

BUILDING A WORKABLE MODEL FOR YOUTH THEATRE:
AN EXPLORATION INTO A COURAGEOUS AND COMPLEX FIELD

by

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ABSTRACT

As an active director of productions featuring youth actors, I find myself debating the same questions continuously: Are there clear and demonstrated differences between working with young people and adults when directing a youth theatre production? Are there approaches and methods of working with young people that differs greatly from working with adults? Are these methods supported and utilized by those working professionally in the field? Is there an ideal format for a theatre producing only productions with youth?

I believe that directing young actors tends to require a shift in focus due to the pliability, sensitivity, and inexperience of the actors. I feel the director must take into account the emotional, developmental, and educational needs of the young people and at the same time remain focused on the creation of a product with artistic integrity and clear storytelling. Due to the didactic nature of Youth Theatre, directing young people often requires an awareness of process over product despite the similar end goal of directing adults.

Since little research or literature exists about the differences between working with adults versus young people, I will pursue information by interviewing several recognized professionals in the field of Theatre by and for Youth. I will examine their multiple methods, techniques, and practices of working with young people. In addition, I will use my personal experience working with youth at the Orlando Repertory Theatre in Florida and Coterie Theatre in Missouri. Through an investigation into the emerging field of Youth

Theatre coupled with my education, I plan to develop a workable and effective youth theatre company based upon these findings with the hope it might inspire others working in this field.

For all of the amazing young actors with whom I have had the opportunity to create theatrical magic. And for Sean Phillip Mabrey and Kathy Mellinger, my eternal sidekicks and artistic inspirations.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

My study began as a basic question: do you believe it is necessary to take a different approach when directing youth versus directing adults? As I began to delve deeper into this topic, I found this question more complex than it appeared. Many other questions emerged out of this one seemingly simple question. How do you handle the large variance of skill levels often seen in youth theatre, but not in professional productions? Do you feel extensive reflection is important for young actors? How does the amount and specificity of notes you give change from a production with all youth to a production with only adults? I sought answers to my growing list of questions, but found that throughout the field, very little research and literature exists on techniques for directing youth. This is despite the fact that Youth Theatre is a blossoming field with many recognized theatres producing hundreds of productions featuring youth every year. In addition, most major theatres feature some form of youth performance camp with young actors often playing main roles. Youth Theatre appears to be a field many professionals work in, but do not discuss at any academic length. Journal articles and books ruminate on teaching artistry, arts education, and successful theatrical productions, but do not explore how the three of these fields intersect and collaborate on the same level when dealing with youth.

Since these questions could not be easily answered through journals and other literature, I chose to seek answers from those working actively in the field, interviewing them to find their opinions and thoughts on these ideas. Following these discussions, I began to realize that a workable and useful model for creating ensemble and collaboration

amongst young actors did not exist. My study took shape and sparked a desire to format a practical outline for the creation of a Youth Theatre. In my thesis, I will discuss the findings of my interviews and how they impacted my beliefs as a practitioner and finally, using those realizations, I will create a model for how I would start a small Youth Theatre Company.

In order to understand the terminology used throughout this thesis, it is necessary to answer a few prominent questions relating to my exploration and the vocabulary used.

I). What is Youth Theatre, Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA), and Creative Drama?

Youth Theatre: I define Youth Theatre as theatrical productions featuring young people from ages pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade exclusively. These young people are not paid in order to fit this definition since typically paid youth actors are considered to be young professionals who work with adults. Since Youth Theatre denotes only productions featuring all youth, they do not fall into this category. When part of a theatre company, most of the Youth Theatre participants will have paid for their participation in the production whether through scholarship or parent purchase. However, in circumstances of high school production, students participate in the production as an extracurricular activity. Youth Theatre should be viewed in a broad sense from required class performances to high school one-act competitions to large-scale musicals. For my purposes, these forms all fall under the same umbrella of Youth Theatre. I mention and discuss professional productions with

paid youth and adult actors; this falls, however, under a separate category from that of Youth Theatre and under the realm of Theatre for Young Audiences.

Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA): For the purposes of this thesis, the definition of Theatre for Young Audiences differs from the traditional opinion of TYA. Many believe TYA refers to theatre performed specifically for youth, theatre performed by youth (what I delineate as Youth Theatre), and theatre as a process to facilitate learning and help students create meaning. I consider TYA only to be theatre produced for a youth audience, not the other possible two definitions. This theatre may or may not be professional and may or may not include child actors. Theatre for Youth is another term used to describe this area. Most commonly, the theatre company pays the actors involved for their participation in the production.

Creative Drama: Creative Drama denotes theatre activities used for educational purposes in the classroom to develop confidence, creativity, practical knowledge, and responsibility to self and world. Creative Drama approaches theatre as a process-based tool whereas Theatre for Young Audiences and Youth Theatre utilize theatre to create a finalized product for performance. This process-oriented focus is the primary difference between Creative Drama and the other two fields. Due to this main differing element, the techniques used for Creative Drama in the classroom often vary greatly from those used in the rehearsals process. This is important to be

aware of given that the cross pollination of techniques between fields is a topic heavily discussed later in this thesis.

II). Why do these differences matter?

Theatre for Young Audiences, Youth Theatre, and Creative Drama all involve some form of theatre and education. At different times, they require the practitioner to be a director, teacher, and artist in some combination. In order to truly understand my research it is pertinent to have some knowledge about the differences and similarities between the areas. It is important to understand the variety of differences between these fields to appreciate the complexity of when they intertwine.

The intricacies of the terminology in the field of drama and theatre for/by youth are extremely complex and highly debatable. Practitioners all across the field hold opposing views on what precisely these terms signify. The definitions I utilize for my study contain more specificity than typically given by professionals. Most use an umbrella term for simplicity's sake: often, Theatre for Young Audiences, Youth Theatre, and Creative Drama all fall under the same category. When working with youth, however, I discovered the context to be vastly imperative in determining the approach to take during the process. Finding a common language for this study was a necessity, in order to give a definite understanding of which type of theatrical process I reference.

III). Who am I as a practitioner of theatre arts?

From a young age, I began my work in the theatre as a young actor performing in numerous Youth Theatre productions as part of the local community theatre's education programming. My sophomore year of college I discovered that education and theatre intertwined under the field of Theatre for Young Audiences. As I transitioned into my graduate studies, I became interestingly interested in how education plays a role in Creative Drama, Theatre for Young Audiences, and Youth Theatre. Creative Drama had obvious ties to education since it is based in the classroom. Theatres for Young Audiences continuously seek to produce plays with history, science, or citizenship ties to make them viable for teachers to use as source material. Youth Theatre, however, appeared to have the loosest tie to education beyond the fact that it is all students performing in the productions. I postulated to my professors, my classmates, and myself how education plays into Youth Theatre and if it is a necessary component. I witnessed a director for whom I assistant directed integrate master classes in acting, improvisation, movement, and voice into rehearsals with youth. Adding these technique classes into the rehearsal schedule gave the process an immediate educational component that some of the actors needed, but others did not. I wondered if these classes evened the playing field or created a superiority complex amongst those who already knew the material. These classes used precious rehearsal time that we later regretted giving up. Did the product suffer because of a focus on the process and the education? Is it possible to marry education with a highly artistic product? The answers to these questions escaped me; I could not quite envision how to

create this balance when directing youth or conclude if this balance was a necessity. This rumination led me to ask the question that initiated this study.

IV). About the interviews.

My personal catalyst began with a simple question I asked my colleagues: do you believe it is necessary to take a different approach when directing youth versus directing adults? Almost immediately, each of them replied that their approach did not change nor did they feel that it should. This shocked and surprised me; I am completely certain I approach them differently. I immediately wanted to compare the variations between my approach through a complex study into play analysis and casting, but quickly realized with only little experience to synthesize, I would simply be hypothesizing and meditating on mere ideas. I began seeking out professionals to interview hoping to discover if I was the only person who felt that the approach of directing youth differs from the approach of directing adults. Using several of my personal connections in the field, I asked a variety of different individuals to participate in this study. I attempted to find professionals from different backgrounds, genders, ethnicities, and geographical locations. I interviewed and conversed with directors, schoolteachers, heads of programming, and freelance artists. Each agreed to the interview willingly and with full knowledge that the interview would be recorded and transcribed for the purpose of producing this analysis. I offered each participant full disclosure. Only two of the interviews occurred in person. The majority took place either through email, over the phone, and on Skype. Only a few of these

participants I knew prior to the interview; most were recommendations given to me by others who knew about my project. While I developed questions that I asked throughout the course of our conversation, often these turned into discussions between the participant and myself. I have included the interviews as appendix for perusal.

These conversations not only uncovered trends, commonalities, and large differentiation about Youth Theatre direction, but also changed me personally as a practitioner of theatre with young people. The journey began as a mere query into a particular question, but emerged as a bigger quest to improve the quality of information available about working with young people. I sought to discover if there was a common approach to Youth Theatre in the hope of improving my own practice, assisting others in their personal work, and giving my ideal for how a youth company might function.

IV). My bias.

It should be known that I went into this study determined to disprove the statements my colleagues made about the dissimilarity between directing youth and adults. From my own personal experience, I felt confident that the approaches must differentiate. While I attempted to create questions without an inclination toward this bias, it is imperative to know my prior beliefs to understand my placement in the analysis. I sought a certain response. This led to unique conversations that might not have occurred had I not wanted this response. I endeavored to remain neutral in my interviews without speaking specifically toward my bias or giving indication toward the answer I sought.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERVIEWEES AND RESPONSES

For this study, I focused on a variety of professionals throughout the field of theatre for young audiences. All of them have spent extensive time directing youth in both professional and educational settings. I attempted to select individuals who had worked with youth in a variety of different ways and also sought those who came from an array of diverse educational backgrounds. Some received Masters of Fine Arts in Theatre while others received education degrees. This created responses that often differed greatly from one another, yet in several ways, still found areas of similarity. In this chapter, I will give a short summary of each person's professional background followed by a short synopsis of their response to my question: do you feel it is necessary to use a different approach when directing youth versus directing adults?

1). Kim Peter Kovac

Kim Peter Kovac has worked with the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. for over 25 years demonstrating a great dedication to the development of Theatre for Young Audiences in the United States and the rest of the world. Most notably, he founded New Visions/New Voices, a new play development festival (that) has assisted in the development of 73 new plays from 63 playwrights and 51 U.S. theater companies in 29 states, and with 5 international companies from 3 other countries. Important works including *The Yellow Boat*, *The Wrestling Season*, and *Afternoon of the Elves* have emerged

from this festival. At the Kennedy Center, he has commissioned works from recognized playwrights including Jose Cruz Gonzalez, Laurie Brooks, James Still, and Doug Cooney. In addition, he serves on committees with TYA/USA (formerly known as ASSITEJ/USA) and IPAY offering executive duties and mentorship. Despite his extensive work in the field, Kovac has not directed a production with young people in over 20 years. However, he offers a great amount of insight given his extensive work in this arena.

Although I had only a brief email interview with Kovac, he served as a mentor as I searched for an appropriate thesis topic. He helped me develop my interview questions and secure contacts. From his email, I was able to get straight forward, easy to decipher responses which helped me in my search for a cohesive answer to my question. In response to my question, Kovac answered directly that in general, he does feel it necessary to direct young people differently. "What young actors lack in technique and training, they make up for in spontaneity" (Kovac). This requires an adjustment in methods and your way of talking to the young people to adjust to these differences. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to change the direction of young people over adults. He stated that when he directed mixed casts with both young people and adults he spoke to the youth differently. Kovac, also, echoed many of the sentiments expressed previously by the other interviewees. His advice to those directing young people was simply "Do not condescend. Do not talk down. Expect much but do not put too much pressure" (Kovac).

II). Gary Cadwallader

Currently the Education Director at the Orlando Repertory Theatre in Florida, Gary Cadwallader received his Masters of Fine Arts in Acting from Western Illinois University. He originally began his career as an actor specializing in musical theatre, performing extensively across the United States, before a desire to settle down led him to Florida. Cadwallader spent twenty years with the Seaside Music Theatre in Daytona Beach, Florida directing several shows including *Little Shop of Horrors* and *A Year with Frog and Toad*. He also performed in numerous shows including *1776*, *Singin' in the Rain*, and *South Pacific*. Eventually, a passion and interest in education led him to begin teaching drama with youth. Many of his classes focused on acting, singing, and dancing techniques although knowledge of creative drama infused itself into much of his work. These experiences led him to serve as the Education Director at Seaside Music Theatre in Florida. When Seaside Music Theatre closed its doors, he became the Education Director of the Orlando Repertory Theatre. Currently, he directs two to three productions every year. One of these productions is a large-scale summer stock musical cast with only local teenage actors. Aside from directing, Cadwallader maintains his career as an actor by working in many national commercials including EA Sports and Publix.

In response to my question, Cadwallader, like many other interviewees, discussed the balance that must be discovered when directing youth. For Cadwallader, when directing musicals featuring all youth, it is difficult for him not to teach some form of vocal and dancing technique to the young actors. In order to get everyone on the same page for choreography and singing, this teaching must happen early on in the process. This works to

neutralize the students and offer a common ground between them. Otherwise, for Cadwallader, no differences exist between his processes with young actors over adults. He maintains a high level of expectations as when he works with adults, if not somewhat higher. He sets the bar to a place where the young people can push themselves beyond their limits and grow immensely throughout the process. He has found that when he sets his expectations high, they always rise to them. Cadwallader still stresses the importance of having a finished product that both he and the young actors can feel pride in creating. The process and product are both equally vital to him, carrying similar levels of necessity. He strives for the young people to work toward a successful product while allowing them to enjoy the challenges and joys that come with working on a theatrical piece.

III). Abigail Adams

Abigail Adams is the artistic director of People's Light and Theatre Company; a regional theatre outside of Philadelphia with a budget is about 5.3 million. People's Light Theatre produces seven to eight productions a year featuring a combination of young actors and professional artists. They bring in numerous school groups to see their work while also featuring productions in which the youth are the actual creators. She has spent nearly thirty-one years with the theatre company having directed over sixty productions including *The Miser*, *Peter Pan*, and *The Last Good Moment of Lily Baker*. She also began the New Voices Ensemble, a company of area teenage students, who develop and perform their own themed theatrical pieces. In the past, she served as a faculty member at Swarthmore

College and taught at New York University and Carnegie Melon University. Her particular area of interest is the direction of professional productions that challenge young people and adults to work in conjunction with one another.

Adams immediately responded to my question saying that she felt there is no differentiation between directing adults and young people. While she does believe in beginning work with the young actors many months before working with the adults, she directs them no differently than she would direct adults. She feels that beginning the rehearsal process with youth earlier in advance gives her an opportunity to build a repertoire with youth and to make sure that during the official rehearsal process everyone feels himself or herself to be an equal partner. Adams asks for every actor to be off book from the very first day. She believes carrying a script can wreck impulses, particularly for young people who tend to be inexperienced readers. She states the need for youth and adult actors to understand the difference between reading and actually living the moment. This desire for the actors to work without scripts spurs from her belief in the importance of developing relationships onstage. Often her directing work focuses on improvisational storytelling activities that ask the actors to dig deep into their characters and develop detailed given circumstances. In support of these beliefs she states:

It's not any different. I don't make any kind of differentiation. I do a lot of work on relationships. A lot of not so much improvisation as storytelling that thickens the given circumstances. I don't let anybody work with a book in hand, ever. And that's the same for adults and young people. (Adams)

Her choices in directing emerge from the core values of the theatre company she helped developed. People's Light and Theatre Company believes that their teaching and educational programming is rooted in artistic practice. They use the rigor of arts training as a tool to teach young people while focusing solely on the theatrical form without utilizing an educational vocabulary. She feels that:

The rigor of the art is the best thing that you can give the kids. And that is really what they respond to which is mastery. Which is why we're not a school, we're a professional theatre. Even our teaching or even the term education is really all rooted in artistic practice, not in an educational vocabulary. And that's what we can bring to the party. And that's not to say that schools or educational institutions aren't incredibly useful. They are, but for us it's the actual art form that's really important. For directors, I want artists. And again, we just don't differentiate.

(Adams)

IV). David A. Miller

Miller originally began his career as an actor, but began teaching young people as means to make supplemental income. During undergraduate school, he was looking for different summer jobs when he saw a teaching initiative for eight through eleven year olds that combined performance and visual arts. David was immediately attracted to this idea

because they are his two passions in life. Eventually teaching took over as his principal career and brought him to internships with the Kennedy Center Theatre for Young Audiences and Seattle Children's Theatre where he worked as the Director of Outreach. Since he left Seattle and moved to New York City, he has worked many jobs in various capacities with and for young people. During our interview, Miller was walking to rehearsal for a show he was directing, although not with young people. Like many professionals, involved in Theatre for Young Audiences, Miller prefers to freelance as a teaching artist, director, and stage manager rather than narrow himself down to one choice. He has been a teaching artist and director for the past several years. He states that the reason he continues this career is because "phenomenal things happen during the rehearsal process that give (him) such joy and surprise" (Miller).

Miller and I began our discussion with an exploration of what exactly the term Youth Theatre means. Previously in my thesis, I defined Youth Theatre as theatrical productions featuring young people from ages pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade exclusively. Miller, however, felt that Youth Theatre regarded a much broader realm of theatrical activities. He views Creative Drama and Youth Theatre as extremely similar given the stress in each on process over product. He described that making theatre with young people is "as much about the experience as it is about the product itself" (Miller) which is one way he feels that professional theatre differs from theatre with young people, but only slightly. He believes that good theatre involves an extensive collaborative process with the only difference being the lack of teaching. In his rehearsals, he focuses on ensuring everyone remains open to new ideas and open as a collaborator while demonstrating those

same skills as a director. The professionals he works with do not particularly need the teaching aspect given their training and grasp on the collective goal of creating an incredible performance with clear storytelling. “They do not actually need training, but they need direction related to the production or to their characters” (Miller). With the young people, however, the focus is not on the creation of a polished product, but about everyone jointly sharing a healthy, open, productive theatrical experience. They know in the teaching moments that their performance will be improved, but essentially working well together is the most important aspect. Assisting the students in developing their way into the story and discovering what they find satisfying about creating the characters is crucial. Through this they are able to find real ensemble moments and instances of teaching that “in the rehearsal process leads to a sharing out that transfers to the performance” (Miller). The improvement of the performance happens as a by-product of the extensive collaborative exploration. Miller admits, however, that this is a difficult line to tread. As a director, he finds himself getting caught up on the product knowing that at some point there will be an audience evaluating the work they have created. Rather than accepting the beauty of young creative mind conceiving the best characterization idea, he finds himself just wanting to control the situation, so a highly artistic final product emerges. This struggle is similar to many sentiments echoed throughout my study.

V). Richard Hitchler

Richard Hitchler is the Artistic Director for SteppingStone Theatre for Youth Development in Saint Paul, Minnesota which was started in 1987. The primary mission of the theatre is to use theatre with young people as a means to build self-esteem, process, and a sense of community and ensemble. Hitchler has served as Artistic Director since 1997. Serving an estimated 70,000 people a year, SteppingStone produces six mainstage shows, conducts fifty in-school residencies per year, and houses after school programming, drama classes, and summer day camps. Hitchler works directing youth full time since he began his tenure at SteppingStone. Since at SteppingStone, he has directed over 25 productions including *Hanuman King of the Monkeys*, *Young MLK*, *The Stinky Cheese Man*, *Ruby!*, and has produced more than 60 productions. Hitchler earned a BA in Theatre from the University of Minnesota and worked in various education departments teaching creative drama classes, directing youth theatre productions, and working in the school system. He has worked with Illusion Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, Children's Theatre Company, Cricket Theatre, Teatro Latino, and the Homeward Bound Theatre. In addition, Richard spent a number of years in Florida, as well, working with Florida Studio Theatre, TheatreWorks, and the Orlando Shakespeare Festival.

Hitchler states that he attempts not to make any differentiation between directing adults and directing youth. He feels that his "expectation level with the young people is (the same) as they will be with professional thirty-year veterans of the theatre" (Hitchler). Similarly to Cadwallader, Hitcher hopes that they would all live up to that same level of expectation. His "sense is typically that if (he) raises that level up and (has) that high

expectation then the youth will rise up to those expectations.” Therefore, he attempts to make the bar high rather than low. This gives him the opportunity to push them beyond the possibilities they believed true. While his expectation levels are the same, however, he does acknowledge the teaching element necessary with young people. Unlike adult professionals who tend to have previous grounding in theatre education, the young actors do not have grasp of the basic theatrical language, thereby making it the director’s responsibility to communicate these terms to the youth. This does not allow him to talk down to the young people. He attempts to enjoy their vibrancy and exuberance on their level, treating them as peers with respect and mutual understanding, while still serving as their teacher and director. Otherwise, he states that the difference stays very miniscule. Often times, he finds working with young more enjoyable and rewarding than working with adults. Hitchler states:

With young people, you can go on a journey that is – the story may not make sense logically, but the young people may be open in their mind’s eye and creatively to go on that journey. While an adult actor may tend to overthink some of it, you get stuck in some areas where you wouldn’t necessarily be stuck with someone who is younger and will let their imagination roam. So I think that tends to be one of the biggest differences and one of greatest joys is being able to roam with them and share that journey. (Hitchler)

It would appear from his remarks that Hitchler still considers process an essential focus rather than wanting nothing but an excellent finished product.

Each ... time when I've watched kids from that very beginning to that end result I have seen great leaps from kids that have just been really incredible. It is really (the) joy of watching kids go from that initial rehearsal to that opening night where you see it click and them really understand it when they get that reaction from the audience. That's something that is wonderful to see. You see it in every face, them recognizing that the audience ... appreciates what (the young actors) have done. It is incredible for me and quite amazing for the young kids. Some of the kids who have ... a very major role, they are very afraid in the beginning, but when they get to opening night that light bulb just clicks. (Hitchler)

For Hitchler, the process has great focus, but the biggest importance being that it is still a theatrical process. The mere fact that the young people experience the emotional and intellectual journey of creating a play from beginning to end enough without anymore pressure put on the product. Seeing the audience react to characterization work from weeks of rehearsing triggers a response in the young people that Hitchler implies is the reason he does Youth Theatre. This, however, greatly differs from adults who go through less of a journey, but still use similar methods to create the final product.

VI). Stephanie Lash Kilpatrick:

Kilpatrick is currently an elementary drama specialist working with nursery through sixth grade students at the National Presbyterian School in Washington D.C as part of their special units team. Receiving her degree in Theatre Education from the Educational Theatre program at New York University, Kilpatrick researched devising and creating theatrical productions with youth. She initially thought that her degree would lead her to eventually working in the Education Department of a professional theatre, but quickly discovered she preferred utilizing drama techniques in a school setting. Although she has a wealth of experience working educationally in museums and professional theatres, her most relevant experience is holding residency and after school programs at elementary schools in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington D.C. After first moving to Washington D.C., Kilpatrick worked as a freelance teaching artist until National Presbyterian hired her as a part time drama and visual arts specialist. In 2010, however, they upgraded her position to full time. Her primary responsibility is to teach theatre classes and direct productions for each grade as mandated by the school. As part of her job, she has devised numerous productions with pre-kindergarten through second graders. In addition, Kilpatrick has directed and written several staged productions with third through sixth grade students. Kilpatrick has also taught units on acting techniques and Shakespearean performance that led to informal showing with small audiences.

From my interview with Kilpatrick, it became evident that she feels it absolutely necessary to handle the direction of Youth Theatre productions differently than with adults. She approaches the direction of these grade level productions with the specific

belief in “the practice of drama for drama’s sake and not about the production itself” (Kilpatrick). She works primarily in the application of Creative Drama techniques to the rehearsal process with youth creating small-scale productions. While this presents difficulties, it also offers exciting opportunities to create curricular-based productions with the young people based on what they currently study in their classroom. Rather than create fully staged plays with young people who might lack drama and acting experience, Kilpatrick utilizes creative drama techniques more appropriate to their knowledge and skill level. Since the students have only been taught to do productions, she especially tries to infuse her productions with a bountiful amount of educational opportunities in order to create an experience that is more developmentally appropriate for the given grade. She often finds that one of the biggest struggles with her job is creating a process-focused experience with an end product that maintains a high artistic level. In response to a question on the sacrificing the art for the educational components Kilpatrick states:

When I think about what I’m sacrificing, it is more of the artistic. Sometimes that’s unsatisfying for me as an artist. I also teach younger students. I often have to remind myself that they’re not in middle school and not in high school. I don’t think I would be sacrificing so much if they were. I also wouldn’t be sacrificing so much if they were electing to be in my class. That’s the other thing too. Is that they’re not electing to perform. They’re required and so I’m very conscious of that when I’m working with them. I don’t want to be the cause of anyone at the party when they’re thirty saying I was a tree when I was in 2nd grade. I don’t want to be that person that made

someone a tree. Artistically, sometimes it would be helpful to have a tree. I do place an emphasis on more of the educational aspect. Because often I will look something and say “Oh, man. If only I could do this the way I want to” or “If only I could talk to them and lay it out there the way I want it to be” or “If only I could direct them the way I would direct adults” we would have this spectacular production. In the environment that I’m in, the education definitely does win out over the artistry.

(Kilpatrick)

Kilpatrick’s position at National Presbyterian School puts her in a different situation than most of the other interviewees in this study. Her students rarely choose to be in her class nor does she see them very often. She must adjust to young people with little to no desire to participate in any sort of theatrical experience. She “think(s) about the least excited student and how she can make it comfortable for them” (Kilpatrick). This causes her to focus more on group work and devising in the classroom, so each student feels a sense of personal ownership over their work rather than being handed a generic script. Despite all of her attempts to make the experience more conducive to learning and theatricality, she still feels that she has not been able to put too high of artistic expectations on the students. She states:

I don’t know if I’ve found a way to do it except have lower expectations than you would if you had more time. I think my goal is I want everybody to come out of the entire process having felt like they had a good time throughout the entire thing.

Sometimes I've found when you're very conscious of that product that the process is not very much fun and kids don't have that really positive feeling. I would rather sacrifice a little product and have a great time. My philosophy is if we've had a really good time, we've learned a lot during the process. It's okay that the product is not Broadway worthy yet, because it's never going to be. (Kilpatrick)

Kilpatrick puts focus on the process because she has found that when the production is artistically satisfying for her, the experience has not been as gratifying and healthy for the young actors. She feels like you have to weigh more heavily on either the process or product because a middle ground exists very rarely. This belief puts her in direct contrast with many of those interviewed in this study.

VII). Marty Johnson

Johnson began as a young actor doing theatre all throughout his childhood, eventually leading him to an undergraduate degree in Acting and Directing from the University of Minnesota. While in undergraduate school, Johnson taught students as a camp counselor and worked in several different theatre and education venues. He immediately felt a draw to directing over performance. Eventually, he went to receive his masters' degree at the University of North Carolina Greensboro in Theatre for Youth with an emphasis in directing. While pursuing his degree, he worked at North Carolina Theatre for Young People directing youth. After graduating, Johnson spent time directing at regional

theatres including Virginia Stage Company in Norfolk Virginia and North Shore Music Theatre north of Boston. He served as Education Director for North Shore Music Theatre leading their youth performance conservatory. Currently, he resides in New York working with iTheatrics developing a Broadway Jr. and School Edition collection of shows for young people. Part of the development process involves testing the shows with young performers to ensure they will work for various levels of students in an educational setting. He directs most of these test productions. In addition, iTheatrics also teaches technique classes on how to work with students in both theatre and musical theatre.

Johnson acknowledges that while numerous different techniques exist to get results out of young people versus adults, however, when asked how his approach differs with young people over adults, he states that the biggest difference is simply having an awareness of “young people’s egos and personalities... and not bruise any growing personalities” (Johnson). He states:

The only difference is you have to be aware of not hurting anyone’s feelings in a much broader way than if you were working with strictly adults. With adults, you still don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings or want them to feel bad about themselves, but they have a different skin and different thickness of skin than most children.

(Johnson)

He also agrees with many others in that he raises his expectation levels to the same of that with professional adult actors. He asks for a “level of professionalism ... and their

commitment to the art and the craft” (Johnson). When asked how he approaches productions in relation to process over production values, he responded:

I think my job as director is first and foremost to tell the story... Now, when you’re telling it with students you’re doing everything you can to make those students look good, feel good about themselves telling the story to the audience. So, that includes learning basic techniques – being loud enough, being clear enough. The emotions. All of those things and as well as getting them to understand they are an artist and they are sharing something with the audience... Everything I do is process based, the product is as important as if it was all adults up there or all students. I think personally that students thrive to that level of commitment... and it’s not perfection you’re looking for, because then you just want robots, it’s that level of professionalism of doing the best they can on the stage.(Johnson)

Despite his process-centered direction, Johnson still maintains that one must still work towards an end product. While he believes that reflection and theatrical games are mainstays of the rehearsal process, often he feels these activities verge on therapy rather than working toward the goal of a finalized production. To Johnson, “the theatrical process is enough in itself to provide a good developmental experience for young people because it naturally encourages that without having to overanalyze the fact that (they are) doing it” (Johnson). In reference to this idea, he comments:

I think it's really important that kids learn how to play, but if you can work while you're playing, you can accomplish a whole bunch of other things. I think there's a lot of great creative drama activities that people do all the time... but creative drama activities are different than for what I do when we're putting on a production, because creative drama is about figuring out who you are and playing. Putting on a production, you have an end goal. You have an end goal that is more than just an internal thing. It's an internal and external thing. It's really important for kids to learn how to strive for those external things while fulfilling that internal thing as well. (Johnson)

When discussing his process, Johnson constantly reiterates that very little difference exists between productions with adults versus young people. He feels that through theatre individuals are "making successes, no longer being afraid, making leaps forward, learning how to speak and learning how to communicate with each other, learning how to be a part of a team, and learning how important every person is" (Johnson); all growths that happen no matter the age of the actors.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYZING THEIR RESPONSES

As I began to study results of my conversations with the interviewees in relation to my experience working on productions with youth, I discovered several topics where their ideas and thoughts converged and diverged. I found that five specific areas differed Youth Theatre from Adult Theatre: the expectations of the young performers, the focus on process versus product, a wide variety of skill sets, the educational component, and the use of creative drama in the rehearsal process. I began to wonder if the concern of some of these areas, especially product over process, might hinder young actors' growth, rather than allow them to flourish as an ensemble. Many interviewed stated that they felt like they focused more on process over product during rehearsals, yet continuously their discussions came back to issues of product. I felt this concern of product over process might poorly impact the youth. I divided them into key essential categories, so I might better understand how young actor's experiences might be changed.

1). Expectations

Almost every person interviewed discussed the level of expectations they have when directing a production. When directing paid adults, directors assume each actor will uphold a certain level of decorum and professionalism as stated by their contract. They expect the actors to arrive in a timely fashion, stay focused in rehearsals even when not actively participating, maintain a professional standard, follow direction, and not serve as a distraction for those involved. While this type of behavior is contractually agreed upon

with paid professional actors, young people often have no form of contract binding them to behave in a certain manner. Usually, the director sets the tone for the type of attitude expected in the rehearsal and in the production process. Most of those interviewed stated the importance of setting a high level of expectations from the very beginning, so the young people can rise to these professional standards. These standards often mirror those set for adults. Johnson stated “I don’t treat the young people any differently than I treat professional actors as far as what you expect out of them. Their level of professionalism you want from them and their commitment to the art and the craft of what they’re doing” (Johnson).

Many interviewees noted that a byproduct of having a high bar for the young actors to strive toward is that they actually push themselves beyond the given level of expectation. A process of pushing and learning occurs where the youth find themselves capable of achieving more than they believed possible. This encourages them to strive even harder to maintain a high level of professionalism. Hitchler supported this idea: “I tend to not make a difference because my expectation level with the young people is that they will be as professional as you would be with thirty-year veterans of the theatre. I would expect that they would all live up to that same level of expectation. My sense is typically that if you raise that level up, and have that high expectation the youth will rise to those expectations, so don’t make the bar low, make the bar high” (Hitchler). Cadwallader and Johnson also echoed this belief.

While most tended to agree that high expectations foster a communal growth within the youth, I wonder if the focus of the expectations is accurate. Pushing students to do their

best is certainly important, but what happens when they feel they fail to meet such high goals? In my work with youth, I have witnessed students cry and beat themselves up because they missed a scene changed, messed up a line, or accidentally smiled onstage. However, in my eyes, they still remained faithful ensemble members, dedicated to the production; even moreso because they cared enough to feel badly over what they consider “messing up.” How can we as directors shift our expectations to keep students remaining positive throughout the full experience? Surely, difficult, negative, troubling moments will occur throughout the process, but we might try to change the focus. By placing expectations more on the individual’s value to the ensemble, we can keep the young actors thinking about the process and not product-based mistakes.

Kilpatrick echoes my thoughts with a slightly different perspective. She feels that she often lowers her expectations as to not put pressure on young performers who might not be developmentally ready for the stress of performance. Since she spends a limited amount of time with the young performers, she does not want to push them to the point of disappointment with themselves and their abilities. She remarks, “I don’t know if I’ve found a way to do it except have lower expectations than you would if you had more time” (Kilpatrick). By not raising the expectations too high, she maintains a sense of accomplishment and achievement with the young performers who might otherwise feel they did not fulfill certain goals.

II). Process versus Product

One of the most common debates found in Youth Theatre revolves around the struggle of product versus process. In general, youth often grow in their social skills and acting abilities during the process. The idea being that process can and should be an open environment with activities intended to push the young actors beyond their comfort zone. This process, however, must result in an end product. Traditionally, the goal of any rehearsal process is to create a final performance for an audience. This is a necessary element. With young people, however, I believe that the most important element should be creating a safe space where they can feel comfortable since due to their developmental and emotional levels the risk of harming a young person with unnecessary pressure is higher. This necessity of atmosphere complicates the goal of a finished product at the conclusion of the process. It is a delicate balance that Youth Theatre directors often find themselves treading carefully.

Every person interviewed discussed their viewpoint on this struggle at some point. Youth Theatre is a field about both product and process. Selecting which to give more focus towards often happens unconsciously and merely in choices of technique and methodology. The consideration of focus on product versus process was echoed frequently throughout each interview I conducted. While several interviewees strongly agreed that they focus more strongly on process over product, most stated they still felt the product to be an important element of which to stay cognizant. "Sometimes part of the challenges are sometimes me getting more focused on the product then the process and wanting and knowing that even though we're more focused on the process, there will be a product and

there will be people evaluating the success on the product whether they are consciously doing that or not” (Miller). None of those interviewed, however, affirmed that the product was more important than the process. Only Kilpatrick stated that she felt she completely sacrificed product for the process. She often discussed how her ultimate goal is to have a healthy, safe process for the young actors even if this results in the product losing importance. As mentioned previously, she believes in “the practice of drama for drama’s sake and not about the production itself” (Kilpatrick). Miller agrees with this idea stating “whenever working with young people on plays I try to stress to youth the process is as much about the experience as it is about the product itself... and I feel that’s one of those things that defines what I consider healthy theatre with young people that’s maybe different than other people expect about theatre in general” (Miller).

Is it possible to balance a focus on both process and product, or is it mutually exclusive to only product or only process? Johnson feels he can successfully achieve both: “I know at the end of our productions the students will leave feeling successful about themselves in that they’ve grown, that they’ve learned, that they’ve done these other things. But the audience should see a great story being told or as an interesting story as I could help these kids present” (Johnson). Kilpatrick, however, still believes that it is a matter of sacrifice over balance.

I think my goal is I want everybody to come out of the entire process having felt like they had a good time throughout the entire thing. Sometimes I’ve found when you’re very conscious of that product that the process is not very much fun and kids don’t

have that really positive feeling. I would rather sacrifice a little product and have a great time. I think there are other people who do not believe that, but that is my philosophy - if we've had a really good time, we've learned a lot during the process, it's okay that the product is not Broadway worthy, yet. Because it's never going to be. (Kilpatrick)

I suggest that the focus on product might be lightened to ensure everything is centered on the process or growth of the ensemble. Perhaps, by stripping away some of technical aspects of theatre, the concern could solely rest on the group's experience in rehearsal. This is an idea to be further explored in the creation of my model.

III). Evening Varying Skill Levels

One question I directly asked the interviewees referenced the handling of varying skill levels when working with youth. Often the youth enter the rehearsal process at very different places in their theatrical education due to their age or previous experience. In any given piece of Youth Theatre, the age range might be from three to ten years difference with it sometimes ranging even larger. Previous experience is typically not a requirement to participation in a Youth Theatre production although it may determine the distribution of casting roles. The professionals discussed the various ways they dealt with this imbalance, most described how they make every youth feel successful by letting their particular abilities shine. Johnson mentioned "I feel my job as director is to make them look

good and feel good, so I have to tailor the production to fit who the actors are to some degree. I can come into rehearsal and go “Oh!”.. and this is a great moment where they’ve had cast members who can do triple pirouettes and then we get into it and only two cast members can do it” (Johnson). He adjusts his personal vision of the show to better fit the capabilities of his cast members. This allows for the youth to feel they each have a personal contribution and all are on the same level. Miller also echoed similar sentiments as those heard by Johnson.

I think playing up their strengths, whatever those things are, and applauding them for those strengths is important. The little ones can bring their unique physical skills to exercises and we can capitalize on them as opposed to the older students who may have more skills with language. I think it’s about really, exploiting their strengths and applauding them for what they can do. Rather than comparing them with what others can and cannot do. (Miller)

For most of the directors interviewed the best way to handle varying skill sets in a rehearsal process is to access their skills from the beginning and find ways to help the individual talents of each young performer shine. Most of the interviewees described wanting to find a way to incorporate everyone from the most talented to the disinterested. Kilpatrick mentions that she is most concerned with the least interested young person and focuses on activities that will help them feel comfortable. Hitchler discusses how it is not always a concern of age, but rather a concern of experience level.

I think the challenge is really examining the fact that you are the one who has to go back be not only director, but teacher and acting coach. Typically the young people have not had the experience being in a production, so then really you are starting from the beginning and trying to remember that as an artist. The longer you have been doing it, the more you get a common language that you speak. Some directors have a challenge with how old they are, whereas others have a challenge with their lack of experience level. (Hitchler)

I believe trying to level the skill sets requires a Youth Theatre director to utilize their multiple talents in ways that keep the youth on a level playing field without creating a sense of superiority or inferiority. This challenge is one that I plan to remedy with process-based classes that would be separate from the actual product. By separating the educational, practical, acting classes from the production itself, this allows the focus to be different and the pressure of time to be eased.

IV). Educational Aspect

Given the inherent educational nature of working with young people, this aspect of Youth Theatre often became a topic of discussion during each interview. The professionals had a variety of differing opinions on how they incorporate educational components into their individual work with youth and whether or not it plays a role in the process. Some stated that they naturally play a part without any further overanalyzation, while some, like

Kilpatrick, stated their main focus in theatrical experiences emerges from a didactic place. This is in part due to the fact that she works at private school as a creative drama specialist.

All of my productions in my current and past school have been devised from required curriculum. It all comes from what they're studying in their classroom. And I think that's kind of standard. I think they approach it from what are they studying and how they can enhance the necessary information through Creative Drama. Obviously, my process drama background dictates how much I choose to do that. (Kilpatrick).

The very specific focus that arises from Kilpatrick's placement in a school setting requires her to connect her theatrical decisions with the necessary school curriculum. By teaching in a private school setting, Kilpatrick must adhere to certain standards set by the administration and state learning requirements; this limits how often she creates personally artistically fulfilling work due to stipulations set by her administrators. Working within these limitations however, allows her to focus on the process-based drama techniques she finds exciting. She feels that education is a primary component of her work, perhaps even more so than artistry.

I do place an emphasis on more of the educational aspect. Because often I will look something and say "Oh, man. If only I could do this the way I want to" or "If only I could talk to them and lay it out there the way I want it to be" or "If only I could

direct them the way I would direct adults” we would have this spectacular production. In the environment that I’m in, the education definitely does win out over the artistry. (Kilpatrick)

Kilpatrick, however, is the only of those interviewed to express the sentiment that education creates an imbalance that lessens the importance of the art of creating theatre. Most of the directors discuss a balance of directing the actors to tell the story while still making an educational and joyful experience for the youth. Hitchler feels that the educational aspect of Youth Theatre must be avoided to make for a much constructive artistic experience.

With the exception of having to do some more of the teaching element of it, where you wouldn’t have to do that necessarily with adults who understand the language (and when I say the language, I mean more of theatre lingo kind of language, going back to the basics of theatre, starting with here’s upstage, here’s downstage, you know, the real basics) If you can avoid that, working with young people is probably more rewarding at times then working with adults. (Hitchler)

He hopes to move past the basic theatre techniques quickly to focus on directing the play with the young actors, allowing them to make exciting choices and discoveries. Johnson similarly feels the same, but teaches every performer the dance routines even if they will not necessarily be dancing that part. This ensures that each actor learns something new

with an opportunity to show their abilities and develop techniques foreign to them. Education plays a definite role in the direction of Youth Theatre, but only Kilpatrick describes the large impact it has on the choices she make, every other director feels it is only a byproduct of working youth rather than a decision they consciously make. Education, in my opinion, is a specific and important choice; in my theatre, I make very deliberate choices inside and outside of the rehearsal process.

V). Use of Creative Drama in Rehearsals

As previously mentioned, Kilpatrick uses creative drama techniques often in her rehearsal processes to help the actors make discoveries, feel personal ownership over the production, and keep the focus on the process over the final product. She guides the students in the creation of character and story tableaux to help them find the important storytelling moments and develop their characters more fully. Often she will use these tableaux in the final performance, rather than create a large-scale production with a script and full technical elements. For her creative drama activities allow the experience to be less stressful for the young people by putting a minimal amount of pressure on the final end product that the youth might not be developmentally ready to create. She uses these methods as a replacement for a traditional rehearsal process in order to make the experience healthier and more productive. Kilpatrick differs from the rest of the group who use these activities sparingly as a means to help the young performers make strong character choices and learn to work together as an ensemble. Miller specifically describes

how he uses these techniques in the rehearsal process. “I think with young people a lot of times what we do as exercises or in teaching moments, they know consciously that it’s going to help them in the performance, but that’s not the primary goal as much as them working with other people in good strong ways” (Miller). These exercises play an important role to Miller, but mostly to help the youth develop their skills and personalities. They do not help determine the focus of the production in the same manner that Kilpatrick uses the creative drama. Johnson has a completely different perspective on these methods, feeling that often the focus of these exercises directly opposes the necessary end product in Youth Theatre.

Creative Drama activities are a great tools to figure out who you are have, play, and have fun, but these activities are different for what I focus on when directing a production. Putting on a production, you have an end goal. You have an end goal that is more than just an internal thing. It’s an internal and external thing. It’s really important for kids to learn how to strive for those external things while fulfilling that internal thing as well. (Johnson)

Johnson finds that often these activities make the rehearsals too process-orientated and helps very little toward the final product creation. He feels that while they may help the young performers become more playful in their work and discover themselves strongly as human beings, they do nothing to help toward the final performance. He stresses the importance between differentiating between Youth Theatre and Creative Drama by stating

that there is a time and place for both of these things although it is not always mutually exclusive. None the others interviewed discussed using these exercises as extensively, although from the description of their techniques and rehearsal approach, it is evident that these activities play some significant part. Most fall under the same category as Miller, they feel that by using these methods they help assist the young performers in the discovery of their characters and their personal selves.

I believe Creative Drama can serve as a tool with the very young to help them develop ensemble and theatrical exploration without the need of a scripted final product. The stress of using a script along with memorizing lines requires tools that many youth are not developmentally equipped to handle. I feel Creative Drama has tremendous placement in the Youth Theatre world; it allows for the creation of productions that by nature remain process-focused. In my model, Creative Drama plays a strong role in the structure of the programming.

VI). Difference Between Directing with Adults and Youth

One of the biggest topics that I anticipated would be discussed was the difference between working with adults versus youth. Since my thesis question first arose from this differentiation, I hoped to discover what exactly made the two experiences separate from one another. Many of the interviewees discussed specific ways working with the two age groups differs. Adams finds that it is merely a difference in capabilities and availability of skills.

There's a pretty big learning curve lots of times where the young people simply don't have the skills, whether that's in simple repetitions or whether technically they don't have the equipment to be able to support filling a house. Sometimes there's endurance, issues of endurance. (Adams)

She stills attempts to direct them in the same manner, but often finds that she must adjust for the technical differences. Johnson feels that his job as a director remains the same whether working with youth or adults, but the intent of the process changes when working in Youth Theatre.

I think my job as director is first and foremost to tell the story. That's why we're there to see people tell a story. Now, when you're telling it with students you're doing everything you can to make those students look good, feel good about themselves telling the story to the audience. So, that includes learning basic techniques – being loud enough, being clear enough. The emotions. All of those things and as well as getting them to understand they are an artist and they are sharing something with the audience. (Johnson)

Johnson feels the biggest difference between directing adults and directing youth is the need to help them feel positive and confident about themselves in their performance. For him, a big difference between the two comes from assisting the young performers in an

understanding of what the role of an artist necessitates; sharing oneself and a story with an audience in a manner that can be heard, understood, and felt clearly. Miller's belief is similar to Johnson's in that his focus is on helping them find themselves as artists.

Finding their way into the story is really important, what they really like, and what is satisfying to them about creating the characters. There's a lot of real ensemble moments, moments of teaching I think in the rehearsal process that leads to a sharing out of the process in the form of the performance, but there's a lot of those formal teaching moments of characterization and interaction between each other, but also lots of teachable moments for individuals versus what I may not do in a professional situation where folks have had training. (Miller)

These teaching moments occur less frequently when working with a group of adults. Miller, as a director, is less likely to capitalize on these available teaching moments as an opportunity to guide the young performers to a realization of self and character. When working with adults, Miller still helps them find and tell the story, but in a different manner than he does with youth. The story with both gentlemen still has utmost importance given that they remember the importance of the end product. They use these teachable opportunities without letting them get in the way of focusing on the need for an end result. Kilpatrick has a different view on this difference; for her, it is more about the lack of balance personally when directing a show with youth. She finds that often she can not be

happy with the final product of a show and give the young performers the best experience possible, if she gets too focused on the product then process falters and conversely as well.

I can think about times when I felt really artistically happy with the shows and those probably weren't the best experiences for the kids. When I think about the best experiences for the kids, those weren't always the best shows. And I think that you find that a lot. I think that in my experience you have to weigh more heavily in one side or the other (of good experience for the kids versus strongly artistic).

(Kilpatrick)

Kilpatrick concerns herself less with creating a healthy, stable rehearsal environment when working with adults, so she can focus more on the creation of a final production for performance. She does not have to spend time worrying about the ego of the actors or showcasing their skills evenly like she does when working with youth. This allows her more freedom to make theatre she finds artistically fulfilling.

Overall, all of the interviewees felt that while themselves as director remained the same throughout the process, it is those involved that bring the changes in process. The directors adjust and adapt given the situation, in this adaptation come a shift in methodology and a focus on teaching moments and support of the young ego. They all are cognizant of the changes that occur and aware the necessities to provide a successful experience for the youth, so they make these changes accordingly. As a director, they are still striving to make the actors, the audience, and themselves happy. I now feel, however,

that this is the single biggest mistake made when directing Youth Theatre. The focus is not in the right place. It is absolutely necessary to be a different director when directing Youth Theatre, in order to ensure that the youth are happy and growing throughout their experience.

In my next chapter, I propose the beginning of a new form of Youth Theatre, one focused honestly on process, with most theatrical elements eliminated and ensemble-building as the ultimate goal.

CHAPTER FOUR: A WORKABLE MODEL

From the basic issues I found after interviewing the various professionals, I began to formulate for how I believe Youth Theatre might be done in a way that creates a successful, comfortable environment for the kids. In July 2011, I had an opportunity to incorporate these ideas into a two-week production camp I did with the Orlando Repertory Theatre in Florida. The production was *Eat: It's Not About Food* by Linda Daughtery. Part of the initial stipulations of the camp states that it utilizes minimal production elements in order to give focus on the acting, relationship building, and ensemble development. As the process started, I found myself feeling less and less stress toward what the props would be, how the lights would look, and if we would incorporate any sound. Even when the young actors asked, I simply told them that we were choosing to focus on them as people rather than on other production technical needs. I invited them to embrace this opportunity to focus on supporting one another with their listening abilities and acting skills rather than relying on things usually considered “necessary” for a production. Although I did not make this choice deliberately, I began to find immense freedom in my work with the youth because those elements simply held little importance. I spent more time on moment-to-moment work in each scene. I allowed for extensive time at the beginning of each rehearsal for all of us to just talk about our lives with one another. I created a variety of different activities that fostered the growth of the ensemble independently without my involvement. I would take an hour to discuss a scene before it got on its feet. I was truly able to develop true listening skills within the actors. They began to realize that in order to be successful actors they had

to learn to listen to one another not only onstage, but offstage as well. The rehearsal process truly stayed a process and not a sprint for the finish line.

Through this focus on process over product, I began to appreciate the beauty of discomfort within a safe environment with youth. I reflected on the specific ways in which I created this supportive community in which the young actors felt the freedom to cry, fail, and take gigantic leaps. I knew the actors would never feel safe if they did not trust the people they worked beside. Every morning I developed a routine that the actors expected, allowing them to share themselves as human beings with my assistant director, the ensemble and me. I presented them with two questions: one about what they did the night before and the other a creative question such as, "If you could go anywhere in the world right now, where would you go and what would you do?" By asking them about their evening I was able to not only gauge what mood they might be in, but also express to them how much I truly cared about their personal lives. This also fostered relationships within the group by guiding the youth toward discovering their commonalities and connection with one another. This began to warm up their listening skills as we sat around the circle simply having a chat and telling each other personal things. Subliminally, they were learning how to listen to each other offstage and onstage without realizing the intention of this activity. These morning conversations let the ensemble know that I did not only care about creating a "perfect performance," but also cared about their happiness and general well-being. Following these chats, I stepped away from the group as they did a speed through of the show, completely out of character, and completely on their own. This provided them with the opportunity to function as a unit without my input, helped them

learn their lines, and discover the ebb and flow of the show itself. We would then begin warm ups; a series of physical stretches, traditional vocal exercises combined with some silly tongue twisters, and a few fun games. My favorite of these games is “Huh!” Meghann Henry at the Coterie Theatre introduced me to this game when I assistant directed with her during the summer of 2011. It is a simple activity that follows the format of several theatrical games. The students stand in a circle. One person points to another person using both hands, eye contact, and saying loudly “Huh!” The person receiving the “Huh” throws his/her hands up saying “Huh” while the two people to his/her left and right brings their hands in toward that person saying “Huh,” as well. That person then passes the “Huh” onto someone else and it continues around the circle as such. Eventually, people begin to get eliminated and the speed increases as does the laughter and silliness. This is an excellent activity because it warms up the actors physically, vocally, and mentally, and develops their listening skills. They must stay hyper-aware of their surroundings in order to do well in the game. In addition, I played the “Color Game” with them each morning. I brought out my list of crazy crayon colors such as, purple mountain’s majesty, and whispered one in the ear of the person next to me. Their goal was simply to whisper the color around the circle until it returned to me – exactly the same. Then I began to whisper a color in the other direction, until at least six crayon colors were sent around the circle both clockwise and counter clockwise. Through this morning routine, I developed the safe environment, fostered a sense of community and trust, and exercised their invaluable listening skills.

As the rehearsal process continued, I saw the great benefit created from this lengthy morning tradition. The actors felt incredibly comfortable with one another; as if they had

known each other longer than the short two weeks we spent together, allowing them to open up together freely. The play “Eat: It’s Not About the Food,” delves into issues of body image, eating disorders, and parental/media’s influence on kids’ view of their weight. In order to approach these topics sensitively, I knew the importance of having in-depth discussions before we jumped into scene-work. As we read through scenes and put the actors on their feet, I allowed them to ask questions that I answered openly and honestly coming from personal experience and extensive research. Often tears occurred, both on my part and the actors, but it was cleansing rather than scary, allowing everyone to know that sadness, happiness, and discomfort were not only safe in this environment, but welcomed and understood. As we dug deeper into working on the intricacies of each scene, I pushed the young actors further and further, challenging them to share themselves onstage without fear and to truly listen and react to one another. I saw brilliant discoveries within each actor involved in the process. While working on a scene between a husband and wife, I challenged them to honestly look at one another and achieve their objectives. When the wife broke down emotionally and unexpectedly, the actor playing the husband reacted immediately on instinct rushing over to her and grabbing her hands. Afterward, he apologized for not performing the blocking I had given him. I, laughing with tears in my eyes, explained to him that truly trusting his instincts held more importance than any blocking I gave him. These discoveries occurred again and again as I pushed the actors to think about their emotional life, create objectives and tactics, and to listen to each other onstage. The process was difficult, strenuous, and exhausting, but each day the actors left feeling accomplished, fulfilled, and most importantly, safe.

At the last dress rehearsal, I started taking the extensive amount of notes as I had done during the previous technical rehearsal. Within the first five minutes, I quickly stopped. I no longer cared about pushing them to making the production “perfect,” I simply wanted to enjoy watching their unique talents and abilities unfold onstage. In the end, the final production exhibited tremendous effort on the part of each actor. While many of the activities we did and actions we took directly affected the final product, my personal focus stayed on the youth and their experience throughout the two weeks. This allowed me to remain calm in the knowledge that despite the performance, the young actors felt like they accomplished something. I had seen their terrific acting work throughout the rehearsal process. At the talk back following the final performance, I got the opportunity to talk to the ensemble. I thanked them for dedicating themselves to each other and for having such beautiful, intelligent souls that could so wholeheartedly trust their instincts. As we all cried together, I cared very little about how the final product changed the lives of the audience because I knew that we all had been changed as individuals.

This process will be the basis for how I run my Youth Theatre. While it may not be the popular choice, I hope that once parents see the growth made in their youth, they will become more and more accustomed to the idea of “productions” with less traditional production values. The goal of my theatre will be to create personal character development in youth as they learn to build together as an ensemble with the purpose of creating deconstructed theatrical works. Although this theatre company exists purely in a hypothetical realm, I intend to use the structure developed as a basis for the Youth Theatre I plan to launch this spring in Burlington, Vermont. For the purposes of ease throughout

this chapter, the name given to the company will be “Fire and Light Youth Ensemble,” otherwise referred to FLYE. Below I discuss four major elements of the theatre to give insight into the programming structure: productions, rehearsal process, development classes, and financial needs.

I). Productions

During the summer, the directors and teaching artists at FLYE will put their main focus and efforts into eight weeks of theatre work culminating in four two-week productions that offers opportunities for the full spectrum of age groups. Rather than try to offer numerous classes or highly competitive, large-scale musicals, our primary goal will be to give each ensemble the time, attention, and effort they deserve. Using the theatrical process as a tool to create personal change, FLYE’s mission will be to develop strong individuals who garner confidence from working in tandem within a community and from spending time building skills. By creating trust within the ensemble, the actors will learn that great growth and fulfillment comes from the discomfort of working hard in a safe environment. The process I created during “Eat: It’s Not About the Food,” will continue into each production camp at FLYE. Every production will, as previously mentioned, feature minimal technical elements other than simple props, costumes brought from home, basic acting blocks, and lighting that makes the actors easily seen. See Appendix B for further examples of specific activities used to foster listening, ensemble, imagination, and collaboration in these camps. The four sections are divided as such:

Kindergarten through Second Grade:

Utilizing devising and Creative Drama techniques, this production camp will take a common story or topic, such as Little Red Riding Hood or mythological creatures, and develop it into an original, semi-structured script. Movement and character creation will be the focus of the process. For example, the students would pretend to be the character of Peter Rabbit with the objective of getting through the garden, stealing vegetables, then escaping without being caught. The teaching artist would guide the students in creating a map for how to get through the garden with specific obstacles that they must overcome, such as a scarecrow, tall fences, or poison ivy. After drawing this map on a large piece of paper with specific details, the teaching artist would lead the students through the physicalization of these events. They would become the character both physically and vocally, sneak into the garden, go through all the challenges to achieve their goal, then figure out a way to exit the garden successfully. After the completing this, the teaching artist and students would discuss how this might turn into an actual script by discussing which action and dialogue could be kept. Students will meet with two teaching artists for three hours on Monday through Friday with a final performance on the Saturday following the last Friday meeting. When interviewed, Kilpatrick expressed concerns creating theatrical productions that were beyond the developmental understand of the youth involved. By

giving an initial script structure and allowing creative play to be the focus of rehearsals, the hope is to not go beyond their intellectual abilities, thus creating an environment more conducive to freedom of thought and enjoyment.

Third through Sixth Grade:

The programming for this age group will run similarly to that of the kindergarten through second grade section. The rehearsal process will last over a period of two weeks with each class meeting for four hours a day and the performance occurring on the last Saturday. Once again, emphasis will be placed on generating the script improvisationally through Creative Drama techniques, however, no initial script structure will be used. The responsibility for creation of the entire production will rest on the young actors working collaboratively in conjunction with two teaching artists. By allowing them to develop the final sharing on their own, students will hopefully cultivate a sense of citizenship within an ensemble and feel liberated to share their ideas openly.

Seventh through Ninth Grade:

Once a student moves to this section of the production hierarchy, focus will shift to working on a previously written script with longer rehearsal time than experienced in the past. Each rehearsal meets for five hours each day,

keeping the same calendar as the other sections, with Monday through Friday rehearsals and the final performance on that last Saturday. With the addition of a script, it might initially be assumed that an increase in production will occur, however, the simplicity remains. Although the scripts may suggest extensive technical elements, focus will be given on working with the young actors to develop creative solutions to these dilemmas. Emphasis will be placed on specific scene work, supporting one another as a collaborative ensemble, and personal character development and growth. These scripts may fall more on the lighter side, allowing for the oldest section to provide a unique opportunity for the youth to delve into a serious theatrical work in a way not previously experienced.

Tenth through Twelfth Grade:

This final section will continue the work begun in the previous tier of production, but more intensively. Students will meet for an extra hour each day, providing necessary time needed to tackle the difficult issues found in the scripts chosen. In this section, the directors at FLYE will chose a script will issues relevant to the students' lives. Having an extra hour will offer more time for creating a positive, safe environment and allow for in-depth conversation to occur without a fear of wasting time or losing needed energy. The same elements of ensemble and personal development will continue to be the focus as emphasized in the previous three sections.

II). Rehearsal Process

The unique rehearsal process will serve as the strongest paradigm of the ideology and mission statement of Fire and Light Youth Ensemble. While our small production values already imply the process-focused nature of the theatre, parents and young actors will witness the capability of growth within an atypical creative structure. From the first moment actors enter the theatre, they will realize that something is uncommon from their previous experiences. Rather than require monologues and cold readings from the youth for placement in roles, students will work collaboratively to direct themselves in short, improvisational scenes for sharing with the class. By removing the focus on the acting abilities of the youth and allowing them to playfully create their own theatrical pieces, they will be able to learn how to work together as an ensemble while still enjoying themselves in a creatively free environment. Initially this may seem to hinder the directors' ability to cast the show successfully, however, this structure allows them to still learn about their acting abilities, but without putting the young people on the spot or under tremendous pressure. This change removes some of the competition and makes the rehearsal process more enjoyable. As well, the young ensemble will read the script by choosing random roles from a hat before the casting of the show is announced. This first reading gives the actors an opportunity to see the script more globally rather than focusing only their specific part. Casting then becomes a fun party with applause and excitement followed by a few fun, interactive, ensemble-building theatre games.

Once the rehearsal process has begun, the directors will spend extensive amount of time at the beginning of each meeting discussing daily life with the actors and performing a fun series of warm ups and games. Through this morning routine, the youth feels valued for themselves as human beings and enjoy spending time together as a collaborative team before the necessary individualizing needed for the blocking and moment-to-moment work. Two directors will split time amongst the actors, so there is very little downtime. While actors are not engaged onstage, they work with another director or one another to develop character and specify moments. No lengthy period of time will pass without all of the actors being engaged in a conversation about what is happening onstage or their personal experiences. Endless discussions about issues found in the script and extensive moment-to-moment work in each monologue and scene will not be shied away from due to time constraints rather they will be encouraged and given the necessary time for full completion. Ideas from the young actors will not only be strongly considered, by often incorporated and attempted during rehearsals; the environment must foster a sense of creative freedom and the importance of the ensemble.

The day before the performance of the show, only absolutely necessary props will be included into each run thru, with an emphasis given to the actors on supporting one another backstage and assisting each other in entrances, exits, and any prop confusion. The goal is for the youth to never feel any pressure or need to make it perfect; it is acceptable and understandable for them to make mistakes; however, they must remain focused on living their character's life truthfully onstage and listening to their fellow actors. The final rehearsal should end with some form of gleeful event either playing everyone's favorite

game, throwing some sort of dance party, or bringing in food for sharing with the cast. The whole process should be as joyful as possible.

III). Development Classes

Rather than create productions in the winter and spring, FLYE will choose to offer an intensive of core classes that will rotate throughout the year. While students may not be able to participate in each class available, teachers will place emphasis on the youth using the information obtained from these workshops to help their fellow ensemble members during the summer productions. Each session will run for three hours and last eight weeks with meetings either after school during the week or on Saturday mornings. Two sessions will be offered for third-eighth grade and ninth-twelfth grade. The first four weeks will be dedicated to a certain topic with the last four weeks changing focus to a different, more in-depth exploration. Examples of class pairings are: basic acting terminology/scene study, improvisation for devising/script writing, collaboration/ensemble building, physical movement/musical freedom, and character building/tactics, objective, and inner life. By putting these classes at a different time, separate from the rehearsal process, this allows the teaching artist time to serve as purely a teaching artist developing basic acting skills in the actors without trying to balance the role of director as well. This format helps to remedy the difficulties found with education's role in Youth Theatre; education no longer hinders the creative process and visa versa, both topics exist organically on their own regard. Many professionals noted that struggling with

this time balance inhibited their ability to focus on the actors and process in rehearsals, as well, this format also assists in dealing with the varying skill sets often seen amongst youth actors.

Short sample descriptions for each class will read as such:

Basic Acting Terminology/Scene Study: Students receive all of their basic terminology in this focused study on the skills needed to have a successful ease of conversation with directors. Actors spend the first four weeks learning basic acting techniques such as tactic, objective, listening skills, and marking beat changes. The final four weeks focus on utilizing these newly acquired tools directly in process through an in-depth scene study featuring two actors working hands on with a director.

Improvisation for Devising/Script Writing: Improvisation techniques can serve as a helpful tool for actors in both the script development process and during rehearsals. This class focuses on taking basic improvisation rules and games then applying them for use in devising sessions meant to generate ideas for scripts. The first four weeks focus on developing these basic techniques with the final half offering students the opportunity to put their talents to the test in the creation of a short, one-act script.

Collaboration/Ensemble Building: Collaboration is an important skill for all actors to use both during the creative process; this ability to work as an

ensemble serves as a helpful tool in every aspect of both theatre and day-to-day life. From this class, students begin to sharpen their abilities to connect with one another and work successfully as a group by maintaining a sense of individuality while still remaining cognizant to the ensemble's needs.

Physical Movement/Musical Freedom: Comfort in one's body often is a difficult concept for young actors to master leaving them to feel awkward and unsure of what to do with themselves on stage. This class uses the tools of music, dance techniques, and Anne Bogart's Viewpoints to help youth become less aware of their physical being and more able to move with freedom throughout the stage. This class also incorporates musical improvisation to help students cultivate these important skills for the rehearsal process and beyond, as well.

Character Building/Tactics, Objective, and Inner Life: A huge struggle for any actor comes from learning how to let go of one's self and submerge into the depths of a character. This class offers students the basic techniques of character development followed by a further exploration into the motivations behind a character's tactics and objectives rooted in a colorful inner life. Students mature in their ability to create strong, substantial characters who live truthfully onstage and react to situations with a natural ease.

IV). Financial Needs

The financial necessities of the theatre will be very minimal, as long as a simple space can be accrued for performance, classes, and the jam sessions, the rest of FLYE's needs require very little funding to sustain. With a small, uncomplicated room painted in the black, the hope will be to create a transformative area that can be reorganized into different theatrical stages, depending on the need of each production. Once initial seed money is acquired through local organizations, the theatre should be unproblematic to support with donations, grants, and a low cost tuition payment from the parents for each production and class. We also will charge a nominal payment for tickets to each performance. By paring down the traditional, lavish production elements, there is less need to pay a troupe of designers, buy and build extensive sets and costumes, and pay for the expensive electricity needed to run tremendous lights and sound. Utilizing nothing more than six acting blocks and an ensemble of amazing actors, I truly believe FLYE can transform the manner in which professionals approach Youth Theatre.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

After spending an extensive amount of time discussing Youth Theatre with fellow professionals, I begin to reconsider my personal methodology and develop a new theory for how I direct young people. I now fully understand and realize the ambiguous nature of Youth Theatre; similarly to traditional theatre, every show requires a unique perspective that differs dependent on the actors and the environment. The answer to my question that began this thesis project was not transparent nor was it direct. The answer is as ambiguous as the question itself without a clear yes or no answer exists; it is a “yes, but...” or a “no, however...” Those interviewed gave a variety of responses when asked this question: most said that they do take a different approach when directing youth, but they utilize similar methods and focus more on creating a healthy environment for the young people to shine and make new discoveries about themselves and their art. While their responses made me think about Youth Theatre in more complex manner than I previously had, I begin to realize that what they thought was not the real answer I needed. Prior to the beginning of my research, I could not give a complex response to my own question beyond a simple yes; I could not justify my own answer. The most important answer I discovered is my own substantial argument backed by personal practice and experience and grounded in well-developed methodology and beliefs. I now know how I would answer the question; an answer greatly inspired by those with whom I had the great pleasure of interviewing.

Do you believe it necessary to take a different approach when directing youth? I believe it is absolutely necessary to take a different approach when directing youth. Although I employ many of the same techniques to help develop character, establish relationship, and flourish the show artistically, the process is essentially more important to me than the product, so naturally my approach must shift. I still want a final product of which the young actors, their families and friends, and the administrators can be proud, but this final product will never fully come to fruition if I do not offer them the necessary tools and techniques to help make it happen. Young people are at a different place than adult actors developmentally, emotionally, and socially. They have the capability to make brave, bold choices and take insurmountable risks, but they also have fragile egos and delicate souls. Also, in a basic sense, young people simply do not have the training of an actor who has worked professionally and educationally for a certain amount of years. They need a director and educator to create an environment where they feel safe to make the choices they are tremendously capable of making. They need someone to help them find a unique manner to tell the story and develop in-depth, lively characters. They need a director just like every other actor in any production needs a director, but they need a director who will focus on make the process as enjoyable, strenuous, and healthy as possible for them. A director who will understand how to the experience exactly what they had hoped and wanted it to be; a director who will know that sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice a perfectly polished product for an amazing experience for those involved. While having both is extremely possible, a Youth Theatre director differs from a director of adult theatre because they know when to make the sacrifice and when they can push harder. My

methodology working with adults and youth may be similar, but my focus shifts when working with young actors rather than concern myself only with product, I concern myself with the process and try to keep that as the important thing I converge on every rehearsal. I know that my success is not determined by the quality of the final product performed, but by the happiness and growth of the young people involved.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Abigail Adams

Megan: If you could, just start by giving me your name and your position at your theatre and telling me a little about your theatre's history and what you do

.

Abigail: My name is Abigail Adams. I am the artistic director of People's Light Theatre which is a regional theatre outside of Philadelphia. Our budget is about \$5.3 million. We do a wide range of work: contemporary, new, classic and produce about 7 or 8 productions a year. We do extraordinary work with young people year-round. This ranges from projects that involve large numbers of kids coming in to see our work and a large number of projects where the young people are the theatre makers.

Megan: And you've directed productions with all youth before?

Abigail: Yeah. We sort of specialize in productions that mix young people with professional artists.

Megan: Just to start with, what do you feel are the particular joys of directing youth?

Abigail: My particular area of interest is doing professional productions that have young people in them as well as professional artists. I like the mix because I think that everybody learns. I'm as interested in what happens to the adults as I am in what happens to the

young people. There is a kind of shared ownership that I find very interesting that kids and adults don't usually get to participate in. When you're on stage, the child can't save the adult and the adult can't save the child. Everybody has genuinely equal responsibility. Also, when you have kids in the room there's a kind of gauntlet thrown down with everybody bringing their best selves to the experience.

Megan: What do you feel are the challenges of doing this, as well?

Abigail: There's a pretty big learning curve lots of times where the young people simply don't have the skills, whether that's in simple repetitions or whether technically they don't have the equipment to be able to support filling a house. Sometimes there's endurance, issues of endurance. I think that's it.

Megan: Can you talk to me a little bit about your approach to directing a production with both youth and adults?

Abigail: It's not any different. I don't make any kind of differentiation. I do a lot of work on relationships--A lot of storytelling exercises that thickens the given circumstances. I don't let anybody work with a book in hand, ever. And that's the same for adults and young people. So, everybody has to everything memorized before they get up on the floor. And one of my reasons for that with young people, is that there's a huge difference between reading and experiencing and often the kids are not very good readers and it completely

wrecks their impulses. So, we tend to keep reading out of it. I often work with kids very far in advance of the formal rehearsals. We tend to do five week rehearsals. So, frequently, I will start working six months in advance with young people establishing repertoire and learning the script together. So, when they get into the room, they really are equal partners.

Megan: What do you feel are the trends going on with work with youth in theatrical productions?

Abigail: I don't really know. A lot of theatres don't really work with youth and professional artists. They have only adults play children. I guess that's kind of a trend, but it's not like it hasn't been any different. We do not cast adults in the roles of children. So, that's one thing. I think it's very hard right now to get audiences to come to new work for young people, which is why there's so much activity in doing adaptations, because you simply can't get audiences to come to something they haven't heard about. And there's such an emphasis in schools in tying work to curriculum and so forth, that's another reason for so much interest going into adaptation of novels.

Megan: I'm curious, why do you choose age appropriate casting over casting adults as young people?

Abigail: I think it's more truthful. And I love working kids and adults together. I like what that does to the root, to the story. It's a real core value of this theatre. It's the way we've often developed an ensemble, both in present time and for the future. The whole idea of

“company” needs to be modeled and we have found that you need to do that when people are children. We have an awful lot of people that come back and we have a number of people right now who are teaching in their early 20s that started here when they were 7 and 8.

Megan: What advice would you give to those directing youth?

Abigail: The rigor of the art is the best thing that you can give the kids, and that is really what they respond to--which is mastery. This is why we're not a school, we're a professional theatre. Even our “teaching” or even the term “education” is really all rooted in artistic practice, not in an educational vocabulary, and that's what we can bring to the party. That's not to say that schools or educational institutions aren't incredibly useful. They are, but for us it's the actual art form that's really important. For directors, I want artists, and again, we just don't differentiate [between them].

Megan: Right. It's just all in the same.

Abigail: So, our directors direct... three plays out of our season for family audiences and we don't make any differentiation between budgets or personnel, it's all the same level.

Megan: Are there any experiences that you would like to reflect upon?

Abigail: Not without a particular jumping off point.

Megan: It's a tricky question, I'm just curious if there are any experiences you have working with youth that have moved you or touched you or taught you something.

Abigail: There are hundreds, because by now we have done so much. We had a very interesting program over a long period of time which we still have actually, but not as intensively, called New Voices, which was working with a group of at-risk kids from the city of Chester, primarily African-American. And we started working with them when they were 11 and continued working with them until they graduated from high school. And they are now 32, and four of them are sending their children to our classes. So, there's a really interesting kind of legacy that's something we never thought of 20 years ago. Part of what we are doing is creating engaged parents.

Megan: Is there anything else you would like to share or say to conclude this interview?

Abigail: No. I think that's enough.

David A. Miller

David: I started really as an actor, but always was teaching kids. While in undergrad, I applied for a summer job. I saw a teaching initiative to teach 8-11 year olds visual arts and

theatre, which are both my passions. It presented itself to be as something you could do as a job. Ever since then I started pursuing it. I realized two things I really love: being an artist and being a teacher of young people. I combined those, so I sought internships at Seattle Children's Theatre and the Kennedy Center working with the young. I started working at SCT for several years as the director of outreach there. I've had many jobs ever since in various capacities of working with young people.

Megan: My first question, how would you define youth theatre--I mean directing all youth in non-professional productions with mostly youth, or theatre by youth?

David: I'm not sure how define it.

Megan: I'm just curious. When you think of youth theatre, what comes to mind? How would you describe it to someone who is asking you about it?

David: I think there's not actually a definition. Youth theatre can mean so many things. I usually try to tell them about the work I do and I especially try to define for folks the difference between creative drama and theatre making. How much those overlap. For me, whenever working with young people on plays, trying to stress to youth the process is as much about the experience as it is about the product itself. I feel that's one of those things that defines what I consider healthy theatre with young people that's maybe different than

what other people expect about theatre in general. I'm basically clarifying what's the difference between professional theatre and what theatre with youth can be.

Megan: How would you approach a rehearsal process given this process oriented mindset?

David: Well, I think finding certainly.. I guess this is overlapped with what I expect of good collaborative theatre in general. Finding the youths' way into the story is really important, it's what they really like, and what is satisfying to them in creating the characters. There's a lot of real ensemble moments, moments of teaching I think in the rehearsal process that leads to a sharing out of the process in the form of the performance, but there's a lot of those formal teaching moments of characterization and interaction between each other, but also lots of teachable moments for individuals versus what I may not do in a professional situation where folks have had training. They don't actually need training, but they need direction related to the production or to their characters.

Megan: How does that differ from how you would approach a production with adults?

David: Usually the professionals I work with don't really need teaching. They have training behind them and their goal and our collective goal is to create a really incredible performance which has a lot of process to do with it too, but with the young people it's not about creating a polished product as much as having a really healthy experience. Both those things happen with a professional production, hopefully, they'll end up having a healthy experience as well, but we all have our eye on how this going to help us in the

performance. I think with young people a lot of times what we do as exercises or in teaching moments, they know consciously that it's going to help them in the performance, but that's not the primarily goal as much as working with other people in good strong ways.

Megan: When you're in a rehearsal process with youth, how do you deal with kids of varying skill levels while still maintaining a healthy, productive environment?

David: Well, I play up their strengths, whatever those things are, and applaud them for those strengths. As opposed to the older students who may have more skill with language, the young ones may be more physical and able to engage themselves in that way. I think it's about really, exploiting their strengths and applauding them for what they can do rather than comparing them with what other students can and cannot do.

Megan: What is the biggest thing you expect from the young actors when working with them in the production?

David: Their listening and their generosity with other actors is what I really stress with them about the entire nature of collaboration. For me, this has to be at the forefront of everything we do. I think that's what theatre ultimately can do for any young person, regardless of whether they ever do theatre again, is that ability to truly listen to another person onstage or off and collaborate with them to come up with the best possible creative solution to a problem.

Megan: Have you worked with adults and young people together before in productions?

David: Yes. I have done a few productions where it's a mix. The adaptation of Jungle Book I did was one of those productions. One company I work with in New York does a production every year where it's half young people and half professional adults.

Megan: How would you say that is different?

David: One thing is we give time just to work with the young people, so that when we're in the rehearsal process itself everybody is being treated fairly in the same way. The biggest challenge is cultivating an attitude with the adults to make sure they're treating the young actors respectfully with an expectation of them being young professional colleagues. We would have a weekly class session to work with specific things of characterization and professional etiquette, so they can act that way during rehearsal.

Megan: So, the educational aspect doesn't change?

David: Yeah. I think it's still education, but giving them a chance to apply their education because then when they're in rehearsal with adults, especially after the first week or two of rehearsal, they're expected to be actors in the production and all that comes with it.

Megan: So, how do you feel that directing a production with youth is different from, say, an acting class with youth?

David: I think it's definitely the professional etiquette and skills which is definitely about collaboration, but I think it's just a different kind of collaboration. A lot of times in an acting class, there's a sort of quality of everyone striving for the same thing. In a professional theatre setting, the collaboration goes beyond fellow actors, and extends to the director and the designers and the audience themselves and then everybody has a role. Combining different abilities from students and their appreciation of each other's abilities, and also their appreciation of someone like a lighting designer is very specific and unique to the process. Young people realize that it is important to collaborate with them as well.

Megan: How do you promote collaboration in the rehearsal process? What do you do to help build this collaborative spirit?

David: Certainly, there are exercises that are all about that. There's overlapping with acting classes and exercises that build ensemble. Also, making sure that I'm saying yes as a collaborator and yes to ideas from everybody involved and that I'm demonstrating that collaborative spirit with everybody is key.

Megan: What for you personally are the challenges and joys of directing youth?

David: Sometimes part of the challenge is not concentrating more on the product than the process and wanting and knowing that even though we should be more focused on the

process, there will be a product and there will be people evaluating the success on the product whether they are consciously doing that or not. I think sometimes that I get trapped with trying to rush things along because I get focused on the product and the joys are when young people just come up with the best possible idea in the room.. As a collaborator, the five year old or the six year old or the ten year old or the twelve year old come up with the best idea in the room and its from their young creative mind. I think that's awesome.

Megan: What would you say motivates and drives you to continue doing this work?

David: Ultimately, I can't think of anything I'd rather be doing, like I have another choice in some ways. I don't know why I would do anything else. The more positive version of that is there's just always phenomenal things that happen during the rehearsal process that give me such joy and surprise. I feel comforted that being human is such a fascinating thing and that we're such weird creatures and other people feel that way too. Whether it's seven year olds that are like "yeah, this guy's a weird character and I like playing him," or it's an adult who's a serial killer. We're weird creatures and that, we can all agree on, that is fun.

Richard Hitchler

Richard: Stepping Stone Theatre for Youth Development was started in 1987. Its mission is

to use theatre to build self esteem, process, and a sense of community. I became the artistic director in 1997. We have grown from two in-school residencies in the very beginning to a theatre that produces six mainstage shows a year. We have several, about fifty in-school residencies per year, we do after school programming and classes, and summer day camps. We serve about 70,000 people a year now.

Megan: What experience do you have directing youth?

Richard: I have been directing youth since being here full time and prior to that I had worked in various theatres in their education programming working with young people during that time.

Megan: What exactly do you find challenging about directing youth?

Richard: I think the challenge is really examining the fact that you are the one who has to go back to be not only director, but teacher and coach and that idea. Typically, the young people have not had the experience of being in a production, so then really you are starting from the beginning and trying to remember that as an artist. The longer you have been doing it the more you get a common language that you speak, but then when you are looking at some of the people it's not really a challenge with the age, what it is is a challenge with the experience level that most have. The challenge becomes really trying to re-instill those ideas while teaching them the basics of theatre.

Megan: What do you feel are the particular joys that come with directing youth?

Richard: The fact that the youth tend to be fearless and much less resistant to being goofy than adults would tend to do. The ability to just go out and take on very broad characters with young people, they have no problem doing that. There's no wall that prevents them from jumping forth and being as out as there as can be.

Megan: How do you feel that these challenges and joys make how you approach directing productions with youth different from directing productions with adults?

Richard: Well, I tend to not do that. I tend to not make a difference because my expectation level with the young people is that they will be as professional as you would be with thirty-year veterans of the theatre. I would expect that they would all live up to that same level of expectation. My sense is typically that if you raise that level up and have that high expectation, the youth will rise to those expectations, so don't make the bar low, make the bar high. I have not been disappointed in that. I have been really pleased to do that. With the exception of having to do some more of the teaching element of it, where you wouldn't have to do that necessarily with adults who understand the language (and when I say the language, I mean more of the theatre lingo kind of language, going back to the basics of theatre, starting with "here's upstage, here's downstage," you know, the real basics). If you can avoid that, working with young people is probably more rewarding at times than

working with adults. With young people, you can go on a journey that is – the story may not make sense logically, but the young people may be open in their mind's eye and creatively to go on that journey. While an adult actor may tend to overthink some of it, you get stuck in some areas where you wouldn't necessarily be stuck with someone who is younger and will let their imagination roam. So I think that tends to be one of the biggest differences and one of the greatest joys is being able to roam with them and share that journey.

Megan: What kind of experiences would you like to share where you have been able to go on that journey with them?

Richard: Well, I have seen great leaps from kids that have just been really incredible. It's really the joy of watching kids go from that initial rehearsal to that opening night where you see it really click and them really understand it, to get that reaction from the audience. That's something that's wonderful to see. You see it in every face. And when you ask them if it's fun, the natural high that they get from that adrenaline rush and from getting up there in front of an audience for the first time. The audience really appreciating what they've done. It's really incredible for me and really quite amazing for the young kids each and every time when I've watched kids from that very beginning to that end result. And some of the kids who have something like a very major role, they're very afraid in the beginning because it's such a big role and when they get to that opening night and that light bulb just clicks. Oh, they are doing a good job with it and they are doing well and what you've been talking about works and it's just beautiful from now on.

Megan: What do you feel are trends in youth theatre today? How do you see the field moving?

Richard: Right now, people are more looking towards youth theatre with the realization that there is the ability to do things you can't do [with adult theatre] because of budget restrictions and those types of things. You can write a show for youth where you have 32 actors onstage, you can never do that anymore [with other theatre] unless you're a Broadway house for an adult stage. Adult theatres, typically nowadays, you're looking at three to five people in a cast. Writers tend to look at youth theatres to be able to write shows with large cast musicals. You can't write for adult theatres anymore for new productions because most of the theatres aren't going to be able to produce that currently in this budgetary climate and maybe for the next few years. So, they're looking for two and three and four person shows, with a five/six people show being very large. Where in the youth theatre, you can tend to write a production where you can have twenty to thirty actors on stage at any given moment and really be able to create something that's really alive and vibrant with that. From a writer's perspective, this is an opportunity to really add something fun and add lots of characters and not worry about not introducing new characters here and there. From a story standpoint and from a creative standpoint, people are looking at youth theatre as an ability to create new works where you can have large casts which you can't do anymore in the professional adult theatre world. And in addition to that, I think youth theatres creating new works tend to be coming up with ideas where

other theatres are looking at them and saying, “well we might want to take a look at this work that’s being created to see what we can emulate and create that in our organization as well.” And I think a lot of theatres are looking at the ideas that their audiences aren’t getting older. And there’s always this trend toward how do we keep an audience and how do we bring in new audience members? And they look toward youth theatre as that ability to then be that next incubator for their next audiences and next actors. So, I think people tend to look at youth theatre with more of a sense that you’re not just working in youth theatre to cut your teeth and get some experience and then go work in the professional world with only adults, but as a legitimate theatre experience. It is definitely a legitimate theatre genre to really take seriously, where I think, probably half a dozen years ago, it wasn’t that way.

Megan: On that subject, what are some plays you have recently directed with youth?

Richard: I just directed plays here called *Henry’s Freedom Box* and *The Magic Pot: Tree Stories from China*, and prior to that, a play called, *Rainbow Crow*. These are all original works. *Rainbow Crow* is based on a Native American story. *Magic Pot* is basically what it sounds like. It’s various stories from China put into one piece. And *Henry’s Freedom Box* is a play about a young Henry Box Brown who mailed himself north to freedom. He was a slave who mailed himself north to freedom, so that’s his story.

Megan: Who wrote those plays?

Richard: *Rainbow Crow* was written by a Native America playwright. *Henry's Freedom Box* was written by Christina Ham. *Magic Pot* was written by Dane Stoffer.

Megan: Have you directed youth in professional productions as well?

Richard: Yes.

Megan: What do you feel is the difference?

Richard: Defining professional by that the other actors are paid. The difference in that is that kids tend to not have as much fun when there aren't other kids around. When you have peers around you, you tend to enjoy it more. When you're doing a production where you're mixing paid adult actors and unpaid youth actors, you tend to have that look as being that you're going to more of a job. For the younger people, that challenge of looking at that as it's no longer just fun, but a job... and you have to work hard and do this in a different way, which is to approach it very professionally and look at it as though I think there's a little bit more pressure on the youth and in that regard kids are more afraid to make mistakes and more afraid to not be perfect. So, when you're working with youth who are all youth who are amongst peers, making a mistake is okay and you kind of see that. And I think when you tend to have youth who are afraid of making mistakes and afraid of not being good enough and that can be, doesn't have to be, but can turn into a unhealthy experience. Other times it

can be a very positive experience, it depends on the child and how much of their own experience they might have. If they're trying this out for the first time or trying this out as something they really enjoy doing versus something they're considering a career and really getting an early jump on a career, you know, I think kids who tend to try it in the youth theatre, they get the training, they get the experience, we as adults give them all the right tools to succeed and they do, but they may not end up being the next professional actor, they may end up doing something very different. The realization that when you're a youth working with professional adults, that's your goal then, to be a professional actor and that's a tougher thing. I think youth doing that tend to throw themselves into the workplace a little too early to really know what they want to do and sometimes that comes from external forces that may not be as healthy as you want it to be for a child to try things.

Megan: What advice would you give to those directing youth?

Richard: To play and to have fun and to enjoy the exuberance and the vibrancy that the youth bring to the production and don't ever talk down to kids. Treat them as you would your own peers, treat them with the same respect as you would treat your peers, with the knowledge that you may still need to introduce somebody new to the theatre and something that they have not experienced. And remember when you were first going into it, and how you had to learn as well.

Stephanie Lash Kilpatrick

Stephanie: I got my masters at NYU in theatre education from the educational theatre program. And when I was there I thought my focus was going to be more of working with professional theatres in the education department, but I learned that I liked working with students directly in an actual school educational setting. I have worked in many different areas in education. Anywhere from museums to kinds of arts organizations and the relevant for this conversation is probably my experience teaching in elementary schools both in after school programs and residency programs both in Philadelphia and New York and in Washington, DC. I've also been an elementary school drama teacher in Philadelphia and in Washington, DC, which is what I do now. I work for two private schools teaching elementary school drama and part of the special unit teachers have during their academic day. Currently I teach at National Pres. School which is a nursery through 6th school. My job was part-time until this upcoming school year. For the first year, I was part-time there and a freelance teaching artist working for other organizations in DC. And then for two years I worked as part-time drama and part-time visual arts. And for this year, they decided to make the program full time. So, I will be the first full-time drama teacher that this school has had. My primary responsibility has been to teach classes and direct student productions for each grade.

Megan: And what grade range is that?

Stephanie: Nursery through 6th. So, Nursery, Pre-K, K and then 1st-6th. And the school

mandates that Nursery through 6th grade each puts on a class production.

Megan: What are some of the productions you have done?

Stephanie: My background and my direction was kind of the practice of drama for drama's sake and not about production. So, I work primarily in process drama. I've done dramaturgy on devising with youth. My focus has not been large scale productions. But my school dictates that. So it's been a source of contention of me versus the school where they came in and said "we want you to produce plays." And I said, "Well, can I still teach drama?" And they're like, "Well, we're going to give you six weeks to produce this play, so can you do both in six weeks when you see them once a week?" And I said, "No, you can't." So, it's been a problem for me in that students that I'm teaching next haven't necessarily had drama and acting experience. They've only been taught to do productions. So, when I first got there I tried to morph the system, so we could do stuff that is more appropriate to the kind of experience that they have had. We've been working really hard to kind of change that against the administration. We came up with a, next year, we'll be doing in-formances up to grades K. And grade 1 will kind of do an in-formance, but we won't call it an in-formance because people will freak out. And then in 2nd grade we'll start doing things with a few lines. So, for example, last year in 2nd grade we did tableaux. I gave each kid a group and they did tableaux based on which fairy tale they were working on. And then we did gigantic puppets for fairy tale characters and then they had to say a couple lines and the audience had to guess who the character was. My whole focus in that was that they didn't

have an acting background. It wasn't necessarily developmentally appropriate for them to be up there producing a play. So, we've been kind of tailoring it. In my old school, in 5th grade I did "A Thousand Cranes" which is a full blown production that is actually written. But one of the main problems I've had, and I'm sure other people have said the same thing, is in looking for plays I have maybe 30 to 40 children in a play and they're all supposed to have the same number of lines and the same kind of part. And there is nothing out there written for that. There is not a single play out there written for 30 to 40 kids where they all have the same lines that is only twenty minutes, and not an hour production, because I don't see them enough to do an hour-long production. So, I've written primarily everything I've done. I think the only thing I've produced that was not written by me or devised with me and the students is a "A Thousand Cranes." Although, that might be wrong. We also do a musical after school that a totally separate after school thing for 4th and 5th grade. I've only been involved in that the past two years. This past year we did "The Jungle Book."

Megan: At the theatre I work at currently, we're supposed to teach process based camps, but there's a shareformance at the end of it.

Stephanie: Everything is like that. I think that's the tension. Everybody says they want to be process focused, but could you please produce a play in six weeks with all of these kids? It doesn't happen.

Megan: It's hard, too, with parents who want to see some product of what their kids have

been doing.

Stephanie: I've been pleasantly surprised. One thing that my administration has been happy about and I kind of took a gamble and it kind of paid off is that I said "if the parents see these kinds of alternative productions, I guarantee they will not be disappointed." It was a huge risk because what if they are disappointed. But I didn't really think they would be because I kind of knew what we were going to show them was going to be as impressive in terms of the skills building as a show where their kid came out and said a line that was too quiet and nobody could hear it and they didn't have any expression. I knew this was going to be more impressive to my parents. So, I took a gamble and it's been extremely positive. And the parents have really reacted in a very positive way. This past year I started a Shakespeare unit and we studied Shakespeare all year long, so that at the end of the unit we did scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. I think that the parents were shocked that their kids were up there reciting Shakespearean lines. Of course, they didn't necessarily understand that it took a year of process-based stuff to get there. They were just really excited to see their kids saying Shakespeare. We can just kind of pull out Shakespeare and wow people with it. But I've been really pleasantly surprised that the parent population has been really supportive. I think they're really skeptical until they see it. And everyone has said that. I totally didn't know what they were going to be doing and I didn't quite understand it and it was kind of strange, but it was totally great. Sometimes, I don't think we give parents enough credit. We need to trust them more.

Megan: And I think it's kind of the same trust. The parents have to trust us and we have to trust them as well. How do you approach a process when you have kids that have such limited skill sets?

Stephanie: All of my productions in my current school and my past school have all been curriculum based. It all comes from what they're studying in their classroom. And I think that's kind of standard. I think they approach it from what are they studying and how can I enhance that with drama which, obviously, my process drama background would dictate that. The thing that I've tried to do is not expect them to do more than they have time for me. For me, the constant struggle is that since I don't see them very often, I don't have time in my year to teach them all of the skills that they need. And frankly, some of them that are forced to perform are not really developmentally ready for those skills anyway. One of the things is that I'm very conscious of making it so that everyone feels comfortable with what I'm asking them to do. I work with other teachers who are less worried about the kid who doesn't want to perform, but that's one of my main concerns. I think about the least excited student and how I can make it comfortable for them, which usually translates into a lot of group work, a lot of devising stuff, so they can feel a bit more ownership over what they're doing. I decided this year that I'm writing curriculum. We've never had curriculum in our drama program before and I'm writing it now. We're starting this "conversation" about a lot of real meaty acting in 4th grade. Not to say that we're not starting it in 3rd grade when talking about voice, because I certainly am, but in 4th grade it's going to be my emphasis. I don't know if it's going to work. We'll see. I don't know if I've found a way to do it, except

have lower expectations than you would if you had more time. I think my goal is that I want everybody to come out of the entire process having felt like they had a good time throughout the entire thing. Sometimes I've found when you're very conscious of that product that the process is not very much fun and kids don't have that really positive feeling. I would rather sacrifice a little product and have a great time. I think there are other people who do not believe that, but that is my philosophy. If we've had a really good time, we've learned a lot during the process, and it's okay that the product is not Broadway worthy, yet. Because it's never going to be.

Megan: So, would you say you value the educational a little bit more than the artistic? How do you marry those two things?

Stephanie: I guess, yeah. When I think about what I'm sacrificing, it is more of the artistic. Sometimes that's unsatisfying for me as an artist. I also teach younger students. I often have to remind myself that they're not in middle school and not in high school. I don't think I would be sacrificing so much if they were. I also wouldn't be sacrificing so much if they were electing to be in my class. That's the other thing, too. They're not electing to perform. They're required, and so I'm very conscious of that when I'm working with them. I'm also very conscious of... at the end of the experience they can.. I don't want to be the cause of anyone at the party when they're thirty saying, "I was a tree when I was in 2nd grade. I don't want to be that person that made someone a tree. Artistically, sometimes it would be helpful to have a tree. I do place an emphasis on more of the educational aspect. Because,

often, I will look something and say “Oh, man. If only I could do this the way I want to” or “If only I could talk to them and lay it out there the way I want it to be” or “If only I could direct them the way I would direct adults,” we would have this spectacular production. In the environment that I’m in, the education definitely does win out over the artistry.

Megan: Have you ever directed kids in professional productions before?

Stephanie: I have directed in theatres that have productions through their camps and something like that, but I never directed a professional production with children.

Megan: How does directing production camps in a theatre differ from directing in private schools for you as a director?

Stephanie: It differs in the sense that the students who are at the theatre camps want a certain type of experience. and they’ve elected to come there in a way that students who are in high school have not. I’m willing to give them a bit more of an experience that maybe critiques them a little more than I would critique my students at school. I offer them more specific suggestions and I think I am willing to give them more notes essentially than I do at school. A: It’s a function of time. When you’re asked to do these productions in six weeks, it took me six weeks to produce this Shakespearean thing. At school, we have a half an hour rehearsal every week. The kids at school, two of them would ever think about a drama camp. So, those are the kids who really want those extra things. The rest of them are just

there for the ride and enjoying themselves. But at the camp, the other kids want that, they want more specific direction. So, I guess I'm more conscious of that.

Megan: What drives you? What's joyful about it to you?

Stephanie: The reason I do what I do is because I like to teach. My first passion is doing these process drama classes and having that curriculum based process drama experience. The other thing that makes me motivated is directing. Even these productions that I'm working on in school, there's so many other factors of time and the ability of the students and I haven't taught them very much because I haven't had time. For me, directing those classroom productions is not something I would say is the highlight of my job. I think if I had more time with the students and went through this really appropriate way of developing their drama skills before I had to do a production with them and if I only had to do it with the older kids and they really had been working on it, then I would be excited about the directing. I love directing, but that is not what gets me up in the morning because that is the hardest part of my job, because of the limitations. The thing that makes me excited is the process drama stuff. The reason that is really exciting to me is because that is within the constraints of what I have to work with. With the time and the resources that I have, that is what makes me feel successful. I don't know if I ever really feel successful after a production. I have in the past at other jobs. I currently, whenever a production is over, I think, "Well, at least, we pulled that off and at least no one is complaining." I think that is largely a function of asking to do too much within the constraints of what we have.

Megan: It's hard not to feel like we're not doing enough.

Stephanie: I can think about times when I felt really artistically happy with the shows and those probably weren't the best experiences for the kids. When I think about the best experiences for the kids, those weren't always the best shows. And I think that you find that a lot. I think that in my experience you have to weigh more heavily in one side or the other (of good experience for the kids versus strongly artistic). And if someone has figured out a way to do that, I would love to talk to that person. I think that someone has figured it out, but I just haven't.

Megan: If you were talking to someone going into the school system to teach drama, what advice would you give that person?

Stephanie: I think you have to be willing to try new things. I have never taught the same lesson twice. I never do the same thing twice. I think it's because I'm always trying to do it better that's what makes it good. I would love to get to the point where we do something the same every year. If you are going to go into this, you have to know there's a lot of trial and error. The most valuable thing that I have learned is that as a specialist, where I have to go and teach in individual classrooms, the most valuable thing that I have is my relationship with the staff. I'm constantly requesting things from them. I need an extra half hour, etc. I work every member of the faculty. You have to understand that when you go

into being a specialist in a drama setting. There will be stuff required of them to do in the classroom. You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar. The productions in which I have been able to collaborate really well with the classroom teacher have been the productions that have been more enjoyable and more successful. It's very humbling. I'm constantly asking for favors. Can I have the kids for a few more hours? I'm always asking for stuff. I think that's very challenging. You have to embrace the work relationships you have with the other faculty members. You're not even considering the fact that they're still learning. Your job, not only directing them, is still to teach them. If you're even for a second thinking, "I am teaching something rather than directing them," of course it's going to be different.

Marty Johnson

Marty: I had been doing theatre as a child, then I went to the University of Minnesota undergraduate school for an acting and directing degree. During that whole time, I was teaching students and being a camp counselor and doing all types of different things that were both theatre related and education related. I realized quite early on that I truly enjoyed directing and that I enjoyed the directing aspect of theatre more than I enjoyed the performance aspect. So, I went on to get my master's degree at the University of North Carolina Greensboro in Theatre for Youth with an emphasis in directing. I did a lot of directing there with the North Carolina Theatre for Young People. After grad school, I worked at a bunch of different regional theatres, such as the – Virginia Stage Company in

Norfolk, Virginia. Then, I spent five years at the North Shore Music Theatre, which is a professional theatre company north of Boston, as the director of education. There we had a youth performance academy where students performed a great deal. I am now in New York working with iTheatrics. I have developed a Broadway Jr. and School Edition as a collection of shows intended for youth to perform. Part of what developing that is, we test the shows out with students actually performing the parts.. We make sure that they're going to work in every school system, not just for the more advanced learners or for the lowest common denominator. We make sure that they work straight across all levels. We are currently testing out our new Broadway Jr. shows. I do a lot of the directing of these things. We also teach some classes for teachers on how to work with students. Primarily, we work with musicals, but we instruct them on both theatre and musical theatre. So, we do a lot of those classes. We have partnerships with many different organizations and school systems to bring theatre into the schools and make sure it's staying lively and vital there.

Megan: How would you define youth theatre?

Marty: I define youth theatre as the majority of performers, with the exception of potentially one or two adults, , being student performers playing all the roles. I've seen shows and I'm okay where one person playing one role, an adult playing one role, here or there, I still think of that as youth theatre. I know people who are sticklers and say "No, no, no." [For me], youth theatre is students performing and playing all the roles.

Megan: For you, how do you feel that directing youth theatre is different than directing productions with adults?

Marty: I think you have to be aware of students and young people's egos and personalities and all of those things, but that's the only difference. You are aware that students might not have as thick of a skin. So, you look at them differently. You don't want to bruise any growing personalities and all those different things like that. I don't treat the young people any differently than I try to treat professional actors as far as what is expected out of them - the level of professionalism you want from them and their commitment to the art and the craft of what they're doing. I think the biggest difference is truly... I mean, there are different techniques going about it to get a different thing out of an adult actor than you do a child actor. The only difference is you have to be aware of not hurting anyone's feelings in a much broader way than if you were working with strictly adults. With adults, you still don't want to hurt anyone's feelings or want them to feel bad about themselves, but they have a different skin and different thickness of skin than most children.

Megan: Given that you approach things similarly, how do you approach a production?

Marty: I think my job as director is first and foremost to tell the story. That's why we're there: to see people tell a story. Now, when you're telling it with students, you're doing everything you can to make those students look good and feel good about themselves

telling the story to the audience. So, that includes learning basic techniques – being loud enough, being clear enough, the emotions...all of those things as well as getting them to understand they are an artist and they are sharing something with the audience. There are different workshop productions where you're focusing on different things and you don't care about the product, the process is much more important. If you're talking about full versions of shows that are coming up on the stage like at the Orlando Repertory Theatre, on their stage, while I think the process is important and everything I do is process based, the product is as important as if it was all adults up there or all students. I personally think that students thrive to that level of commitment and that level of... and it's not perfection you're looking for because then you just want robots... that level of professionalism of doing the best they can on the stage.

Megan: How do you think that desire of doing the best they can, how do you think that benefits the students and the actors?

Marty: It's just like setting a goal for yourself. You set a goal and you do everything you can to accomplish that goal. Whether that goal is to be a great team baseball player and catch all the flies that come out to you in the outfield or to do all your dance steps to the best of your ability while you're telling a story and while you're singing and dancing and connecting as characters, or whether you're trying to do the best you can on your math equation. I think it's perfectly fine to make mistakes. I don't think it's okay not to try. In my philosophy when I work with the kids, you don't have to be good at anything you do. As

long as you're trying to do your best, you've succeeded. That is the end goal.

Megan: How does this idea of trying to do your best and succeeding work into productions when you have students from different skill levels who may not have the same background experience as other kids?

Marty: I feel my job as director is to make them look good and feel good, so I have to tailor the production to fit who the actors are to some degree. I can come into rehearsal and go "Oh!... and this is a great moment where they've had cast members who can do triple pirouettes," and then it gets into it and only two cast members can do it. My job as a director is to figure out what is that same emotion and feeling I'm trying to get out of them and how can I do that in a way that is successful so they can achieve the thing. The biggest thing is being flexible with what has to happen and what must be done and as the director, your vision. You have some freedom within that vision to change it to make it successful for a student. The same thing happens with adults. Ideally, the adults you cast have a different bag of tricks than kids. But there will be some adults who are right on and some adults who are different. I think you always have to strive for them to be their best. You have to have alternate ways to look at what it means to be fully committed to this. What I typically tend to do from a directing point of view, this is best example in musical numbers. Whatever the musical number we're doing, I'll teach everyone the dance. Everyone knows what the dance is going to be, whether hard or easy, it doesn't matter if they as a character will be in that scene. We work with all the characters and have them all learn the dance. After that, we

talk to just the students who should naturally be in that scene. If it's just a dance number, we say "Who feels comfortable doing this dance? Who needs something else to do? Who would like to do something else, so they'll feel more comfortable?" I encourage them to put themselves in a place where they'll feel more comfortable, if they can still tell the story the right way and if I don't think they're just giving up on themselves and not wanting to try. And so what we do with that idea, it forces everyone to continue to learn as a whole. It forces everyone to be there and even though they're not going to do the dance this time, they've learned some skills and next time they'll feel that much more comfortable with it.

Megan: So, would you say that's a way an educational approach maybe plays into youth theatre?

Marty: My training is all about making kids feel good about themselves and understanding why they're doing drama and understand who they are as an individual. All those things come through. It's a little harder now that I've been doing it for so long, not that I'm old and not learning new things. I think if I came into every rehearsal thinking "How am I educationally going to make sure every child.. "la,la, la, la," I think I would forget that my job as the director is to make sure these kids tell a great story to the audience and be committed fully to that. The ways to go about it more educationally are, as you said, that. Everyone learning something and letting students find their comfort level, setting up an environment where they want to achieve and get better at things, but I don't [have a formula], because I've been doing it long enough, there's just some natural teaching things

that I do. If I sat for a little while I could over analyze it and figure out what they are, but it's not.. I know at the end of our productions the students will leave feeling successful about themselves that they've grown, that they've learned, that they've done these other things. But the audience should see a great story being told or as an interesting of a story as I could help these kids present. Sometimes when you're directing youth theatre, it's a workshop and you don't care about the final presentation. But I think if you don't give the kids a goal and a sense of how you need to try, they will do less and that actually is as harmful as not feeling good about themselves. Then they can go, "Oh. I can just not try. I can get away with things and not try." And that's not okay in my book. How you put it all together is different.

Megan: How do you feel that musical theatre especially contributes to this?

Marty: I think the thing about musical theatre is very few kids are really comfortable singing, really comfortable dancing, and really comfortable acting. They are some, but musical theatre is... everyone has an area where they're not as strong, so it gives them an area to work on in a different way. If they had to do straight theatre, and there are lots of challenges depending on the show, but if it's a show where they play a kid who is already like them because that's how they were cast and they get to run around doing the exact same thing, they learn to communicate, they learn to speak clearly, they learn how to do all those things, but they aren't challenged in the way of.. "Now, sing a song that is less comfortable to you." Part of the challenge is that you have to look at it as a director with different skills levels. Some kids learn music quicker, some learn it slower, some don't read

music, some do read music. With musical theatre, there is usually some part of it that is challenging to the student. If the student is good at acting, singing, and dancing, it is less likely that they know how to do all three together very well, at the same time and. I work with a lot of kids who have beautiful voices, but their faces are blank when they're singing or they can dance, but their faces are blank when they dance. This is what I say about musical theatre, it always pushes that extra level of "here's something new you have to try in order to be successful." You can grade success on many levels. For you, if you were to sway back and forth and clap on the right rhythm, but can do it as the character, then great. For others, now we need to learn to do that clap step and keep it clean and clear.

Megan: Have you directed with adults and youth together?

Marty: Yeah.

Megan: In what capacity?

Marty: In professional productions, but on a summer stock basis. It's professional community theatre summer stock. Age appropriate casting, I have done that.

Megan: How do you feel this is different?

Marty: I don't know that it is that different. I don't swear with both kids and adults. I try to

treat the kids like the adults and the adults like the kids. The kids have a more honest nature than some of the adults. The adults have more tricks up their sleeves. So, it's finding the mix of the two. The kids get as many notes as the adults and the adults get as many notes as the kids. We don't take more or less time on one or the other. I tend to expect a lot of anyone working with me. It's a fun environment; I think I keep it light and lively. If people are miserable working, I'm not happy either. They tend to work. The kids who we've been around, they want to do it, they want to work. From the adults, they learn the adults are working like this and they want to be like this and work like the adults. So, it's keeping all that level of professionalism and that level of moving forth and trying in the forefront.

Megan: What are the challenges and joys of directing youth?

Marty: The challenges are... the first day is always exciting, but it's figuring out where the students are as far as their level of interest in being theatre professionals, and their level of interest in being in a play, and their level of interest of just hanging out. I think it's great that there are kids who like to do theatre camp one week and soccer camp the next and then go camping with their friends the next week and then do another show. I think those kids are important, and just as important as the kid who only eats, breathes, and lives theatre. Actually, I think those kids are a little more successful than the kids who only eat, breathe, and live theatre because they have a little more to draw from in the theatre world. It's figuring out where that group is so you can understand what professional and hard work means to them and you can help them define what it means to you. So, it's that initial

understanding of who they all are and where they're coming from and what they want to get out of this. I think that's one of the challenges to what I do and how I approach youth theatre. I think one of the joys is seeing kids "learn how to work," for lack of a better phrase. I think it's really important that kids learn how to play, but if you can work while you're playing you can accomplish a whole bunch of other things. I think there a lot of great creative drama activities that people do all the time and I myself do and I love them, but creative drama activities are different then for what I do when we're putting on a production because creative drama is about figuring out who you are and playing and having fun. Putting on a production, you have an end goal. You have an end goal that is more than just an internal thing. It's an internal and external thing. It's really important for kids to learn how to strive for those external things while fulfilling that internal thing as well. That's one of the things I do. I agree and I like reflection and "Hey. What did you like about today? What didn't you like? What were some challenges? What are some things you want to do better tomorrow?" I think all those questions are great and important and I certainly use them. I'm not personally a big "let's spend the last hour every day in reflection and understand how it felt. Why was this scary and what does it mean?" No. Acknowledge that is was scary. Great. And now let's move forward. We know that it was scary. You said aloud it was scary. You now have permission to fail as much as you want and try as much as you want either way. Because you said, "I'm afraid of this" and I said, "Great." And whatever I can do to help you be less scared, great. I don't think it needs to become a therapy session. Other people do. I think the joys of theatre and doing youth theatre are, specifically seeing people making successes, no longer being afraid, making leaps forward, learning how to

speak and learning how to communicate with each other, learning how to be part of a team, and learning how important every person is. All of these are joys that come about not because I'm telling them that they're doing it or not because I have to do lots of weird activities to try to get those to happen. I think that's one of the most beautiful things about theatre and musical theatre is that it naturally encourages that without having to overanalyze the fact that you're doing it.

Megan: So, talking about process, how would you approach a first day of rehearsal?

Marty: The first day of rehearsal depends on how much time we have. If we have lots of extra time then it's just going to be game playing and ensemble building because students will work better in ensemble. But that would be true if I had adults or if I had kids... ensemble building and different games and activities, so they can get to know who they are going to be working with, so they can take chances and understand that everyone's in this together and we're going to work together. Then there would be a, whatever the show is, I try to get something on its feet with scripts in hand, that involves many of the kids, not specifically the leads, the whole ensemble, and I get them up. I work them a little harder to see where they're at. So, they can also see "Wow. This is how Marty works. This is what he expects. He was encouraging. He was moving forward and there was a lot going on." I tend to spend half the time making sure everyone's getting to know the environment, getting comfortable, and feeling good about themselves. Then the second half of time is spent somehow specifically on the show, so they realize, "Oh. We're going to have to work this

week." I find that by establishing that right from the beginning they either jump on board or understand they're going to have a rough week or two weeks or month. At least they know what they're getting into. It's not "Great. We've felt good for two weeks and now we're in tech, we're going to really have to try." I think you have to try from the beginning. I have much different expectations the first day then I do a week or a month later, but that's my first day--as a half of getting them all to work together, then one half of "this is the ride and adventure we're in for." So, they really get an idea.

Megan: What drives you to do this work?

Marty: I am very fortunate that I get to do what I love to do. In fourth grade, I wanted to be a teacher and I was in my first play. In the eighth grade, I started being a camp counselor. So, I've been working in this field, twenty-two, twenty-three years now. Seeing kids succeed and have a great time and being happy and turning into responsible adults is an amazing thing. Being a part of that process is a really amazing thing. I'm fortunate that I have some of my ex-students who are on Broadway. That's not as exciting to me as students who just are happy members of society, or felt good about themselves, learned how to work as group, and learned all those wonderful things I think theatre has to offer. What I like about theatre specifically is it allows students to be artists in a time and day when I don't think they allow students to be artists. I think it allows students to have goals and things to achieve while still doing something that's fun and artistic and imaginative along the way. I think giving them a goal to do great math work is really important and really smart and

they should all be able to do that. But with math, they're not using their imagination, they're not using that. One's not better or worse. I'm really happy I'm in the field that's getting them to do that sort of stuff.

APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

In this appendix, I offer two activities for implementation in each section of the development class. The hope is to provide inspiration for how a teaching artist might direct focus and work with students in these classes.

Basic Acting Terminology/Scene Study:

Observe/Wonder/Perceive – Partner students sitting on the floor opposite one another. One student sits neutral while the other partner verbally acknowledges the things they observe in the person in the moment (i.e. – not their personal opinions or things they have observed in the past). Each observation should begin with the phrase, “I observe...” The natural tendency is to list observations of inanimate features such as clothing or hair color. Encourage the students to also note behavior, even the minutest detail (e.g. blinking, shifting, scratching, etc). After the first partner speaks for one to two minutes, they switch and the other partner begins verbally expressing their observations (as opposed to alternating observations back and forth). The next step is to verbalize the mind’s natural progression of what the information ascertained in the observation means to them in the form of a wonder. For instance, they might say, “I observe that you curled your hair today. I wonder if it took you a long time to do that.” Each student should have one to two minutes to verbalize their wonders – these can be from repeating the old observations and making new ones. Finally, the students make a perception regarding the wonder. For instance, “I observe that you curled your hair today. I wonder if it took you a long time to do that. I perceive that you’re the kind of person who curls your hair

every morning so you probably are pretty efficient with it by now.” It is important to reiterate to the students that it does not matter if their perceptions are accurate according to the partner, they are inherently accurate because they are perceptions: decisions made from taking in information and extrapolating data from that observation. With this acute sense of awareness, they can more truthfully adapt their tactics in the moment to their partner, rather than generically coaxing, threatening, or seducing.

WOW Circumstances - Before beginning the game, discuss given circumstances and situations in which they are found. One at a time, have students exit the room and then enter as if they are coming from a certain given circumstance and saying nothing, but “Wow.” It is helpful to choose the circumstance for them at the beginning, perhaps even have the entire class do the same circumstance and compare and contrast how that circumstance affected different students. Eventually, let the students choose their own circumstance and have the class guess what the circumstance was. This helps the actors realize how their expressions give signals to the audience. Shy the students away from indicating, however, and ask them to live honestly in their circumstances. Let the students know that if they truly believe in their given circumstances, then it will be enough. An indicating actor who is trying to act out or spell out their circumstance is not living life, but rather playing charades. The circumstance affects your action and you act “through” the circumstance.

Improvisation for Devising/Script Writing:

Word Associations: Students sit in a circle saying the first word that comes to mind upon hearing the word from the person *directly* before them without responding to a word two or three people prior. For instance, a progression might go, “Christmas...snow...cone...traffic...” and if one tried to jump the gun and take their word off Christmas or snow, their word would have little to do with traffic. Discourage falling into categories and listing off assorted colors or reptiles or spices. The biggest challenge is to respond completely in the moment following one’s instincts. Youth tend to get too inside their heads either thinking up the best line or direction to take the scene before and not actually listening. The key to acting is reacting and expressing in real time.

Tableaux Inspiration: Put the students into groups of three or four. Assign each group a character, obstacle, and location for their tableaux. Have them create three tableaux for the beginning, middle, and end. In each tableau, they should all say a word to define the feeling of the scene. A movement with sound should also connect each tableau. Have everyone share their presentation and discuss what they discovered from it. How can these short scenes inspire the basis for a script? What is missing? How can we add in rising action and a climax?

Collaboration/Ensemble Building:

Human Knot – Ask students to shake hand with one person across them in the circle and freeze, holding their hand. Have them repeat this action with their other hand and freeze. Everyone is now connected to one another. Challenge the students to untangle themselves only speaking one at a time. This will be difficult. Keep trying until the knot is untangled. Try again without speaking at all.

Ball Game – Explain to the students that they will attempt to see how quickly they can pass a large, squishy ball around the circle. The trick, however, is that they must say a specific script when throwing the ball around. When passing the ball, they say “*their name* passing to *another person’s name*,” such as, “Megan passing Elliott.” After catching the ball, the other student says “thank you” with the person’s name, for example “Thank you Megan.” The ball continues around the circle with each person sitting as they catch and throw the ball. Once everyone has thrown the ball, the last person passes it to the teacher. Continue to attempt the passing pattern *using the exact same people*. Time it to see how fast they can go. This game is played at the beginning of every class, eventually adding in multiple balls and an invisible ball.

Physical Movement/Musical Freedom:

Use It or Become It: Ask students to walk around the space freely without touching one another and moving at a moderate tempo, as if they were walking down the street. Give students an object that they must either use or become, such as a piano, an elephant, or a basketball. Initially, students will gravitate toward the easy choice,

but challenge them to push outside of their comfort zone and make daring choices. Eventually, give them an object then ask them to use it or become it in a different way. After doing this for awhile, add in another layer called “Stop, Drop, Melt.” When you say “Stop!” students freeze in the position they were moving in. “Melt!” causes students to slowly drop to the ground and “Drop!” causes students to quickly fall to the ground.

Kunja – Have students stand in a circle. Begin by asking everyone to pat their hands on their thighs and chant “kunja” together in rhythm. Next, begin passing around the “bunny, bunny.” This action requires one person to point both hands at themselves and touch their four fingers to their thumbs in a hand puppet motion saying “bunny, bunny” then to do the same action pointing their hands at a group member and saying “bunny, bunny.” The people to the left and right of the “bunny, bunny” turn toward the center person, waving their hands in the air, and saying “tokey, tokey, tokey, tokey.” This passes around the circle until someone makes a mistake. Once someone makes a mistake, they celebrate their failure by dancing around the outside of the circle keeping the “kunja” rhythm.

Character Building/Tactics, Objective, and Inner Life:

Character Emotional Life - Have each student write down five things they think their character might be feeling. Using their bodies, have them create individual tableaux to express these feelings. Challenge the students to go beyond the obvious and express

themselves using full physical movement and expression. Present these tableaux to each other with students sharing their impressions.

Tactic Circle - Students stand in a circle with a collective line of generic text to be used throughout the exercise, such as “I really like ice cream.” As a group, create a list of tactics that might be used throughout the game. Start with simpler choices “to amuse,” “to anger,” “to guilt,” or “to beg” before moving into more difficult tactics like “to entice,” “to confuse,” or “to dissuade.” Ease students into the idea of using text as a vehicle for unrelated subtext. Feel free to side coach. Let this lead into a group discussion about specificity and the differences between tactics: Do you slap? Why? When do you stab? Why? What are the physical energies of both?

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