plan to include time for the students to share songs that they thought fit the theme of our play and the end of the scene that we wrote last week.

Unfortunately, however, I had not expected the process of considering songs to take so long, and I had not expected the students to select such random music. I had also not expected the students to be emotionally attached to their selections, which led to a few issues and interruptions in our song selection process. I was not prepared. I should have been more organized in this, and I should have had the students submit nominations ahead of time. I should have reviewed their selections and chosen a few to consider as a whole group.

But, that's not how I approached this. I took it on as part of our share circle, with my laptop by my side, all set up to bypass the filter in order to access Youtube. I told the students that we would go around the circle and that each student would say the name of the song that they wanted to nominate, as well as one reason why they thought that song would fit in with the story. Then, we would listen to 60 seconds of the song before debating its use in our play based on the following criteria:

1. Is it easy and fun to dance to?
2. Is it appropriate for all ages?
3. Does the song's story match the scene's story?

I figured that, with 25 kids, this process would take forty minutes to an hour, assuming that each student would take one minute to introduce their nomination, listening to the songs would take an additional sixty seconds, and answering the three questions with a simple "yes" or "no" would take less than a minute per song. But, everything takes more time with

elementary students. And, elementary students cry.

The third student in our share circle was Matthew, who nominated Psy's current pop hit song, "Oppam Gangam Style". His reasoning was solid, especially for a second grader. Even though I can't stand this song, I was proud of Matthew's attempt to validate the earworm's use in our play. He said that, since everyone loves the song, even people who are fighting would all dance to it and get along.

I complimented Matthew on his reason for nominating the song. Then I said something along the lines of, "I think everyone has heard this song, so we don't need to listen to it," and I proceeded to ask the three questions. I asked if the song was fun and easy to dance to, and the group responded with a unanimous vote of yes. They also responded yes when I asked if the song was appropriate. When I asked if the song was a good fit for the scene, they hesitated, processing. Amna stated that talking about sexy ladies had nothing to do with ending bullying. Julie then agreed, saying that she doesn't like the word sexy. Upon hearing these ideas, I turned to Matthew and again explained that his reasoning was excellent, but that Gangam Style would not be one of our finalists.

We started to continue around the share circle, but I quickly realized that I'd made a mistake. Matthew started to cry softly as Aliyah began to share her idea. I asked Aliyah to pause, and I asked Matthew what was wrong. His response was to throw his drama journal across the circle, nearly hitting Tippy, and to yell "You hate me!"

Um, so I was really not prepared for that. Matthew evolved from a state of fine, to softly crying, to an outright tantrum in less than a minute. I didn't even know what to say. All I could think was "hey, I just went out of my way to compliment you twice, kid!" Before I could process the situation and think about the fact that I had probably caused this breakdown, Matthew was already flailing and hyperventilating. Several girls rushed to his

side to try to console the screaming second grader, while the rest of the group just tried to get out of the way.

I told the group to partner up and talk about their nominations with a friend, and I sat down next to Matthew. I explained that I do not, in fact, hate him, and I asked him to tell me what I did to upset him. But Matthew was already in full-blown tantrum mode, and either could not hear me or didn't want to respond. Or, maybe he didn't know how to answer. I told Matthew that I hadn't wanted to make him cry and that I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I asked what I had done that upset him, and I asked why he thought that I hated him, but I received no response.

I told the group to get into small groups of three to four students, and share their nominated song and their reasons behind the choice, and then to answer the three questions for each nomination. Sara S. wrote the three questions on the board, and I told the groups that any song that received three yesses would be a finalist, and we would share the finalists with the large group in a few minutes.

Going back to Matthew, I spent a few minutes explaining that I was sorry that I had hurt his feelings. I told him that I didn't know what I had done wrong, but that I wanted to fix the problem. I asked if he wanted me to fix the problem, which received a response. Still sobbing, Matthew nodded his head. I told Matthew that I wanted to fix the problem, too, but that I couldn't fix anything until he told me what was wrong. Then I just sat with him for a while as he calmed down. As we sat, I listened to the groups debate songs ranging from *Frozen's* "Let it Go" and Macklemore's "Same Love" to the song "Happy" from *Despicable Me* and a variety of songs by Miley Cyrus, Justin Bieber, Bruno Mars and Katy Perry, as well as several artists I've never heard of.

Eventually, Matthew responded. He said that he was upset because I didn't have the

group listen to his favorite song, and because his song didn't become a finalist. I explained that everybody knows the song, as well as the dance, so we didn't need to listen to it, since people started singing the song as soon as he mentioned it. That didn't fly with Matthew; he really, really wanted everyone to hear his song. And I guess it wasn't fair for me to promise sixty seconds of each nomination and then deny that for one obnoxious earworm. So we struck a deal; if he would calm down, then at the end of our meeting we would all listen to his whole song. He asked if we could dance to it, and I agreed.

Finally having Matthew calmed down, I realized we were already after 4:00. Frustrated and needing to figure out how I would tackle everything else that I had planned for today, we dismissed for snack. During the break, I decided that I would be content if we at least decided on a song today. The rest of my plans could be delayed, and I would be relieved if we could get through the second half of the meeting without tears. If I could get the group to agree on one song to end our scene, I would consider myself not fully a failure today.

We made it. The group decided on "One Tribe" by the Black-Eyed Peas, nominated by Komildzhan, with help from his older brother's iTunes library. We chose the song and ended our meeting by dancing to Matthew's nomination, followed by dancing to the song we selected.

This was horrible. I should have planned better. I overestimated the students' individual developmental levels, because the group had been working so well together as a whole. I also undermined myself by outlining a process and then deviating from the steps that I had described. Now I feel drained, tired after a long day, and hungry. I'm kind of dreading the bike ride home. Because I'm so exhausted, I've been writing slower than usual. It's 7:00, which means I'll be biking home in the dark. Ugh. I get so frustrated with the immaturity of these kids sometimes, but that's not fair. They are only first through fifth graders. I just keep

holding them up to higher expectations, and kiddos like Benjamin and Eva always rise to meet them. But they are all very young, and Matthew's breakdown was my own fault. I know that, which makes it even more frustrating.

Meeting 8-February 26, 2014:

We reviewed our social contract, then started today by silently listening to the song that the kids had selected, and all of the students drew pictures or wrote words that they felt described the meaning of the song. When the song ended, we circled up for share. The students shared their pictures, and then discussed the journal prompts. Themes that emerged today included fears of kidnapping, basements, failure and loss, and confidence that comes from drawing, good grades, or playing sports. Madison shared that she is afraid to show people her real personality, and Tippy shared that she feels most confident when everyone around her is happy. Every student shared today, and multiple students shared twice. I started to feel like the students are really growing into a cohesive ensemble. Even though we've had individual outbursts, the students are much more willing to share now than they were at the beginning of our process. I feel like the individual issues that we've had to deal with are caused and affected by so many outside forces that I can't blame them on our process or our group. I really wish that I could stop these tantrums from happening, but we had another one today.

After share circle, the students broke up into groups and created scenes through our Plan, Practice, Perform procedure. We performed and recorded the scenes, and since so many kids shared so much today, recording the performances brought us right up to snack time. I was still passing out the snacks when the group erupted. I was giving Eva a granola bar when suddenly Sara Z. was flying across the stage, and Kat and Julie were tumbling down the stairs. Sara is prone to extremely angry, and sometimes violent, outbursts, which is why she

was nominated for our club. One of her accommodations for class requires that she be allowed to take a break if she gets too stressed during classes, so when she ran off, angrily shouting that she was going to the bathroom, I let her go. I handed Eva all the snacks, and asked her to distribute them, and I rushed over to check on Julie and Katarina. Amna was already there. Both the girls were fine. I asked what happened and asked if they knew why Sara would feel a need to push them, but they claimed to have no idea why they had been shoved. I asked them to think for a minute to figure out if either of them had said anything that might upset Sara. They insisted that they hadn't been talking to her at all, and Sade—Sara's best friend—corroborated their story. In fact, Sade said not to worry because, according to Sade, Sara has just been having a bad attitude all day.

So, we ate snack. Benjamin gave the two-minute warning, so we started to clean up in order to continue our work for the day. That's when Sara came running back into the auditorium, yelling that she's not a slut, and nobody should talk about what she does with her boyfriend, because she doesn't do "dirty things" with anyone. She was really irate. But considering that her best friend agreed that Julie and Katarina hadn't said anything to Sara, I suspected that her anger might be misdirected. I had all of the kids sit down, and I told the group that we needed to respect Sara's feelings, even if we disagreed with her, and that we show respect for people's feelings by listening to their side of the story before we share our side. Once everyone was seated quietly, I told Sara that we could see she was upset, but that we didn't know why. Sara scoffed and yelled that "everyone" believes that she does "dirty things" with her boyfriend. Several students tried to interrupt, but I reminded them that we need to respect her feelings by listening, even if we don't agree. Sara started ranting, saying that nobody has the right to talk about her or about her boyfriend. I asked if she could tell me specifically who was gossiping about her and if those people were in drama club, but her

response was “why is ‘everyone’ so fucking hard to get?” Amna started to cut in, but I just said, in the most low and even tone I could manage, “Stop. Everyone sit down. Get out your pens and pencils.”

As the students did this, I walked to my desk and pulled out a notepad. I tore the whole notepad in half, which startled several of them, including Sara. I distributed the half pages. I then told the kids to spread out, and put the following instructions on the board.

1. Do not write your name on the paper.
2. On the colored side, write the worst thing someone else has ever said about you.
3. On the blank side, write the most hurtful thing you ever said to yourself.

I told the students that we would be writing silently until the music stopped, and then I started an instrumental song.

When we were done, I asked if the students wanted to share. A few shared the worst things other people said to them, but almost no one wanted to share their self-inflicted insults. So, I circled everyone up. We sat quietly for a moment or two, and then I asked the group to tell me what they learned from this. Komildzhan spoke up after a few moments of hang time, and he said that this activity taught him that when he blames others for bullying him it's not really fair, because he bullies himself worse. Julie shared that she is even meaner than the bullies, and Déjà shared that the things other people say to her can be mean, but that those insults hurt less than the things she tells herself, because she actually believes it when she insults herself.

I asked Sara Z what she thought. She just said, “I think this needs to go in the play.” I asked why, and she said “when others bully you, their words are like getting slapped. But when you bully yourself, it's like a stab in the heart. And when you get stabbed, you just want to stab everyone else, too.

I thought that was pretty profound, especially coming from a ten year-old. I asked the group, with a show of thumbs, to vote on whether or not they thought this experience should be included in our final play. The vote wasn't even close; the results of this spur-of-the-moment, hoping-to-end-a-fight activity would be included.

We brainstormed for a while about how to incorporate these. I collected them and read them aloud, editing out a swear word here and there. The kids were silent; I think they were shocked by what the other students had to say. Then Mugabe burst out with "that's not fair!" and started crying. I asked what was wrong, and he yelled a few incoherent phrases before cursing at me. I told him that I could see he was upset and that being upset was okay, but that I couldn't help if I didn't know what was wrong. He simmered for a few minutes, then yelled that it wasn't fair. I asked what wasn't fair, and after a bit of coaxing from his peers, he blurted that everyone else's statements were written about him, rather than about everyone's own self. So I read their papers again, first asking them to raise their hands if they had ever thought each statement was true about themselves. As I figured, most of the group raised their hands in response to most of the prompts. After reading ten or so, we talked about feeling alone and having negative thoughts about ourselves. Several students shared that they realized that they are not really alone, because lots of different people feel the same ways that they do.

We started to chat about how to implement the phrases into our play. Komildzhan suggested that everyone should read the insults that others have said, and then read the statements about themselves. Julie reiterated what Sara had said, saying that other people's insults are a slap in the face, and "I-insults" are like a stab in the heart. Déjà agreed, saying that self-inflicted insults kill our confidence. So Komildzhan suggested that the "you-insults" be read and followed by a mimed slap in the face, but then the "I-insults" could be read and

followed by a mimed death. Everyone got really excited about this idea, so we adopted it. I told the kids that I would type the insults for next time, and then we dismissed.

As I said earlier in this journal entry, I don't think that the individual outbursts we experience are representative of the students' growth as an ensemble throughout our process. However, I think that their ability to sit quietly and respectfully during a reading of insults is a testament to their growth both as an ensemble and as empathetic individuals.

I think that Sara's outburst today may be the result of low self confidence, which may also explain why she gets into so many fights on the playground. I am simply guessing, so that I can attempt to better serve her needs in the future, but I wonder if hurting others helps her feel powerful or respected. Maybe I need to come up with some extra responsibilities for her, to help her feel more valued in the group. Or maybe, because C.C. excels in school and is in the Gifted and Talented (GT) program, maybe Sara feels inadequate compared to her younger sister. Then again, there are seemingly infinite amounts of possibilities that could explain Sara's outburst today. No matter what the reason behind Sara getting upset, I think that the kids did an incredibly admirable job of working together and respecting one another as we worked to solve the problem.

Meeting 9-March 5th, 2014:

Komildzhan was absent today. Several of the students said his family moved to California because his dad was deported, which worries me. Komildzhan distinctly remembers—and has spoken about—getting his green card and going through the long legal process of moving from Tajikistan to Uzbekistan to Russia and, finally, to America. I don't know what's going on, but I hope that his family is okay.

I was also somewhat disappointed that Komildzhan was gone today simply because I had rearranged my original plans in order to pick up with his blocking suggestion for the

insult scene. I put the typed—and slightly censored—insults on the board via the projector. I hadn't assigned them, because I wanted students to feel comfortable with their lines. So, I displayed the “you-insults” first. It was a really slow process, taking far longer than I expected, but after about forty minutes we had debated, revised, and assigned all of the lines.

Although dividing up and assigning twenty-four lines took twice as long as I had assumed it would, which was dismaying, I was really proud of the kiddos. They were debating well and challenging each others' ideas effectively using the sentence stem that I had posted before we began. I was proud of them, and I knew that being sedentary for so long was probably really draining them. I also knew that if we kept plowing through the “I-insults” right away, which was my original plan, they would get mentally exhausted very quickly. And, when they're tired, they get grumpy. So, figuring that I was already going to have to scrap my original plans for the second half of our meeting time, I decided to continue assessing and assigning the insults—but only after a decent break. So, we paused for snack and I took them to the gym.

I had been right; all the academic work had been driving them batty. They were nuts. They had so much pent-up energy that they needed to release, so it was definitely a good idea. I didn't want them creating a chaotic atmosphere, though, because that's when kids get hurt and drama pops up. So, I pulled a few exercises out of my memory from when I coached volleyball, and had them run a few drills and complete a few obstacle relays. They ran for about fifteen minutes, and then I had them line up for water and return to the auditorium.

Our little exercise break worked way better than I expected it to. Upon returning to the auditorium, they were pretty ready to work. Matthew threw a small fit about wanting to go back to the gym, but Elizabeth snapped at him to “stop whining so we can finish the scene,” and he did.

The second half of rehearsal ran really smoothly. We continued debating, assessing, and re-writing the insult lines until all the kiddos were pleased with what they would be saying in the scene. All the kids shared their ideas clearly and debated respectfully. They used evidence in their arguments and made connections from our project to their lives and—I was especially proud of this—to *Macbeth*. No one threw a tantrum, and all of the students really worked together as an ensemble.

If I could end the project here, I'd feel good. Today, I could see progress; both academic and emotional growth were obvious in the students' interactions today. During our meeting, all of my students demonstrated an ability to articulate and defend their opinions, while respectfully listening to others' arguments. Today, the whole Script Writing Club worked as an ensemble.

Today counts as a success.

March 9, 2014:

I am so pissed.

I just got an email from Kathleen Angel. It's 11 O'clock on a Sunday night. And even though I emailed her two weeks ago to ask for our assigned judging time for Shakespeare Festival auditions, she's just now sending me our date and time. And even though I requested any Monday or Tuesday between 3:00 and 6:00, she gave us a Wednesday. That's Script Writing Club's meeting day. Our assigned time is from 4:00-5:00, so I have to cancel Script Writing Club in order for the Shakespeare Club students to audition for the festival. And that really sucks, because there's no Script Writing Club on the 26th, either, since I have to go to a DPS-required Professional Development meeting that day right after school.

This means we will only have one more meeting before spring break. And that really sucks, because I've already strayed from my original plans so much. I was going to use this

upcoming meeting to catch up, but with this meeting being cancelled I will no longer be able to do so. Now, we won't be able to finish the play before vacation. The kiddos had wanted to add another scene, specifically about discrimination based on financial status. But, we won't have a chance to do so. I'll probably have to print out the scripts so that we can start working when we get back from spring break.

March 12, 2014:

The judges didn't show up.

I had all thirty of my Shakespeare Club students assembled and in costume. We ran through our entire fifty-minute version of *Macbeth*. At 4:15, I called Kathleen's office, but no one answered, so we had a snack break. At 4:30, I called again. The kids were antsy and obnoxious and continuously asking where the judges were. I had no answers for them, which made me irritable, so I started a speed-through. Midway through that, I sent an email.

Everything I've experienced with this festival has been so completely unorganized. I am so annoyed. I barely had time to get advance notice to the parents of the Script Writing Club students, so all of the students—and their parents—are annoyed. Now I look like a flake, and we have no idea when our actual festival auditions will be. I lost a day of Script Writing Club, just to be stood up by the judges! What a waste of time.

April 27, 2014:

I couldn't leave the script as it was. There were too many incomplete areas and scenes. I know we may not be able to include the last scene that the students wanted to write, which was about what they have called "money bullying". But I wanted to at least finalize what we have written already. With that in mind, I sent a letter home on Monday, announcing an optional meeting today. Since yesterday was Wednesday, our typical meeting day, but I had to attend a district-mandated professional development session, we are meeting on a

Thursday today. And, because it was somewhat last minute and because so many classes have tests going on right now prior to letting students go for a week, we were only able to meet for an hour.

So I got the students together today, and we had a one-hour in-role as playwrights meeting. I printed out each scene that the students had written dialogue for, including the lawyer scene titled “Ending Racism”, the “Bully Circle” scene, and the final scene of the play, which includes the “you-insults” and “I-insults”. I broke the students up into three groups, and gave the members of each group a specific color of colored pencil. As playwrights, each group discussed and made edits to one scene for 10 minutes. Then, the groups switched scenes and repeated the process, discussing the scene itself and the first group’s edits. The second group, in their own color, then added to, agreed with, or disagreed with the first group’s edits. We rotated scenes one more time and repeated the process again, then we circled up to share the ending results. I pulled the scenes up on my computer and projected them on the board, and as each group of in-role playwrights shared their final versions of the scenes, the group discussed and approved the revisions. When each scene was completed, I typed the final revisions into the script. I was bummed that we wouldn’t be able to include their scene about financial differences, but I was pleased that we at least had created some decent transitions and made our individual scenes more into a fluid piece.

Meeting 10-April 9, 2014:

I broke down a little today. I started the meeting off feeling stressed, because we hadn’t finished the play yet. I printed out copies of what we had done so far, and was prepared to begin rehearsing what we had already written. However, I wasn’t very happy about it. I had wanted the play to be finished on the students’ terms. At the beginning of this meeting, I was still pretty certain that, if we practiced what we had accomplished prior to

spring break, and if we had time, we could add the final scene. But I was flustered that we hadn't had a meeting in almost a month, and I felt that I had deviated so much from my original plans that we might not accomplish my original goals. I wanted to try to move past my own frustration, though, so I put on a happy face and began.

Sara Z and Sade started out our meeting already fighting, so I separated them. Once they were apart, Sade dropped the issue. But Sara, having severe anger issues, couldn't let it go. She kept mumbling "bitch" at barely—but still—audible levels. Sade was seated right in front of me, so I could easily keep an eye on her. Sara was close to the back, with a dark cloud hanging over her. I told her she could take a break if she needed one, but I didn't want to draw extra attention to her behavior. She seemed to be settling down, but then she jumped up and yelled at Sade to stop talking about her. Sade hadn't been saying anything. So, I took a few minutes to get Sara settled, while Aliyah passed out the scripts. We talked about anger clouding our vision, and she agreed that sometimes when she's angry, she blames other people for things. When I asked why she thinks she does that, she had to think for several moments, but she finally admitted that it makes her feel better when she does this. I asked if she thinks that hurting others' feelings to make herself feel better might be considered bullying. Her body language softened and she averted her eyes. I let some hang time pass, and then I just said her name. After a few more minutes of hang time, Sara said, "maybe."

I can accept maybe. So with that, we continued. We started our first read-through, with assigned parts and with translations. Before spring break, the kids had completed handouts requesting specific parts in the play. Originally, these sheets were meant to help the students cast each other in the play. But when our meetings on the twelfth and the twenty-sixth were cancelled, we ran out of time. I had teachers distribute the forms and had the students bring the forms back to me before the break, and I used these forms to cast the show

on my own. In order to keep participation and confidence high, I did my best to give each student a part that he or she had requested. But when we got to the part in the lawyer scene that mentions soccer, Daniel read his line and Mugabe got up, ran across the stage and shoved me, yelling that he hated me. By the time I stood up, he had already turtled, which is the term his homeroom teacher uses to describe his tendency to tense up and curl into a ball with his head and arms inside his shirt. He does this frequently, and often becomes violent afterwards, flipping over tables and hitting people if his shirt or hoodie is moved to expose his eyes. I instructed the group to keep reading through the script while I talked to Mugabe.

I asked what was wrong, but as per usual Mugabe was tensed up and non-responsive. I figured it was relating to the soccer line, and I assumed that Mugabe wanted that line for himself. However, he hadn't circled that part on his form. He had circled that he wanted the part of the character that wears the colored shirt. But because Mugabe's social anxiety is so extreme, I had given him a part with fewer lines. The part that I gave Mugabe interacts directly with Matthew, who's in Mugabe's class. I had hoped that this would make both of them feel comfortable delivering their lines. So often in our exercises, he has completely refused to participate, and I knew that the part that he had circled on his form would overwhelm him. Since Mugabe would not respond, I retrieved his form and showed it to him, telling him that he didn't communicate that he wanted to say the soccer line. I told him that I can't help if he doesn't tell me what he wants. This is a talk that I've had both with him and with his parents multiple times. Mugabe just remained turtled, despite soothing. So I told him—following the behavior plan that was recently instated for him in his homeroom class—that I couldn't take away other students' learning time to focus on his unexpected behavior. I left him turtled in the corner and moved back to the group. Mugabe remained turtled for the rest of drama club. He didn't move during snack, even when I placed fruit snacks and a

cookie on a napkin next to him.

After snack, I showed the students their shirts, which came in on Monday. I passed the shirts out and had the kiddos try them on for a sizing check. The shirts seemed to run a little large, being too long for most of the kids. I explained, multiple times, that if the shirt was a little too long we could tuck it in. C.C. knotted her shirt in the back, which worked just fine. Elizabeth and Katarina followed her lead. But then Julie went off, saying that I had given Katarina the shirt that was rightfully hers. I looked at the tag and assured her that, no, the shirt Kat was wearing was not actually Julie's shirt. Julie then started yelling at me, saying that I had gotten her the wrong size on purpose. So I pulled out Julie's form and pointed out that the size of the shirt she was wearing matched what she had listed on her form. Julie then yelled at me, saying that I should have known that she would need a medium instead of a large, and I should have gotten her the appropriate size. She also said that I don't like her and that I was making her look ugly on purpose, by ordering the wrong size shirt for her.

This completely opened the floodgates. Several other students started complaining that their shirts were the wrong sizes, demanding shirts of the other color, or claiming that someone else had stolen their shirt. Sara Z., who is quite short, insisted that Sade, who is taller than I am, had stolen her shirt, which was ridiculous because they both had large grey shirts. But the shirt-based complaint was enough to spark their argument up again. I announced that everyone needed to circle up. That didn't happen. I made the announcement a second time, and then tried an echo clap to get their attention. A few students circled up, but the majority did not. More students circled up, but many of them continued arguing. I used my Simon Says attention activity, and most of the students quieted down after a few rounds. Now, however, Sara Z was arguing with Madi, Amna, Matthew and Ishmael. So, just as the

rest of the group quieted down, we could all hear, very clearly, Sara yell that she was going to kick someone's ass. I said Sara's name very sharply, which garnered a loud "Fuck you!" from the little fifth grader as she threw her shirt at the box.

I was just so worn out and tired from the day, and having Sara in my drama classes right now means that I'd been dealing with her attitude since 2:00. I was tired of her constant anger, outbreaks, and immaturity. The constant direct insults and accusations of hating the students that I'm trying to help out are even harder to deal with. So I gave in. "Fine, Sara," I said, "you run rehearsal. I'm done for the day." I said this partially because I just wanted to sit down, and partially because I thought that if I put some responsibility on her shoulders, she might shape up. The whole group turned to gawk at me. I walked to my bike, got my notebook out of my pannier, and sat down. Nothing happened; they all just stared. Déjà muttered that she thought they had made me mad. Sade said, "it's not like we did anything wrong."

That's when I lost it. "Are you kidding?" popped out of my mouth. I had to check myself, so I took a deep breath and took a moment to remind myself that even though they drop F bombs, throw chairs, and threaten to kill people, they're just eleven year-olds, at the most. I explained, in the most even tone that I could manage, that I had spent over two hundred dollars of my own money to buy the shirts for them, just because they wanted shirts. I explained that I do not get paid extra to run drama club and that I worked my butt off to arrange a time for them to perform at a professional stage, just because I wanted them to have that opportunity. Then, I explained that their behavior today says that they don't care and don't want to perform the play that they wrote.

Sara Z. flipped a very sudden, and very complete, 180. If her brain had wheels, there would have been skid marks. In almost a whisper, she asked why I don't get paid. I explained

that I get paid to teach drama classes from 7:00 to 3:00, but that the work I do with the drama clubs is work that I do because I want to. I don't get paid extra for staying at school until 5:00 or 5:30, waiting for their parents to pick them up.

The group seemed to think about that for a few minutes. Then Sara said that her mom would never do work that she doesn't get paid for, and that her mom quit jobs that didn't pay her enough. Then, she explained that her mom works with elderly people but sometimes she can't help them, because that's not what she gets paid to do. She said that if her mom did extra work that she didn't get paid for, instead of working a second job for more money, her life would "suck", because her dad doesn't have a job.

Having said this, she snapped into action. She had all the kids get back into their shirts and get organized into sides of the stage for the lawyer scene, which I had asked the students to do while I was originally passing out the shirts. She started yelling at people to do their jobs, which is a reminder that I use in class frequently. With her on my side, we were able to switch a few shirts around and write everyone's names on the back of their shirts, so there would be no future confusion. We ran through the lawyer scene with very loose blocking, just to be certain that everyone had the correctly colored shirt based upon their parts in that scene. Then, we sat down and did a read through of the entire script, to be sure that everyone's shirts matched their parts and that everyone was capable of saying the lines that they were assigned. We ended up, as a group, deciding to switch Benjamin and Ishmael, because even though Benjamin speaks Spanish, he has less confidence in it than Ishmael does. Ishmael, being older, spent much more time in Argentina than Benjamin, who was born here in Denver. This switch meant that we had to change their color of shirts, but that went smoothly.

After our read through, we started working on the nightmare scenes. We went one at

a time and I introduced the blocking for each scene. Just as we finished the final nightmare scene, it was time to go. I had all the students put their shirts back in the box, and we dismissed. As the students left, I thanked Sara for her help in organizing everyone for the lawyer scene. I want her to know that I value her efforts when she participates in a positive way, because I'm hoping that the recognition of positive behavior will motivate her to make constructive choices more frequently in the future.

Meeting 11-April 16, 2014:

That went really well. After rehearsal ended, Sara Z. approached me as the other students packed up, and she said that she thought our little "pow-wow" from last week really "made people care." I just hope that sentiment lasts.

I passed out the completed scripts and gave every student a black marker. I instructed the students to write their names in large, neat letters across the front of their folders. Of course I had a few who wrote their names tiny and on the tab, but we were pretty close to full compliance. Once they had done this, I collected the markers and folders, and then I passed out colored pencils, instead. Once I was sure that everyone had a colored pencil, we did a turn-and-talk about compliments. I asked students to tell their partner what a compliment was, and how they feel when they receive a compliment. Most of the kids determined that a compliment was saying something nice about someone else. A few students shared examples from their turn-and-talks. Then, I explained that an affirmation is like a compliment, but it's about someone's personality instead of the way that the person looks. Students shared a few examples, and the students voted for each example, showing a thumbs-up if the example was an affirmation and showing a fist in the air if the example was a compliment.

Once they seemed to have a decent grasp of the difference between compliments and affirmations, I redistributed the folders at random. The rules were simple; write silently,

don't look at your own folder, write one affirmation per folder, and write on as many folders as possible. The folders filled up quickly, and all the students—even my typically withdrawn students—were eagerly affirming, seeking out folders that they hadn't written on yet. We wrapped up after about 15 minutes, and I pulled out the self-insult notes that the students had written several weeks ago. I held them up, and held up the folders in my other hand. I held up the notes, and asked the students if they remembered what these were. Sade cried out “oh, no! Burn those!” and Tuff said that the notes were horrible. Tippy called them “hate notes” and Sara S. said that those are the “hurty thoughts.” I agreed with all of the students, and asked what we learned from them. Several shouted-out responses hit the mark, revolving around the fact that we bully ourselves. It's been a long time since our last meeting, so I was glad that they remembered.

I asked if the notes were in the scripts. Ishmael got worried and asked if I had taken them out. I said that, no, I hadn't removed them. Other students chimed in, agreeing that they wanted the “I-insults” in the play. Tippy shared that she thinks it's important to include these in the play, because it makes her feel better when she is honest and tells other people how she feels. She said that she doesn't get to do that outside of drama club, because she's afraid that other people will mock her.

I told the group that I agreed with Tippy and I think that we need to share our feelings and help other people understand the way we think and feel. Then I segued, saying that it's also important for us to understand what others think, instead of making assumptions. “So next time that you think this,” I said, holding up the insult notes, “look at your folder and remember that when you feel sad or alone, the ensemble supports you.” I held up the folders, now full of colorful affirmations, and reminded the students that even though we are sometimes mean to ourselves, we are an ensemble and we need to remember that others in

the ensemble care about us.

I established a few rules prior to passing the folders back out. The rules included being silent while we read the folders, not asking who had written something, and not insulting spelling or grammar. After all, we have first through fifth graders, and native language speakers combined with ELLs, so there's a huge range of writing and spelling ability represented within our group. After setting these guidelines, I gave each student their own folder, and gave them some time to read their affirmations.

When it seemed like they were finishing up, we started rehearsal. We reviewed the blocking for the nightmare scenes, and the first two went really well. The third one was a struggle, because the majority of the students could not remember their spots. I had to physically place several kids where they were supposed to be, which was frustrating, but at least they were willing and compliant. I shouldn't hold forgetfulness against an age group that lies primarily within the single digits. Once I got them to their places, I realized that Benjamin had forgotten his route. So, I had to walk them through the blocking again, piece by piece, before we could actually run the scene. Once we got everything ironed out, though, rehearsing all of the nightmare scenes went really well. I was pleased that most of the kiddos were really trying to do a good job, even if they weren't entirely focused. They're kids; I can forgive faulty focus if they are actually participating with positive energy and effort.

After reviewing all of the nightmare scenes, we blocked the lawyer scene, called "Ending Racism". This went really well! Elizabeth enjoyed getting into the role of the bossy lawyer, and Mugabe didn't complain about not saying the word "soccer". I gave the students prompts, reminding them to tell the story of fighting by using angry movements and angry voices. Elizabeth picked up on every prompt immediately, and even Mugabe followed direction really well, accepting some light criticism without turtling, which was really

awesome. His classroom teacher told me that after spring break, she had noticed some regression in his behavior. She was requesting to take him out of Script Writing Club because she sees it as a reward that he does not deserve. I am really excited to tell her about his behavior tomorrow, so that she'll see that he is growing through our process and that he needs to be here. I was really pleased with his progress today, and I was happy that blocking the scene went smoothly.

We also started some rough blocking of the language scene today, and Eva's mimed performance was fantastic, which did not surprise me at all because she was so active in writing that scene. When we were writing the scene, she had shared a lot about her friend Danja, who spoke absolutely no English at all when she moved here from Libya, but has learned English pretty quickly since October. Eva also shared that she often feels left out at Ellis because so many students speak other languages, and she does not. Her investment in writing that scene is the reason why I cast her as the focal character for the scene, and I think that her input in the writing is really evident through her performance of the character.

The blocking for the scene is relatively simple, because I want the focus to be on Eva, so we were able to get through the scene pretty quickly. Once we finished, we reviewed all the blocking, from the first nightmare scene all the way through the language scene. Then, we wrapped up our blocking rehearsal to take the students' pictures for the poster. The idea for the poster was inspired by something Daniel said on the playground one day. He told me that if the title for our play was "One Voice", we should have someone be the face of the voice. I didn't think it would be fair to nominate one student over the others to be the mascot for our show. When I talked to my husband about it, he suggested taking pictures of all the students, and then layering them together to form one face. So, that's what we're doing.

Everything went really well today, as evidenced by Sara's closing comment. But, I

still have a few frustrations. I'm annoyed, once again, by our complete lack of supplies. I really, really wish that we had a platform, or something we could use to create a few levels. I don't want to use the stairs at the front of the stage, because we can't light them completely or evenly. Chairs won't really work, because the kids can't seem to stay balanced on them, and because we can't easily pack them into a bus to transport them to the Newman Center. I keep having ideas for staging that simply won't work when we have nothing. Trying to get students to cross at a diagonal seems completely confusing to them. The route that I created for Benjamin and Ishmael in the nightmare scene used the stage with lots of depth, but they keep flattening the route into as much of a straight line as possible. I asked Khoa for permission to build two 4' square platforms, out of my own pocket, and he said it was alright with him as long as I could get approval from Terry Lucero, our Facilities Manager. She flipped shit when I asked, saying that I'm lucky that she allows me to have chairs on the stage, because they scratch the wax on the floor.

Sometimes I get really frustrated with Terry. She won't allow me to post anything on the walls in the auditorium, even using painter's tape. When we're doing in-class performances, she frequently comes in and moves props or costumes during the performance or between classes, because she says that those things are not approved classroom equipment. When I made small 1' cubes that were wrapped in muslin, she threw them into the dumpster for the same reason. I'm not allowed to have my desk in the stage right wing, because she says that location would be a fire hazard. So I bartered with Sue, the music teacher, for a podium that she had, and my computer balances on the podium, so that it can be connected to the projector hookups. Now that there's a podium in the auditorium, every time we have an assembly, Terry unhooks my computer and my speakers and moves this equipment so that she can set the podium up on the stage. She has also, on multiple occasions, thrown away

student projects including scripts, puppets, and posters that are stacked on the stage. The first time this happened, she told me that anything on the floor is considered trash, which is frustrating because I do not have any tables or storage space. The second time this happened, I had puppets sorted by grade level and stacked on chairs, but she informed me that this was a fire hazard, so all the papers had to be thrown away. I hate breaking news like this to my students, and they are always disappointed in me when that happens. It's frustrating, because at my old school I was pretty close with the Facilities Manager, and I knew all the fire codes. But here, whatever I do or say, I am always stepping on Terry's toes. She hates that I have class in the auditorium, and she makes it clear that I am only allowed to use a minimal amount of space in the room, which she uses as her closet. And that's also frustrating! Earlier this week, a fifth grader fell into the ladders that are behind the curtain, and she hasn't been back at school since Monday, so I'm assuming that she has a concussion. Even though I remind the kids about the ladders all the time, and even though Reham wasn't doing anything wrong, kids smack into the ladders occasionally. And I feel like that comes down to me, even though the best classroom management can't stop a kid from tripping.

Rant aside, I just really wish that I had something to add a few levels or some depth to our stage in the different scenes. I've been trying to use students' bodies to do this, but the kids just keep moving, and my stage images don't hold. I spend probably sixty percent of my time telling students to hold still or go back to their spots, and it's frustrating, because that stops us from accomplishing anything else. But I need to make the scenes more visually interesting. I know my focus is more on the process than the performance, but I really don't want the performance to be miserable. I tried creating levels by having some kids stand while others sat or knelt, but all the kids are so stinking fidgety that with all my reminders and interruptions to tell kids to hold still, the scenes were taking far too long, which made them

dreadfully boring. The kids were also getting frustrated and angry, telling me that they weren't playing with their shirt or their hoodie, they weren't holding their feet, and they weren't playing with their hair or swinging their arms. Their arguments got me frustrated, too, so trying to get them to hold still so much was just seeming counter productive. Now I don't really know what to do. I have so many ideas for the final production of our play, but they all seem like ideas that would only work if my students were slightly older and could hold still, or if I wasn't so determined to having the students run the production. I'm going to have to re-think a lot of this.

Meeting 12-April 23rd, 2014:

If I believed it were possible, I might think that Shakespeare cursed my day as punishment for not mentioning his birthday to my kiddos. It was a long day, exacerbated almost every hour. I really just want to curl up and pass out and let today die, but I know if I don't do this now, it will be really difficult to do it later.

So, the day started with being told that our specials showcase for this rotation, which was originally scheduled for Friday, May second, is being moved to this upcoming Monday, on account of standardized testing. I immediately changed all of my lesson plans and set the auditorium up for grade level rehearsals, which had to be today and tomorrow, since I'll be at the Shakespeare Festival all day on Friday, and the gym teacher was not willing to run the rehearsals without me.

First grade's specials showcase rehearsal was awful. Ashley cried because she was scared to go on the stage all of a sudden, so Zayuri cried because her friend was crying. Edison laughed at Ashley, so Jairo—Ashley's brother—punched him and gave him a bloody nose. This all happened in the course of a less-than two minute scene, and of course it all happened off stage left, while I was running sound and lights off stage right. So I stopped the

drama class's play rehearsal, and told Terri that her group could start rehearsing their performance. By the time I circled my kids up in the back of the auditorium, I had four girls crying, three boys yelling in Spanish, and one bloody nose. I told Terri I was going to figure out what had happened, and went back to circle up with the kids.

Just when Ashley built up the confidence to explain what happened—I had asked, “Que necessitan hablar en Espanol?” and she had agreed to start—Terri yelled at me from the stage. She started, in a very sassy tone, with “Um, hello!” and then proceeded to ask if I was just going to make her do all the work on her own. I asked what she needed, and she said “uh, the music! Hello!” I told her to double click the song on iTunes, which was already pulled up on my computer. Everything was all set up for her; I had made sure of that before I headed back to meet with my kids. After a few seconds and a failed attempt to start her music, she yelled at me again. So I had to ask Ashley, who was still crying, to wait for a minute, which made her cry even more. After double clicking on Terri's song, I returned to my first graders, and figured out that several of my Spanish speaking students were scared of talking in front of an audience, even though they'd been leaders in drama class and in our rehearsals. I suspect that other first graders have teased them in the past due accent or vocabulary issues, so having the music and gym classes in the audience just raised their affective filters to the point of paralysis, which is exactly what I've been trying to combat—in drama club especially, but also in my classes. Even though I've only had this group for two weeks, this was the first time I've failed to build enough confidence for a student to feel safe performing at the specials showcase. Feeling a sense of failure, combined with Terri nagging me to pause and re-start her music three more times, was not a good start to my morning.

During second grade specials showcase rehearsals, one of Sue's marimba players puked on the stage. That was fun.

I was getting my kindergarteners ready to finish their Horton hats for their upcoming performance of “Horton Hears a Who” next week when Terri brought her whole class into the auditorium. Well, actually, they just came running and squealing through my door without any explanation and without their teacher. I calmed them down as much as I could, which took a few moments. Then I asked one of the more mature students what Ms. Diaz told them to do when they came in. Isabella said that Terri wanted them to come watch a movie so that she could go get lunch. I started the kids in a game of Gracious the Goat and once they were engaged, I called the gym. Terri didn’t answer, so I assumed that Isabella was right. I was pissed, because now I had to handle forty Kindergarten students on my own, and I hadn’t eaten lunch either, because I was busy transitioning props, costumes, instruments, and Terri’s dance and yoga equipment throughout what should have been my break. Not only did Terri just assume that I could abandon my own lesson plans on her whim, but she also deposited her students with me without any sort of discussion. The kids, having been promised a movie, were being incredibly disruptive in voicing their desire, so I logged into iTunes and bought Disney’s *Frozen*. We played Magic Rocks for the seven or eight minutes that it took to download, and then I started the movie, still simmering a little about the twenty unannounced students.

Third, fourth, and fifth grade practices followed the pattern established during our a.m. rehearsals. Due to a third grade field trip, we were missing four narrators, two farmworkers, and our Dolores Huerta, which caused all the third grade students who were actually present to panic. My fourth grade Cesar Chavez forgot his lines and started telling dirty jokes in Spanish during the play. I pulled him aside and offered him a script, whereupon he rolled his eyes and said that his words were better than the script, so he didn’t need to memorize his lines. I reminded him that knowing his lines was his responsibility and that if

he didn't do his job, he was letting down his classmates and not working as a member of the ensemble. To this, he shrugged and said "oh well," which was very out of character for Isidro, so I pulled him a little bit further aside, assuming that he might have been showing off for his peers. I asked him if he wanted me to help him with his lines or if he wanted to take a script home, and he told me to just leave him alone. I asked if he thought that the real César Chavez would be proud of his behavior in class, and he dropped an F bomb and told me to go away. So, I replaced him. The only boy in my class willing to take on the role was Willie, who was originally nominated for drama club, but whom Ms. Clifton removed from drama club before we even started, because he hit a second grader so hard that the poor kid had to get stitches. Ms. Clifton decided that it would be dangerous to the group if Willie joined Script Writing Club, so he was removed. I felt badly for him at the time, but now I realize that the massive sense of entitlement that allows Willie to believe that acceptable behavior includes beating up other students definitely makes it difficult for him to work with a group. He's smart, though, and he works hard when he's interested in something, so I know I could trust him to memorize the lines quickly. In fifth grade Luhkman, a student who has only a very fundamental grasp of English, suddenly became very upset and indicated that he wanted to be Cesar Chavez. I explained, to the best of my ability, that I needed Luis to be Cesar Chavez, because he's louder than Luhkman. Despite my explanation, Luhkman sulked the rest of class time. I just hope he doesn't think I'm denying him the part because he speaks Amharic; he's painfully quiet and we can barely hear his narration part through the microphone. We definitely wouldn't be able to hear him without one.

After school, we started our Script Writing Club. We rehearsed, adjusted, and re-rehearsed the nightmare scenes, and it went really well. The lawyer scene also went really well! I had tracked down some plastic cubes that the Kindergarten teachers were willing to

lend me, and I added those to the nightmares and to the lawyer scene. I am pleased with the change, although it's still not quite what I want. But, at least it looks a little better. In fact, I think that the blocks, despite their obnoxious Crayola colors, really help the kidnapping nightmare scene a lot. I'm much more pleased with the way it looks, now that I'm able to integrate some levels. Having these pieces in place also forces the students out of their line, allowing some depth into the scene.

Our big struggle with the nightmares was Ishmael and Benjamin's scene. Ishmael continued insisting on running in a straight line, rather than weaving through the monster characters as instructed. Benjamin was really trying to wind through the monsters, but he kept either getting lost, or forgetting where he was supposed to go, which led him to repeatedly stop and stand still. So, I simplified the route a lot, narrowing the depth of the stage that they were covering. They still got confused, though. So I switched it up entirely, and had them enter from stage right, so that we could start over again and any confusion with previously laid out paths would be avoided. Now, they're coming in from the same side of the stage that Eva is coming in from during the first nightmare scene, and they look very similar, which I don't like. I left it like that, though, because I wanted to move on. If I have time to come back to it later, I'll change Eva's entry point and blocking, because I know she'll be able to easily make the adjustments.

The lawyer scene went as well as it can, with Aliyah being gone again. Her grandmother passed away, so she and her mother have been on the reservation for the past several weeks. Her classroom teacher told me that she will miss at least a month of school. That's frightening, because our show is in less than a month, now. I asked C.C. to memorize Aliyah's lines, just in case she can't make it to our performance. Aliyah has missed every rehearsal since we handed out scripts. I don't want to take her part away from her, because I

don't want her to feel unwelcome or unwanted in our group. She was nominated for script club because she doesn't have a social circle of friends. I'm afraid that, because she's so shy, she may be afraid to return to drama club when she gets back, and if we reassign her part, then we are almost guaranteeing that she won't feel welcome upon her return. I've worked hard to avoid this, ordering her a shirt and having the group write affirmations on a folder for her, but I'm afraid that this won't be enough to increase her comfort level when she returns. I have no doubt that she can learn the lines and blocking upon her return, but I'm concerned that she may not return in time for our performances.

The one hitch we experienced in rehearsing this scene was the very last line. The students have gotten it into their head that they need to yell the line directly into Elizabeth's ears, even though I've explained that when they say the line all together at volume level three, the ensemble is so loud that it seems like the group is yelling at the lawyer. I've explained that individuals in the ensemble do not need to yell in order to accomplish this effect, and I've even told them that they are not allowed to really yell the line. Although I've explained this multiple times and in multiple ways, I have several students who cannot seem to stifle their volume. So, instead of continuing in my attempts to coerce them into being quiet, I changed tactics and we held a brief lesson in what I called "safe stage yelling." This so-called lesson included explanation and demonstration, followed by student pair-and-practice. The technique consisted of lifting your chin to yell over someone's head, or tilting your head down to yell at someone's chest, rather than yelling directly into someone's ear. We talked about safety as part of our "respect the ensemble" rule, and I explained that controlling our voices and aiming our sound not into someone's ears are both part of acting safely and respectfully.

We were working on our third themed scene, the language-bullying scene, when

Justin Walvoors, an actor from the DCPA, came to view what we've completed so far. So we recessed for a snack break a few minutes early, and I described what we've accomplished so far to our guest. The kids were really excited to show our play to someone that they considered to be a real actor, so they ate very quickly and quietly. When they had finished and cleaned up, we got into our places for the beginning of the nightmare scenes. The kids went through the nightmare scenes and transitioned easily into the lawyer scene. This went well, too. Since I had told Mr. W. that the second scene was all we had gotten through today, he stopped them there to give notes. The kids seemed really excited, and they sat down to listen intently, except for Mugabe, who pulled out a comic book. Mr. W. got a little flustered and told Mugabe that he wouldn't get any better if he didn't listen. Mugabe said that he was listening, which is every child's immediate response. Mr. W. told Mugabe that the only book he should have in his hands was our script. I could see Mugabe start to tense up, and I didn't want him to turtle, so I told Mr. W. that I would handle the situation so that he could give notes. I went to Mugabe and calmed him down, and I was able to convince him to put his book away and listen for now. In return, we agreed that he could read when he wasn't in a scene.

Mr. W's notes included lots of duplications. He harped on things that I always mentioned; standing still, speaking loud and clearly, not swinging arms around, and paying attention during a scene so that the scene can run more smoothly. While he was giving notes, Sara Z. and Sade started huffing and puffing and rolling their eyes. He addressed them several times, and then I pulled them aside to figure out what was going on. They were both very tight-lipped and full of attitude. I asked if they were annoyed because of his notes, and Sade got sassy, saying that he wasn't really a real actor, he was just someone I brought to school, to tell them the same things that I always tell them. She closed by shouting, loud

enough that Mr. W. could hear, that he doesn't even care whether or not the students do a good job.

Mr. W, upon hearing this, said, "if your director has been telling you the same things and you haven't fixed your behavior yet, you're not doing a good job." He then explained that making the same mistakes over and over makes the performance get worse, and we need to try to make the performance better by listening and following the director's advice. Tuff Love chimed in that this is like the Broncos in the Super Bowl; they kept losing the ball and making the same mistakes, so the game got worse and worse. I interrupted and told Sade that Mr. W was here to try to help, and if something he said hurt our feelings, it wasn't on purpose. I used a comparison that could have gone horribly wrong, now that I think about it. But thankfully, it worked; I said that when Hatchet was a puppy, he used to chew on carpet. When we'd catch him doing it, we'd yell at him, which made him really sad. And since we couldn't trust him, he'd get locked in the bathroom or crated when we weren't home, and he hated that. But, this combination taught him not to chew on carpet anymore. I explained that I was always sad when we had to yell at him, because I could tell that it hurt his feelings, and I didn't like doing that to him, but I had to, because I knew it was the only way he'd learn to make trustworthy choices. This seemed to appease both Sara and Sade, and they sat and listened to the rest of Mr. W.'s notes with more respect than before.

After notes, at around 4:25, we started scene three, the language-bullying scene. We did it once as mime to check that they all remembered the blocking, but I kept having to remind Sara Z. that mimes use the acting tool of body and movement, not of voice. Several times, I had to resort to reminding Sara that she was talking again, or asking her to hush. Each time, she'd quiet down momentarily, prior to starting up again. The fact that her talking would at least pause after my request shows a lot of growth for Sara. She wasn't blaming

others, and she wasn't arguing back; she was at least trying to follow instructions. I was pleased with this improvement. But, Mr. W. didn't know that.

We started going through the scene again, with dialogue this time. The kids in the language cliques are all supposed to murmur in their languages or in gibberish while Eva pantomimes and the narrators speak. Most of the groups were doing just fine, but Sara's group was clearly being distracted; they were laughing loudly, moving, and pacing back and forth between their group and the other groups, despite what I was saying. I guess Justin got annoyed by my frequent reminders that the students were not supposed to be speaking in English and that real conversations were ruining the scene, so he called Sara out specifically. He explained that when a teacher corrects you, they're trying to help you learn. He explained that interrupting a scene was disrespectful to the whole team. Then, he explained that if an actor disrespected their director like that, they would be fired and never allowed to work at that theatre again. He even said that, if he had been me, he probably wouldn't have allowed her to be in the play.

So, she exploded, yelling that he was disrespecting her right now by bossing her around, that he was picking on her for talking when she was supposed to be talking, and ending by yelling that he could go to Hell.

I yelled. I really try not to yell at any of the kids, because I feel like it destroys our mostly cooperative environment. But, I yelled. It stopped her. She was still seething, but she stopped. I told her to go home. She said, "Hell no." I told her that I could not accept her behavior and disrespect toward others, and that we would talk about the problem in the morning when we were both calmer. I told her that her outburst hurt the ensemble and was taking time away from our practice, and I told her that in order to do my job and to help the ensemble, I needed her to go home. She responded by dropping an F bomb. So, I said it

again; “Sara, go home.” I paused for a moment, allowing her time to make a decision before adding, “Now.” There was an awkward hang time and a very uncomfortable, animalistic staring contest for a moment.

“Fine!” she yelled, storming out, “Fuck you! And stupid drama club! I don’t even care any more!” She stormed out, and Justin kind of jumped in and started directing scene three. Which was awesome, because at that moment all I wanted was to go home, myself. Every time something like this happens, I just feel like all of my energy has been sucked away. It’s so hard to bounce back from the pure hatred of a ten year-old whom you are trying to help.

I let Justin run the rest of rehearsal while I called Jordan, our school social worker. I asked if she could mediate a meeting with me and Sara tomorrow before or after school. She informed me that Sara’s stepdad was already coming in tomorrow, because Sara had gotten into another fight on the playground. Jordan invited me to come to the meeting, and I agreed.

I sat and tried to think of a silver lining to the storm cloud that can be Sara. All I could come up with is the fact that “I don’t even care any more!” indicates that she did care at one point in time, or that she really does care and is just lashing out and trying to hurt my feelings. I think that the second hypothesis is supported by her swearing.

Five o’clock came around before I could recover from my dour mood. It had been a long day, and I wanted to go home. I dismissed the kids and changed into my bike clothes without journaling first, which is my normal routine. I stuffed everything into my panniers and headed out.

Around the four mile mark, I realized I’d forgotten about the cookies that I’d gotten for the kids to celebrate Shakespeare’s birthday, which I had planned on doing at the end of rehearsal. Around this same time, it also started sprinkling. So I thought to myself that the

first good thing to happen today may be the fact that I'd get home before it really started to pour. I stopped and got my windproof pants and jacket out to layer up, and that's when I realized that my house keys were still at school. Rick is in Fort Collins this week, and our apartment office closes at 5:00, so I had to turn around to retrieve them.

Wind, lightning, and thunder were picking up as I got to school, but it was still only sprinkling. I went in and retrieved my house keys. Returning to the front door, I discovered all-out deluge. I considered sleeping in the auditorium. I considered it heavily, but the dogs were at home by themselves, and needed to be both walked and fed. So, I headed out for another seven miles in the rain.

Today felt like one of those movie moments, when the sidekick says, "well, it can't get any worse than this!"

April 24, 2014:

I met with Ms. Jordan, Sara, and Sara's stepfather this morning, and the origins of Sara's behavior immediately became clear. Jordan started by discussing Sara's playground fighting, and her stepdad instantly became aggressive. He said that when someone comes after his daughter, he expects her to be allowed to stand up for herself. Jordan explained that the student Sara had been hitting was a first grader, and her stepfather responded that smaller kids should be smarter than picking fights with fifth graders. He said that if the first grader wanted to start trouble, she needed to man up and deal with the trouble they were starting. So, Jordan explained that several students witnessed the fight and said that Sara had been chasing and teasing the first grader, calling her fat. Jordan explained that this was when Ximena, another first grader, stepped forward, calling Sara a bully. According to the other students and a recess monitor, this was when Sara grabbed Ximena, pulling out hair prior to slamming Ximena's head against a wall.

Sara's stepdad shrugged. He said that we live in a rough world, and that Sara should defend herself when someone else attacks. Jordan responded that instead, Sara ought to be a role model as a fifth grader, and walk away from a bad situation. Sara's stepfather got very angry, stating that we don't know what Sara goes through and that she can't be expected to just walk away from a bad situation. Jordan tried to interject, but he cut her off, saying that he didn't "need no uppity white bitch" trying to tell Sara how to act. With that, he left.

I hadn't said a word, and Jordan's black.

Meeting 13-April 30, 2014:

Today was a very bipolar practice. We started with working on the language-bullying scene, since we have not yet gotten beyond that. We worked on this scene for a solid 45 minutes. I had Sada, Deja, Sara, and Ishmael upstage center, specifically because I knew they would be the most chatty. My goal was to be able to proclaim that all the fifth graders were centered so that they could be seen by the younger students and could be leaders. I thought that this might give them some accountability. I also thought that I'd be able to keep them still and keep them focused by stating that they were centered so that they could have the audience's attention, and so that if anyone on stage got confused about what to do, they could look to Sara and copy what she was doing. Since Sara loves being the center of attention and in class she often yells at other students who are distracting from her scenes' practice time, I really thought that placing the fifth grader together and centered would provide leverage that I could use in order to keep them quiet. But, I was incredibly wrong.

My third graders stood out as positive role models. In the tableaux parts of the scene, the third graders held statuesque poses that were rooted and still, and that communicated moods appropriate for the story of the scene. Meanwhile, Sara and Sade kept fidgeting, Ishmael kept talking, and Déjà continuously left her group to boss other students around,

which prompted arguments. I gave warnings. I employed the techniques taught during the DPS No-Nonsense Nurturer workshops of acknowledging the focused and cooperative students in order to encourage others to follow suit. But my fifth graders continued creating disruptions. They wouldn't stay still. They kept missing their cues. They wouldn't pay attention. I finally gave in and threatened, saying that if they could not work together and do their jobs, they would have to be removed from the scene.

After half of the scene and far more warnings than they deserved, I had to remove my fifth graders from this part of the play. Their behavior was really hindering the group's progress, and it was distracting from the scene. I had told them that if their behavior continued, they would be removed. I had also pointed out, on multiple occasions, that even the first grader in our group was doing a rockstar job of holding his poses and saying his lines on time. Then, I split the fifth graders up, putting them among the other students, hoping that the younger students' better behavior would rub off on them and that separating them would improve their performances. But Déjà and Ishmael still wouldn't be quiet. Madi, a third grader, asked Sade to hold still, and Sade retorted with "shut up!" Then, when Sara S., a second grader, asked Sara Z to be quiet, the older Sara just cursed at the younger.

So I stopped, and had everyone take a seat. I explained that as a director, it's my job to make hard decisions in order to help the ensemble. I reminded the students that when Aidan and Serina left early from their third and fourth time, I gave them warnings. Then, I reminded the students that when Aidan and Serina were picked up ten minutes into another rehearsal, I had to ask them to leave drama club. I asked the group if that hard decision had helped or hurt the ensemble. With a show of thumbs, the group—including all four of the fifth graders—voted that this helped the ensemble. Tuff raised his hand and said that I make everyone work hard to help the ensemble, and that Aidan and Serina weren't working hard.

He said that I had to ask them to leave, because they were hurting the ensemble. I agreed with Tuff, even though Aidan put in a decent amount of effort when he was actually present. Then, I stated that Sara, Sade, Déjà and Ishmael would no longer be able to participate in this scene. Elizabeth said “good!” and Julie muttered “finally”, but I immediately quieted both of them to avoid an argument. I’d been extending warnings, even though I hadn’t wanted to, simply because I didn’t want Sara’s temper to become even more of a distraction than her talking. I also suspect that her distractedness is sometimes an act, to make her seem tough or cool. But even though she’s smarter than she lets on, and even though she’s one of my more talented kiddos when it comes to acting, and even though I’ve been trying to inspire positive behavior and respect towards others through inclusion, I couldn’t allow the fifth graders’ behavior to continue. Of course, this brought Sara to lash out, as I expected.

“Nobody forces you to be here, y’know,” she growled at me before yelling “you act like there’s a fucking gun to your head!” I wasn’t even a hundred percent sure what she was implying, but Eva, a second grader, jumped in to my rescue, telling Sara to stop being so mean. She said, “Ms. V. wants to help us do a show on a big stage. No one’s forcing her, she wants to be here. She just wants you to cooperate!”

Somehow, the words of a second grader were enough to shut Sara up. I told the group that we were going to practice the scene again, and then block the final scene. I told the group that if we finish blocking these two scenes, then we would practice the bully cycle scene, which is a big scene for Sara, Déjà, and Sade.

After a snack break, we worked on the language scene. It went really well. The kids held their tableaux freezes, said their group lines in unison, and at least were trying really hard to use body language that communicated the correct moods for the scene. And Eva’s part... well, Eva’s part really stands out. She is so easy to work with and so empathetic. She

understands story and character. As a second grader, she is far beyond the majority of my students when it comes to critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. I always start with questions, allowing them to determine how the characters feel either individually or as a group. Usually, students can answer my questions, but quite often they really struggle to tie their choices back into their performances. I frequently have to ask students if they are acting out their choices, and remind them that the audience needs to see the story. But Eva is different; the choices she makes when answering my questions immediately impact her performance. She also provides proof to support her decisions, which is awesome. Today, rehearsing the language scene, she said that she thought she should cover her ears when she moves, because Sierra's monologue says that she feels alone and scared and intimidated. Then, she showed me her script as though I'd never seen it before. Her copy of the script had the emotions in C.C.'s monologue underlined in marker, so I could see that she had thought about this ahead of time. I told Eva that she was absolutely right, and that this was a brilliant idea. I had already planned this in my blocking, but I was really proud of her mature thought process, and I wanted her to have ownership over her choices and her actions in the scene. She only required small prompts, and immediately adjusted to every suggestion I made in side coaching. Working with Eva on this scene really made me remember how much I enjoy directing. I love the process of questioning and discovering, of delving into a story and a character. With much of my energy spent on behavior management, recently, I had forgotten what this feels like. I miss it. I really wish that more of my kiddos were at this level of processing and performing; my job would be so much more enjoyable!

We moved on to the final scene. This scene is based on the worst things people can say to one another, and the worst things that we can say about ourselves. The blocking for this scene is very simple and redundant, but it is very significant to the story telling. I was

explaining the blocking to the students when Sade interrupted, saying that scene five sounded really dumb. I told her I was sorry that she thought that. Then, I explained that we were acting out a statement one of our students had said at an earlier meeting, and she needed to respect the ideas of others. Then, I asked Sade if she felt like she had been respecting the ensemble today. She thought a moment before saying no. She felt badly, and she asked whose idea the blocking had been. I knew fully well that it had been Sara's idea, but I told Sade that I couldn't remember, hoping that if Sara self-identified as the inspiration for the blocking, it would give both of the two friends incentive to participate with positive energy.

Sara Z piped up right away, stating that it had been her idea. Then, she asked why we hadn't put those words into the play, too. I didn't have an answer for her, so I just asked her if she wanted to say that sentence to introduce the scene. She nodded, but then turned to the group and asked the ensemble if they would be okay with adding the sentence into our play. The group voted yes, and so we decided to start our final scene with Sara's words. And, surprisingly, Sara volunteered to split the sentence with someone else. She chose Julie; the third grader was excited to have another line.

We only had enough time to go through the scene once, but the addition of those extra lines got everyone to really buy in to the scene. It was slow going, because almost every child needed to have the blocking re-explained to them. This was obnoxious, but I was glad that the kids were at least focused and attentive, for the most part. The exceptions were Matthew and Mugabe. Matthew was rolling around and refused to be still or pay attention, which is entirely typical for him. When it was Mugabe's turn, I said that Mugabe was up next, but got no response. I had to say his name twice more. Then, Benjamin nudged him and pointed at me. I could see Mugabe start to tense up and shiver, so I said that it was okay, that Benjamin was trying to be his friend and help him out. Luckily, this was somehow successful

in calming him down so that he could deliver his line. I was really proud of Mugabe for not breaking down or turtling, and I told him after practice ended that I was pleased that he had made a friendly choice when Benjamin was trying to help him.

We went through the scene once. It was slow and stumbling, but we made it through. We didn't have time to come back to the bully circle scene, so I told the kiddos we would start with that next time. As they were packing up, I overheard Sade tell Sara that scene five has been her favorite so far. I didn't say anything, but that was a personal victory for me.

Meeting 14-May 7, 2014:

- Paused
- Back Row One
- Middle Row One
- Front Row One
- Windmill Cheer Hands
- Head Roll
- Tower of Friendship
- Walk Through
- Eating
- Head Think
- One

Above are the moves that my kids came up with today. I enlisted the help of my husband, who used my script to review the lines and blocking of the language scene and scene five while I pulled Sara, Sade, Déjà and the other kids who are in the bully cycle scene into the cafeteria. The bully cycle kids got their blocking pretty quickly, with Benjamin—a first grader—learning everyone else's blocking as well as his own by our third time through

the scene.

The problem was, though, that I could not, for the life of me, get them to be still. Benjamin kept grabbing his foot behind his back, in some sort of swaying version of the royal dancer yoga pose. Sara kept bursting into helicopter arms, and Déjà kept inching her way in front of others in the scene, even pushing little Benjamin out of her way at one point. Sade just was not paying attention, and kept turning her back downstage and spinning slow circles for no apparent reason, while Julie hopped around on both feet and played with her skirt.

I started with an attempt to reason with the students; we discussed what was happening in the scene. I asked each student to demonstrate angry body language, which they did quite well. So, I told them to remember that their characters are angry in this scene, and to use angry body language throughout the scene. I told them that if they weren't using the appropriate physical communication, I would say "be mad" as a reminder. I instructed them not to stop the scene, but to adjust their physicality while continuing with their lines. They agreed, and we started again.

I could tell that they were really trying, but I had to say "be mad" so many times and with so many name combinations that I could hardly hear their progress through the scene, which was frustrating. I'm sure it frustrated them, too, so we took a small blocking break. I played the music that we had chosen—"One Tribe" by the Black Eyed Peas—and had the students identify what part of the song they thought best communicated the meaning of the scene. We narrowed it down to a few seconds, and then I worked with the six students in this scene to create choreography for our snippet of the song. They wanted to do a dance that coordinates with the words, so we worked on that. I had to explain what amnesia meant, but after a few minutes we had the whole little dance planned out. It was very literal, but they

were excited. Given my past experiences with this combination of students, anything that allows Sara and Sade to buy into our work and get excited about a scene makes me happy, because it usually means that they will focus and get their jobs done. So, I did as much as I could to help them feel as though they were completely in charge of the choreography, without allowing anyone else to feel ignored. The group designed all of the dance moves, including a “tower of friendship” move that I didn’t particularly like. But, the kids loved it, so it stayed.

We went back to working on the scene, and I explained that this time I would stop the scene to focus on different aspects of their performance. We started again, and I stopped them along the way. I stopped Benjamin a bazillion times, because he kept grabbing his feet. I told him that his character is standing up for a friend, and he needs to tell that story with his body by standing still and on both feet. I stopped Sara from spinning, and asked her—already knowing the answer—if she has ever been in a real fight. She laughed, and Sade blurted out that Sara beats people up all the time. So I asked Sara what would happen during a fight if she turned around from the person she was fighting with. Sara said she didn’t know, so I rephrased my question. I asked Sara what she would do if the person she was fighting with turned away from her, instead. Sade asked Sara what she would do if it were Maria, but I don’t know which Maria she was mentioning. It doesn’t matter, anyway. Sara chortled and announced, “I’d bunch the bitch in the back of the head!” So I told Sara to pretend that Julie was Sara, and that she was Maria, and I told her to never turn her back to Julie’s character of Sara. I then asked Sade how it feels when the real Sara gets in fights. Sade said that it’s scary and she feels like she should protect her friend. So for Sade, my instructions were to act like she normally would if her best friend was fighting. I told Julie to do an impression of Sara, and I told Déjà to act like she’s Leyanna, a catty fifth grader that often picks on Déjà both

outside and during class.

After the scene, we practiced the dance again, then headed back into the auditorium to meet up with the other group. Walking into the room, before I could even see the stage, I could hear Rick desperately imploring Mugabe and Matthew to hold still. I was both amused and annoyed to hear this. I was amused because it was so parallel to what I had just been doing in the other room, and I was annoyed because focus is something we have been working on in class, and both Matthew and Mugabe are in drama class right now.

We had a brief conversation about the acting tools of body and voice, and we agreed that both are very important. I had Rick demonstrate by delivering a compliment with annoyed body language. Seeing this, the students agreed that physicality is important in telling a story or communicating a mood. Sometimes, I guess they just need to hear the same things from another source.

After our brief chat, I divided the cast into three groups, and assigned each group two captains from the bully circle scene. I gave the groups five minutes to learn the basic dance steps prior to our snack break. After cleaning up, I walked the whole group through our dance, slowly, speaking the lyrics, one step at a time. It took about fifteen minutes of step-by-step instruction and individual attention before I could step back and see how it looked. When I was finally able to observe the group as a whole, a few thoughts occurred to me.

First, I realized that the “tower of friendship” move that the kids had come up with was not as bad as I had originally thought. At first, in the cafeteria, I hated it. But now I saw that having the two fighting groups pass through it together, rather than one at a time as originally planned, might pack a little visual metaphor into the dance. The students said that they had wanted to create a dance that illustrated the lyrics, and this move did so fairly well.

Next, I realized that having the two lines of supporting ensemble members go in

opposite directions was too confusing. Eva's line, which was in front and which followed her lead, handled their little grapevine sequence just fine. Tuff's line, however, which was behind Eva's, kept getting confused. Daniel, Elizabeth and Ishmael were spot on, but the other kids in the line kept getting distracted and following the people who were in front of them. With only a week to go, I'd have to adjust this so that all of the back-up dancer students were staying together.

The final problem that really jumped out at me was the hand gestures that the students had created to accompany the grapevine sequence. The ideas behind the different moves were good ideas, and I felt badly about it, but I knew I'd have to cut them, because almost everyone was confused. The cast has been begging to work on the dance, so we're doing it, but I could see that the hand motions were confusing and stressful for the majority of the group.

I took an additional five or so minutes to explain and implement the changes, and then we practiced the dance twice more. The simplifications made the dance run much more smoothly than it had before. Because the students were able to stay together, the dance sequence looked much less chaotic and distracting. It wasn't smooth and it wasn't particularly pretty, but we're a week away from our performance, so it'll do.

Before we started a full run-through, we talked again about stillness and focus. I told the group that Rick would record the show, and that I would take notes, focusing primarily on physical mistakes. I provided a few reminders, set the cubes in place, started my timer, had Rick hit the record button, and told the students to begin.

The run-through was flat out awful. Their volume, which was almost always fantastic before, was nil today. Several students got confused regarding the progression of the scenes. Blackouts, which were verbally defined rather than unlit, lasted between thirty-seven seconds

and a little over a minute. Lines were dropped, nightmare monsters were laughing, and Déjà kept attempting to boss others around. I know she was trying to help, but it was really frustrating, because she repeatedly gave the wrong instructions. I kept having to interrupt, in order to get the kids back on track. By the end of our twenty-seven minute performance, I'd filled four pages with notes. I just gave them the highlights, knowing that they have neither the attention span to listen, nor the confidence to accept the criticism.

We switched gears and ran just the transitions again, aiming for twelve seconds or less per transition. Some took several attempts, but we eventually got them down. I had to remind several students of their responsibilities, but we were able to make it work. I had to really focus on safety and keep a "just get it done" attitude, which was difficult. In the past—in UIL competition pieces, in musicals, and festival performances—I have blocked and choreographed transitions extensively. However, that has typically been with secondary students or with auditioned drama club members and stage managers. That has also been with tons of time spent practicing transitions and technical elements. We are here, meeting only weekly. That, in and of itself, has been killing me. I feel like the retention rates of the students would be so much higher if I was allowed to meet more than once a week! Khoa is allowing me to keep the students after school twice next week to lead up to the performance, but that'll be the first time we've ever met twice within a five-day school week.

These time limitations are really killing me right now. I spent so much time and invested so much energy in the process, in trying to create an ensemble, in lowering affective filters, in creating a culture that was always patient with students having problems. I worked hard to create an environment that felt safe and supportive for all of the students, even though a handful seemed to undermine every effort I made. Now, we're a week away from our performance date, and I feel like I wasted so much time. Time was spent solving arguments

and coaxing students. Time was spent on extended shares and debates about our script's content. Time was spent eating snacks. I wish I could have a little of that time back. I am not meeting my own expectations right now, when it comes to production quality. I'm actually pretty disappointed in me. I was really proud of our script writing process, but I feel like I've allowed the production process to fall apart. I haven't wanted to let that happen, but attitudes and egos have gotten in the way, now that the group has gone from collaborative play writing to scene work and rehearsals.

I don't know if I can get this done in a week.

Meeting 15-May 12, 2014:

It snowed six inches this weekend, so we were missing five students today. Rehearsal was rough, missing almost half the group, but the students that were present were participatory, so that was good. I don't feel like we made a lot of improvements, but that's difficult to do when so many students aren't at school.

We started by watching the video from last week. Sade was horrified, and complained the entire way through. I ignored her complaints and used the video as an educational tool, choosing specific times to ask the students who their attention was on in the video. Each time, their attention was not on the focal point of the scene, but on someone who was waving their arms or fidgeting inappropriately. I asked if they understood the story when they were watching the video, and many of the students were having difficulty. Halfway through the video, some of the students began self-correcting, stating that they needed to be louder, be angrier, or hold still. Other students pointed out general errors, stating that they needed to do their jobs better or be quieter backstage.

After watching the video, we got into our costumes and ran through the show.

Watching the video definitely improved their focus, although they were still confused about

their jobs in the transitions and blackouts. So we practiced those a few times, I gave overall notes, and then we ran the show again. We ended a little early so that I could go over the week's schedule, remind the students that we are still meeting on Wednesday, and tell the students about Thursday's schedule and performances. We were done at 4:30, as scheduled, and I was handing out forms to the students to prepare for the parent meeting, which was scheduled to be from 4:30 to 5:00. However, only four parents were present. So I chatted with them, gave them the handouts, and then waited around for the other parents to retrieve their children. The last student didn't get picked up until six. Apparently, the traffic has been horrible all day, on account of all the snow. Right now, I'm just worried that it won't melt off in time for our performance Thursday; I'm really hoping that it'll all be gone tomorrow.

Meeting 16-May 14, 2014:

The snow had all melted off, but we were still missing Elizabeth, Madi, Daniel, Ishmael, and Sierra. They are all in the after-school OWL program, and apparently OWL had an after-school field trip that I was unaware of. This was frustrating, because Sierra has important parts in the nightmare scenes and in the language scene, Elizabeth is the lawyer in the lawyer scene, Daniel has lines in almost every scene, Ishmael is one of our language speakers for our transition scenes, and Madi is the colored-shirt individual in the lawyer scene, as well as having lines in the language scene. Missing these key players made our rehearsal difficult.

We ran through the whole play, with me reading the parts of the absent students. Then, I had the group go through the play from beginning to end without any actual dialogue, just using gibberish or saying "blah blah blah". This helped me identify where confusion was primarily due to memorization, and where the confusion was based on unclear sequencing of the show. Then, we reviewed the order of the scenes and the transitions between them. The

transitioning students knew which scenes were coming next, but for some reason they were not connecting what they were saying with the upcoming scenes. So I explained how each of their lines helped transition into the next scene, hoping that this would help them remember which lines were coming up next. During our run, Ishmael said his “rules made racism” line between every scene; I’m hoping that the explanation of how each line helps introduce each upcoming scene will help avoid that in our show tomorrow.

Next, we did a scramble review, and wrapped up our night with a full run-through of the entire show, with costumes and props. They’re as ready as they’re going to get!

Performance Day-May 15, 2014:

It was a long and tiring, but overall successful, day.

At 7:45, Matthew's mom and stepdad came in to tell me that the second grader had been so scared that he stayed up half the night vomiting. They said he seemed better this morning and they wanted him to participate. His mom said that drama club was the first time Matthew had made friends, and he didn't want to let them down during the show, so he insisted on coming to school and doing the performance. I was glad to hear that Matthew feels like he belongs, that he cares about the project, and that he wants to perform with us, but I was worried that he may get sick again, so I got his mom's number, just in case.

By 8:30, the kids were showing up in the auditorium as scheduled, and right away, they retrieved their shirts and began changing into costume. I was impressed, because we had been missing a handful of students at each of our dress rehearsals, but they were entirely self-reliant in helping one another find the proper shirts and in double-checking their props. I had already packed everything, prior to school starting, but the students were very thorough in ensuring that everything was set aside and ready to go with us. During this process, we only had one shirt go missing, but that was a simple mistake. One Sara had grabbed the other's

shirt and had gone to change, but quickly realized the shirt was the wrong size, so she came back and they traded. Neither one of them was at all upset or fazed.

At 8:45, all of my students were wearing their costumes, layered when necessary for certain scenes. Once they were all in the auditorium again, I had Rick take them to the cafeteria to pack their lunches while I looked for my sub, who had not yet stepped into the auditorium today. I explained the day's lesson plan, which included supervising rehearsals for next week's plays about Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi, before administering a lines test. My classes are all really solid on their blocking for these plays, but they need to get off book. Knowing that most subs are retired classroom teachers, I wanted to walk her through how to run and mark a lines test, since it's an entirely different process from most tests she has likely given in the past.

My students returned from the cafeteria, and by 9:15 all of the equipment had been delegated to different students and we were headed on to board the bus. Everything was on time; in fact, we left Ellis a little early. I was feeling really good about everything, and I could tell that the kids were, too. We all got a little confused when the bus driver decided to drop us off at Champa, rather than taking us all the way to the Newman Center, but we adapted. The walk through the Denver Performing Arts Complex was brief, but it was just long enough to set us behind schedule. The kids loved walking through the theatre district and seeing all the banners and posters, and although I was trying to keep us on schedule, I was kind of glad that we had the opportunity to walk through. We arrived to the Newman Center a little late, set everything on the stage, and then started our tour. I stayed behind with Kat, Anna, and Julie, who all had to use the restroom. Once they were done, we hustled up and down several flights of stairs, looking for our group. We finally found them, in the set construction shop.

The students were absolutely enthralled by the variety of costumes and props that were on display in the design shops, although the majority of my group was unimpressed by the scene shop. Several of my students have family members who work in the construction industry, so I guess the tools and lumber were familiar or seemed ordinary to them. But they absolutely loved the masks and molds and tools in the mask and puppetry studio. They wanted to know what play every piece was used in, and were particularly intrigued by the renaissance costumes, grotesque masks, and giant shark puppets. Our last stop on the tour was the script library, which did not seem to impress many of my students. Then, Déjà asked if our script would be in the library someday. Mr. W. said that it could be, if we decided to publish the script, and suddenly all of the students were abuzz with that idea, although I'm not fond of it.

After our tour, I dropped the kids off in one of the studios for an improv workshop, and went to see the stage. The lighting technician, Stewart, showed me around, and we worked to clear some space in the wings as best we could, without interfering with the set and props that were awaiting the center's afternoon workshop. We just moved anything that seemed like it would be a temptation to the kids, and anything that could get broken. Stewart kept apologizing that we could only access two legs, but that alone was much more space than my students are used to. I was actually concerned that it might be too much, and that the students might get distracted by all the extra room. Next, we went up to the lighting booth and talked through the show. I gave him a script that I had marked up with all of the lighting cues, and he seemed surprised. But it was clear, and we did a quick sound and lighting check before I retrieved my students for a rehearsal. I was really glad that we were going to be able to access a red wash for the nightmare scenes, since that's how we've practiced it at school. We were not, however, going to be able to use blue for scene 5, but I was not upset. I figured

that we lucked out that they had red lights gelled for the other performances going on at the center right now.

After the kids completed their workshop with Mr. W., they came in to rehearse the show. We'd barely finished our run through by noon, when I turned off my phone and put it away. The kids retrieved and began to eat their lunches, and we reviewed the end of the show in the lobby, while they ate their food. During our rehearsal, we'd botched the end pretty badly, with Déjà leading the group in saying the wrong choral line, and with multiple people skipping lines at the very end of the show. So we practiced it a few times while we ate.

I knew we'd been a bit behind ever since the trek from the bus, and because of that, I'd felt a bit rushed all day. So, I started to get a little nervous as I endured some idle time and the kids ate their lunches. I styled a few girls' hair, pulling bangs out of their eyes and faces while they ate, and then I snacked on some nuts and berries while the students finished their food. When Justin told me that it was close to our time to start, I had the kids clean up and head to the stage. We circle up to share our goals for the show, and Justin told me that it was time to go. So, when we finished our share circle, I told the cast to get into their places for scene 1. Justin and Stu showed me a side door that led out to the stage, and I kicked myself for not preparing anything to say. I gave a very off-the-cuff introduction to the show, and then I headed to the booth.

There were a few spots where my students forgot either their lines or where to go. This caused a hitch with lights and sound, but considering the fact that the kids had never been inside this building or on this stage until today, I didn't mind. Most of our hiccups revolved around the transitions between scenes and the students who speak in their home languages, so I just made a few notes of things that needed review when we got back to Ellis. I ran the sound while taking notes and calling cues for Stu, who was running the lights. Stu

pointed out that, in the midst of scene 5, Mugabe gestured slashing his throat to another kid on the stage who stood up at the wrong moment in the scene. I told Stu that Mugabe doing that, rather than attacking someone or curling up and shutting down, showed tremendous personal growth. I don't think he believed me, but it's true.

The talkback went well; I even teared up at one of Sara's responses to a question. I can't remember, now, what the question was or what she said, but her answer demonstrated such huge improvements in self-awareness and empathy that my eyes misted over. The talkback really helped me to realize how much my students have grown. When we began, so many of our group members were violent, exclusive, or cruel, and they've really learned to work together and to include and respect each other in ways that they were not capable of doing before. Only after everything ended did I realize that we started early; I'd been so stressed out about being late that I guess I had rushed us to begin. I also discovered, at this point in time, that there had been two advertised starting times. I didn't realize that until afterwards, and it's a pretty horrible mistake to have made, but I couldn't fix it now, so I just shrugged it off and continued, knowing that we still had a long day ahead of us.

We packed up our belongings and took a bathroom break, then headed to the field near Champa, characterized by the giant dancing statues, to wait for the bus. While the kids played a game with Mr. W., I noticed Mugabe sulking under a tree. He wasn't turtled, but I suspected that if I didn't intervene, he soon would be. I walked over and asked him what was wrong, thinking that he was still upset because during the bathroom break I had told him that he needed to put his belt back on and stop hitting people with it. But, his response surprised me. "They're making fun of me for being black," he said. I blinked a few times before asking who had said this. I received no response. I said his name, then again asked who had been making fun of him. After a pause, he named Déjà, but she has even darker skin than he does,

and she is not usually a student who says things like this. She is easily distracted and can be distracting to others, but she is not usually cruel. So, I asked Mugabe if he was sure. After a few moments of hang time, he said no. I told him that, no matter what happened, I would not be mad at him as long as he told me the truth. Then, I asked him if he knew why he was upset. He thought a moment before saying no, and I responded by asking him who was saying racist things to him. He begrudgingly admitted that nobody was being racist, and that he had made that up. I told him I was proud of him for being honest. I sat with him for a moment, naming activities that the other students were doing, and asking if he wanted to join them. After a while, Mugabe said that he thought he was upset because he didn't win a game. I asked which game he wanted to win, and he said that he had wanted to win the game Mr. W. was playing. I sighed, and explained that the game had no winners, so it was all right that Mugabe didn't win, because he didn't lose, and nobody else won, either. Mugabe started to tear up, and raised his voice a little, saying that he wanted to be the winner. I told him that maybe later, we could play a game that he's really good at, like Bippity Bippity Bop, and maybe if he focused really hard, he could win. He thought about that for a moment, and then I pointed out that Madi and Sade were doing cartwheels. I asked if Mugabe knew how to do a cartwheel. He didn't, so I told him that they might be willing to teach him, if he asked nicely. The suggestion worked; after considering the idea for a moment, Mugabe took off to learn a new trick. I was proud of him; a few months ago, upon getting upset, Mugabe would have immediately either lashed out or turtled. Either way, he would not have responded well to my interference or trying to reason with him. Today, however, he listened to what I had to say, he thought about and attempted to process his own feelings and actions, and he used words to explain what was wrong and what he wanted. This is such a huge change. The fact that Mugabe was able to pull himself out of being upset and decide to rejoin his peers shows so

much personal maturation; he has grown up so much. I'd really like to say that those social skills were developed as a direct result of our work on our project, but I know that there are dozens of outside forces that impact a student's growth. No matter what caused it, however, I'm really proud of how far Mugabe has come in the past few months.

The bus eventually pulled up--right as I was really getting worried. We packed up our props and personal belongings, and then boarded the bus. Our driver, Miss Sylvia, told me that she'd been waiting at the Newman Center, and that when she'd gone in to look for us, they had informed her that we'd moved to the park near Champa. She pointed out that this was not the location I had listed in my transportation request, and asked why I had come to the Shakespeare Festival pickup location, rather than the pickup location I had requested. I apologized and explained that we had returned to this location because it's where the morning bus had dropped us off. She looked at the form on her clipboard and then laughed, saying that the driver we'd had in the morning has a tendency to drop groups off wherever it's convenient for her, rather than always taking them directly to the drop-off location requested. Then, Miss Sylvia gave our kids what will probably be the most memorable bus ride of their lives.

The whole cast sang "Man in the Mirror" first, followed by a string of Bruno Mars hits. Then, they launched into Katy Perry's song "Dark Horse," followed by "Best Day of My Life", "Happy", and a few other hits. Miss Sylvia laughed the whole time, even catching a few Ellis Elementary renditions of different songs on video. When they ran out of ideas, Miss Sylvia turned on the radio. Then, when we hit traffic on the highway, she pointed out a car next to us that had its windows rolled down, and she suggested that the kids sing to the driver. So, they got excited and pulled their windows down before launching back into "Man in the Mirror". Julie punctuated their performance by shouting "One Voice brings you Ellis F.M.!"

They continued singing out the windows all the way back to school.

When we got to Ellis, the kids thanked Miss Sylvia and took everything off the bus before heading back to their classes. I headed into the back of the auditorium to upload the footage from the DCPA performance. Upon walking into the auditorium, I had to break up a fourth grade argument that had one of my students in tears. The sub simply stated that Anijong had been teasing Nick during the whole class time, and she hadn't been able to get him to stop. Sometimes, our substitutes don't realize that asking nicely doesn't always work with the Ellis population. Some students make you earn their respect, while others need you to demand it. The SES of our population, combined with the ethnic diversity of the population, makes for interesting classroom interactions sometimes. Part of me wondered if the sub had even said anything; Anijong is a big, aggressive kid. He argues a lot, and only backs down when a teacher won't. He can be tough and intimidating, but I got him to stop, although not without an argument. Fifth grade's class was calmer, so I uploaded everything at that time.

After school, I assembled my cast back in the auditorium; we were just waiting for Sara Z. I asked Sade if she knew where Sara had gone, and Sade's response was "she's probably talking to stupid Maria." This instantly set off a red flag. I decided to start without Sara, in hopes that when she came in she'd see that we were busy and get to business, rather than stirring up drama in the dead time before we began. I hoped to take away her opportunity to start a fight by occupying all the other students.

But, when Sara makes opportunities to do whatever she wants to do. So, I wasn't entirely surprised when, in the midst of the bully cycle scene, she stopped and threw her arms in the air, yelling "I can't deal with this shit right now!" So, I circled everyone up, and I explained that we only had one more chance to do the show, and that I wanted us to all have

fun doing it together. I didn't ask Sara what was wrong. I didn't ask Sade to tell me what happened. I didn't even ask Mugabe why he'd gone to sit alone in the corner after I asked everyone to circle up. Instead, I asked the whole group what we could do to make sure everyone had fun doing the show tonight. Tuff suggested everyone could tell his or her favorite joke, and Ishmael suggested playing soccer. Sara S made a suggestion that I thought was incredibly mature, especially for a second grader. She said that we should all do the fifth scene, and really throw away all of our pain when we throw the scarves away. She said that doing this would help everyone to be friends again because they were making the hurt go away.

So, that's what we did. We ran the final scene, and I followed the curtain call by playing some of the songs they'd been singing on the bus. We had a dance party, and I watched Madi try to get Sara Z. to dance, while Matthew and Benjamin tried to get Mugabe to laugh. Eventually, everyone seemed to be in a better mood, so we tried to rehearse the show again. The kids were really wound up from our dance party, so the practice did not go as smoothly as I would have hoped, but at least they were working together again. We reviewed all of the transitions between the scenes, which had been a cause for confusion during our morning performance. It wasn't perfect, but nobody was fighting or causing discord, and that's all I really cared about at this moment.

We broke for a dinner break, followed by some playtime in the gym to get their soda sugar rushes to calm down. Then we headed back to the auditorium for a "blah blah blah" run. Parents had started to arrive during dinner, so the kids were very awkward and nervous during their run. It was not looking too good. So, I closed the curtain and did a reprise of our Cross the Line activity from the first week of rehearsals. This was the first activity we had done as a group, and doing it again today really revealed how much the students have

matured during our time together.

The activity got them to focus, but then I needed to bring their energy up. So we played a round of the Yes Circle, followed by an Oh Circle and a quick game of Gracious the Goat. By the time we finished and our energy and focus were both high, it was 5:55. So, I circled the kids up and we all had a seat for our last share circle. We hadn't done a journal entry in a while, so we went around the circle with every student sharing one goal for our night's performance. When everyone had shared, I explained that this was our opportunity to use theatre and to use our script to tell our families and our teachers what we'd learned together. I told them all to reach their goals, and reminded them not to hide their ideas. Then, I went out to introduce the show.

I felt like the evening performance was fantastic evidence of our work together. Déjà reminded other students what choral lines were coming up next, and Eva reminded Sade where she needed to be on the stage. Sara Z. was congratulating others during blackouts, and I overheard Benjamin whisper to Tippy that she should be brave and be loud. The show wasn't perfect or without its kinks, but the students worked together, communicated, and really lifted each other up in ways that are not commonly seen around Ellis.

I told the students, a long time ago, during an activity that made several students cry, that tears are a sign of change in our hearts. In fact, that may have been said during our first meeting together, while debriefing Cross the Line. I don't remember when I said it, but the kids have quoted it back to me—and to each other—multiple times. After our performance, I couldn't help but smile when, as we circled up behind the curtain, Julie said, "Miss V, I think our play changed something!" and explained that both her mom and her teacher were teary-eyed after our show. I was proud that Julie felt like the play had accomplished something, and I knew that pointing it out helped other students take pride in their work, too. And I'm

not surprised that people in the audience cried; even I teared up a little, and I've seen the show tons of times.

Friday-May 16, 2014:

Connie came up to me this morning and asked us to perform our project for the third through fifth grades. She wanted us to do it today, but the cast wouldn't have had their shirts with them, and it wouldn't have been enough notice for the teachers. So, I talked her into allowing us to perform on Monday, instead.

I'm a little worried about performing it for the school. My kids rocked last night's performance, and I know they can do it again; the performance is not my concern. However, there's a huge bullying problem at our school, which is the reason that I started this project in the first place. My kids have grown so much through this process, and I'm really proud of them and I want to share their accomplishments and their discoveries with the school, because I feel that their story could really impact others. But I'm worried, because I fear that if other students in the school mock what my drama club kids have written, it may reverse some of what we've accomplished together. Mocking the play may be taken as a personal attack, because so many of my students are so proud of and connected to what we've done.

I talked to Connie about my concerns, and I reminded her that the reason she originally didn't want us to perform at Ellis was that she was afraid the audience might take the play too personally, thinking that certain scenes were written about them. I told her that my fear was the opposite; my concern is that the audience won't take the play personally enough, and that certain members of the audience may hook into words or phrases said in the show and use those things to bully my kids. I'm afraid that some students won't remain focused for long enough to hear the message; they'll start judging my cast partway through.

Connie insisted that we perform, and said that she'll pull a few of the fourth graders who are known to be bullies and have them sit with her during our performance. The students she named are some whom I feel need to hear the message of our play the most, but they are also some of the students that I fear will listen the least. I told her that this solution would only last as long as the show itself, and I insisted that we ask all teachers to attend the play with their students, rather than using the performance as extra planning time, which is what usually happens. I also insisted that teachers must have a debriefing conversation with their students following the show. I feel like this will do more good than simply separating the few students who are the meanest.

She agreed, so I used my planning time and my lunch to design, print, and distribute notices for all my kids that we will be performing again on Monday. I also put together and emailed out a few follow-up questions for teachers to use with their students following the play. I just hope that our performance has the desired result, and that it doesn't backfire and hurt my students.

Monday-May 19, 2014:

The play went well today. There was laughter during the nightmare scenes, but the heckling faded away during scenes two and three. My kids took the audience in stride and pressed on through the play, which was awesome—especially since Sara and Sierra were absent today, and they are leading characters in two of the nightmare scenes. Eva stood in for C.C., and Julie stepped into Sara's leadership role in the flying monster scene.

We had gotten together before school started to see if anyone was missing, and we'd divided Sara and C.C.'s lines up at that point in time. Everyone did an awesome job throughout the show of covering for our missing girls. I was really proud of the group; they really came together as an ensemble, and they covered for each other. Two of my students

who started out the shyest—Sara S. and Tippy—stepped up and memorized new lines to help the show go on. Sara S., who throughout our process and rehearsals would often get nervous and lapse into speaking Arabic, said all of her new lines in English. I was so proud!

When we finished, it was 2:45, and I reminded all the teachers to please discuss the play with their classes. The audience emptied, and I told my group that we had one last journal entry to complete. I gave them our Final Self Evaluation handouts, and asked the kids to fill these out while I set up for our awards. I wasn't expecting the kids to be as silent or as diligent as they were, but their focus got me really excited to see what they had to say.

We circled up, but instead of sharing the self-evaluations, we started what I called an affirmation circle. I was really pleased that almost everyone remembered what an affirmation was. We went around the circle with everyone giving a verbal affirmation to each of the two people seated beside them in the circle. The group was feeling really good, and we got up to get seated at the table I'd set up for cake. While the kids were eating, I announced the awards. Every student received an award, but each award was specifically named and explained to honor an area of growth or accomplishment that fit each individual's participation in our process.

After awards and after we'd cleaned up our cake, Tuff Love asked if we could dance to One Tribe one last time. All the other kiddos chimed in, clamoring for a dance party. So I put our songs on, and we danced until their parents came to pick them up.

Reflections

I started this process with great uncertainty. I felt that I had planned activities that were appropriately scaffolded to help the students accomplish the end goal. However, upon starting our process, I realized that all of my academic planning had left me completely unprepared for the attitudes that I would encounter with this combination of students. In the

beginning, I left details out of my journal, like the time I had to talk Mugabe down from choking Tuff. I left out the time that Sade's dad came to school completely drunk and attempted to pick her up, despite the restraining order. I didn't mention when Mugabe told Julie that he was going to rape her, and I didn't write about the time Serina threw my phone, and then a school laptop, at her brother because he wouldn't give her his snack, and she knew they weren't getting dinner that night.

At first, I didn't document these events because I was afraid that each of these occurrences reflected poorly upon me as an educator and as a director. I was frustrated that so much of my mental and emotional energy was spent calming students and mediating arguments, rather than solely focusing on the activities, improvised scenes, and games at hand. I took each behavioral outburst personally, and every time something like this happened, I felt like it marked me as a failure. I was working so hard to establish a safe and supportive community, and every time someone exploded in anger, I felt that the outburst was undoing my efforts. I felt that if I were successful in creating the atmosphere I wanted to achieve, the students wouldn't feel a need to lash out while we were together.

It wasn't until after spring break that I realized these occurrences were not evidence of a lack of effort or success, but that they were instead indicators of each student's need for this project to be a success. I finally realized that each of my students was desperate for a victory in their lives. They were starving for a way to communicate, a tool through which they could connect. Lashing out was an indication of an unspoken need in students who perceived themselves as having no outlet, no alternative. Angry outbursts were the only way that my students knew how to reach out or ask for help. My success, or my failure, as a result of my efforts, could not be measured through the anger that the students demonstrated at the beginning of our process, but through the patience that I demonstrated in handling each

outburst. My accomplishment should be measured instead by the decreased frequency and intensity of the students' tantrums, as well as the group's increased ability to work together, communicate clearly with one another, and empathize with each other during their work and when helping each other overcome anger.

During the break, I spent a lot of time thinking back over our process and the changes that have been evident in my students during the past few months, and I came to a realization. Even at that point in time the process had already been successful. Students who had been removed from group learning situations in their classrooms had become capable of working with one another during our drama club meetings. I can't quantify or prove the amount of individual growth seen in each of my students. I recorded participation, which indicates improvements in confidence, but the complete personal growth that I witnessed in many of my students is something I don't know how to describe. All I can say is that my students grew up and matured a lot throughout our time working on this project. For example Tippy, who used to cry frequently, has found somewhere that she can belong.

Now that our script-writing club has ended, and even though there are only eleven school days left before summer, I've had several students ask if we can continue meeting. Benjamin approached me before school, and asked if we can write another play before summer starts. Sara S. has asked to come work in the auditorium during her lunches and help me with my Kindergarten class. When I asked why she wants to spend recess working, she said that she just misses drama club. She has even asked her friends to come spend time in the auditorium, helping the younger students finish their puppets or other projects. And although the students in drama club are all from different grade levels, I've seen them spending time together on the playground before and after school, rather than staying with their grade level cliques. The culminating indicator of the success these students achieved

throughout this process, however, is the anecdotal evidence that I have overheard from parents and teachers alike, stating that my students are now less likely to bully others, and that they have, in fact, been observed standing up to other bullies throughout the school.

I recently read an article that described a school activity during which students confided in one another in a public forum, using a church as the venue for students to express their fears and secrets to one another publicly. According to the school's administrators, "violence grows out of students feeling isolated. Events like this . . . make clear to them that they're not alone" (McCorry). This article, written about recent events at a high school in Pennsylvania, echoes my own goals for the One Voice Project. I have seen students create connections where, before, there were none, and I have witnessed friendships form and animosity dissipate during our time together. Other teachers have witnessed positive changes in the behaviors of our One Voice Project students, as evidenced in the appendices. Several teachers have approached me, in person or through email, to express gratitude to the work we did together, and asking for the project to be repeated. I don't know if repeating the project annually would devalue the process or not, but I am very proud of the project's outcome, and I'm proud of the growth that the students exemplified through our time together. I feel that, as quoted in the article about the Pennsylvania high school, "When a community can come together and celebrate the humanity in each of our kids, that gives each and every one of our students the right to be just who they are" (McCorry).

Section 4:
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Section 5: Appendices

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Please note:

All appendices have been removed due to FERPA compliance and privacy concerns.
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When the students selected “When We Stand Up And Speak With One Voice” as their title, I decided that I needed to create one face to be the visual representative of the voice of the ensemble. My original idea was to take photographs of each student, and create one face out of a collage of the parts of all the students’ faces. I spoke to my husband, who is a photographer, about my idea. He agreed to take the photographs, and came to one of our Script Writing Club meetings. While I was working on rehearsing scenes and walking students through the blocking, he pulled one student at a time. Using a backdrop of white butcher paper, he took photographs of every student who was in the club except for Aliyah, who was absent at that point in time. Taking the photographs was not a long process. After the pictures were taken, he took my laptop and his camera, and had a seat in the audience while I finished rehearsal.

That day I had to wait with Tuff after rehearsal for quite a while, because his parents were not able to pick him up right away. If I remember correctly, we waited for about forty-five minutes before his mom arrived. Once he had left, I returned to the auditorium to check in on my husband. He had already finished the poster, but the result was not at all what I had imagined. It was better. Rather than creating a collage of a face, he had layered the students’ faces in their entirety by making each face highly transparent and then aligning all of the images on top of one another. The result was an almost ghostly image of one face, which looked like all of the students, and at the same time, like none of them.

Early in the writing process, we determined that we would use shirts to signify racism and segregation. When discussing what the shirt's design should include, the students had many suggestions. They suggested that symbols of peace should be on the shirts around the title, and they suggested that animals should be on the shirts around the title, rationalizing that animals are not racist. One student suggested that the title should be in a speech bubble, because the dialogue balloon would be a visual representation of speaking with one voice. In our discussion, most of the ideas were valid, and the students could not seem to agree on any one concept.

As I biked home that night, I remembered the drawings that the students had done based on the song "One Tribe". The next day, I pulled those out of the students' journals, and brought all of them home with me. Over dinner, my husband and I discussed a new concept. My thought was that all of the students' ideas could be combined with the images from their drawings, and arranged around the title in the shape of a dialogue balloon. This way, all of the students' ideas of symbols that represent peace could be incorporated. I also wanted to include the title of the play in some of the many languages spoken by the students in the Script Writing Club.

When Rick finished the shirt design, I sent it off to print. While speaking with the CustomInk representative on the phone, she asked why the words were in the shape of America. I explained that the shape was supposed to be a speech bubble, but as I spoke I realized that the shape of the United States might actually be appropriate. The title addresses a desire to change the world, but the play ends by stating that change needs to start with oneself. In my role as the governor's assistant, I had explained that the governor wanted to start with Ellis as a case study, in order to determine ways to improve the rest of Colorado. The shape of our nation, then, makes sense in our shirt designs, because if the students are

striving to change the world with their words, they must start by attempting to change our own nation, first.