**Suggestions for Managing your Drama and Theatre Classrooms**

These suggestions have been accumulated throughout 20+ years of observing, teaching, and making drama in various learning environment.

1. **Remember to PLAY and embrace the chaos of drama work.**

First thing’s first: management of a drama classroom is not the same as a traditional classroom. There are many other factors to consider that produce big feelings, intense thoughts, loud and animated voices, and a bit of controlled chaos. Try not to become discouraged if students seem “out of control” by traditional classroom standards. Stay positive. Students respond well to positivity. A drama classroom should be full of energy. It is *play* after all. If you are patient, well prepared, energetic, and excited about an activity, then students will see this and respond accordingly.

1. **Co-construct a “Drama Agreement” or social contract on the very first day.**

Make this a priority. Teachers and students should discuss expectations of **each other.** Always attempt to co-construct your class expectations or “Drama Agreement” and decide on consequences of disruptive or disrespectful behavior as a community. This puts the onus on everyone and ultimately let students know you respect them as individuals and human beings. When possible, adopt the school’s existing policies.

1. **Build an ensemble and get to know your students from day one.**

This process begins as the group works together to create a class contract. Theatre and drama work need the full efforts of the ensemble. Think of how exciting it is to see a performance where the supporting cast is in tune with each other. A strong ensemble becomes a community who is sensitive to each others’ circumstances so that trust is established and everyone feels comfortable taking risks on *and* off stage. Get to know your students as best you can and plan your lessons according to the community and individuals’ needs. Be reflective of your practice. Sometimes this means letting go of expectations (and ego), revising goals, thinking outside the box, or considering the culture of the school or the individual student. Find moments in and away from the drama work to connect, share (appropriate) interests, check in with each other, have a snack and “chill” together, etc. Discuss what it means to create a *Safe Space* where everyone protects his/her own bodies during physical exercises, expresses him/herself freely, and can trust that everyone is physically and emotionally safe. Everyone is more willing to cooperate and invest in the process if he/she feels part of a group of that cares, or at least respects, each other.

1. **Routines, routines, routines.**

There is comfort in knowing what to expect or look forward to, especially for younger students. Routines and rituals work to make your group dynamic unique and special, so create a “script” that you and your students will perform at certain times each and every class. In other words, structure lessons using the same conventions or formats each day so as to lessen anxiety. Always start and end the day standing or sitting in a community circle (avoid traditional “teacher standing in front of a group of sitting students” dynamic). Begin with a group ensemble game or activity that connects with the day’s theme, share something that stimulates conversation that can build toward the main activity, and end with a reflection. Establish a way of cuing students so they know when it is time to begin the drama work, when you need attention, or to signal when students are off task. Some examples: ask the group to “prepare the room for drama” to signal the start of class, call group to the “community circle” at the beginning of every class, create a special way to enter or exit the playing space, use specific call and response cues (“If you can hear me clap once,” use stage manager’s “thank you 5,” sing, ring a bell to signal for attention, etc. **Teach your routines and cues on DAY ONE before you do anything else.** Rehearse these in the first couple of classes. Once the students know the routines they will become second nature.

1. **Stick to the script.**

Consistency is key. Follow through with the consequences of disruptive behavior *and* maintain your routines. Once the “script” is written (i.e. agreements and routines are established), follow through with them **each and every day** to the best of everyone’s ability and the day’s circumstances. It’s ok to improvise so people don’t get bored, but then maintain any changes for a good while. People crave structure as much as they do independence. In some respects, students with inconsistent personal lives will look forward to the consistency in your class environment.

1. **Do your homework: Prepare for your performance and learn your lines.**

Teaching drama is as much a performance as the work required by the drama students. This doesn’t mean you have to stand on your head to get students’ attention. It means that educators should be fully present, speak clearly and calmly, and know exactly what they are saying next, why they are speaking, and his/her lesson’s desired outcome. Sound familiar? Work as hard to prepare your lessons as you would a character in a play you are performing for a paying audience. Do your homework, seek out resources to enhance your lessons, memorize your lines (lesson), check your props, and be clear about your intentions. If you choose a game to play on a particular day, know why you made that choice and how the game helps students to make connections with your main activity and/or how it helps you to achieve your lesson objectives. Also, as the old adage says “It is better to have too much to do then to run out of ideas.” Always prepare an extension activity to explore if time permits.

1. **Participate in the activities and/or take on roles in the drama.**

This can be your most effective teaching and management tool. I have rarely met a drama student who did not delight in seeing their drama instructor take on a role in the drama to help move it forward (e.g. The big bad wolf to their three bears, a news reporter, a leader’s second in command, etc.) or who participates in a game or activity to demonstrate what is expected. Not only does this make you a part of the ensemble, it also lessens power structures in the classroom that can inhibit student’s risk-taking and cooperation. When you get on the students’ level, physically and metaphorically, you immediately illustrate the (awesome) differences between a traditional classroom environment and a drama class. If you buy in, so will your students; if you can do it, then maybe they can too. As the expert in the room teaching artists are the most effective models for students to observe and emulate. There is a time and place for coaching from the sidelines, but I find teacher participation in the drama work is the most effective when considering classroom management.

1. **Reinforce positive behavior.**

Sometimes you just have to raise students’ awareness of what they are doing “right.” Saying sometime like, “I really like how Joey is listening and paying attention like a respectful audience member. Thank you Joey” or “Can everyone see how Sally is using interesting levels in her frozen images to communicate the passage of time? Nice specific work Sally,” can easily remind everyone what is expected. Behavior is a skill that can be learned through positive reinforcement. We cannot expect a very young child to behave a certain way in the drama classroom if we do not show them or point out the desired behavior when it is being enacted.

1. **When at all possible “pass the baton**.”

Most people thrive and react positively when they are given the opportunity to lead themselves. Ask students to explain what is happening in a drama. Consider assigning roles like assistant directors and stage managers, designers, etc. Encourage students to take the lead when critiquing each other’s work. Ask students to lead warm-ups. Empower them as much as possible.