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ENGL 327R

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Curricular Plan: Leadership and Applied Theatre

In January 2007, my family moved across the country from a suburbia town in Washington to a tiny rural town in Georgia. I was in 6th grade at the time, and dived right into a new school setting. I was rather shy, but I tried to reach out and make some new friends. I considered myself fairly quiet and peaceable, and yet some boys saw me as a target. To this day I don't know their motivation behind their actions, but they would harass me through verbal bullying. The things they would tell me would make me leave the school at the end of the day in tears and dread going back the next day. I tried to make my teachers aware of what was going on, but they didn't take any action to resolve the problem; they were oblivious to the severity of the situation. I persevered for almost a year, but by the time that Christmas rolled around, I knew I couldn't go back to that school. I did not feel safe and it was affecting my emotional health and learning. My parents agreed to let me be homeschooled through the BYU Independent Study program; this was the best step towards continuing my education at that time.

The scars of the emotional bullying and harassment that I faced ran deep. With time, I have come to forget the exact words that those boys said to me—a means of psychological defense. Almost ten years after this trauma, I took a class in the Theatre and Media Arts department that was required for my major in Theatre Education. This class explored the significance of Theatre in Education (TIE) and Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) practices as they pertain to problem-solving and teaching concepts that expand beyond the theatre classroom by using immersive exercises. During our work with TO, we explored various forms of oppression, including bullying. I worked on a group project where we analyzed the implications of oppression within bullying that we devised and deemed to be realistic, and we asked ourselves a series of questions as coined by Michael Bahr, who is renowned for his work within TO. First, was there conflict? Second, what were the strong, detailed choices? Third, were the stakes high? Fourth, what could we have done differently to make the stakes higher? Finally, did you care? (Jackson). This process of playing with oppressive situations and answering these questions proved to be a meaningful experience, as I found a level of healing in addressing these questions within those situations. It gave me a sense of ownership in my learning and leadership towards taking action.

I have constructed my curricular plan of leadership towards junior high school students, ranging from age 12-15. I feel that this is a suitable target audience because of the concepts and content that we will address together—the forms of oppression like bullying that students face at school. This age group will most likely not have had a lot of theatre experience, so I am scaffolding this leadership curriculum in such a way that each activity builds upon one another towards reaching the educational objective. The skills that will be taught throughout this leadership curriculum consist of dialogue skills as they pertain to effective communication. As they practice with dialogue skills and communicate effectively, they will be able to humbly persuade others, understand other perspectives, and take action that is necessary for change. Their understanding of these principles will come from their work within workshop activities,

vignettes of oppressive scenarios, and interacting with bullying through applied theatre processes. These processes will occur over the course of 6-12 classes, depending on the length of the class periods. For the purposes of this curriculum, we will define leadership as “being empowered to communicate effectively and humbly to understand, persuade, and take action.”

The preparation (or pre-step) pertains to the instructor—me. I will be implementing the characteristics of a teacher leader within my teaching practice. In order to effectively teach them leadership through applied theatre, I must first learn how to be a teacher leader and practice the essential characteristics of a teacher leader, as defined by Joan Lazarus in her book *Signs of Change*. In being a teacher leader, I will help my students learn the principles of empowerment to change, humble communication, persuasion, and understanding of others.

Pre-Step: Being a Teacher Leader

Theatre teachers as teacher leaders (Lazarus, pg. 187-188). The characteristics of teacher leaders, as outlined in *Signs of Change*, are as follows:

1. Are good teachers and have classroom competency and credibility; build a respectful rapport with colleagues
 - a. In my prospective classroom, I hope to establish a rapport of competency, credibility, and respect with my colleagues, students, and their parents.
2. Have good interpersonal skills and can collaborate with others; be able to listen, recognized and celebrate differences, and problem solve towards helping others feel encouraged, supported, and challenged
 - a. Collaboration and listening are essential qualities of effective teaching; I love that I love to listen and work together with others as we magnify one another’s strengths and problem-solve together in a supportive environment. In finding and expressing my own creative voice, I hope to help others be empowered to see their own value and creative voices as well (Covey).
3. Take on a variety of roles—formal and informal
 - a. We all have many roles that we fill in our lives, and being a teacher necessitates other roles as well. Finding and maintaining balance within the roles that we have is a decision that we need to make daily.
4. Overcome barriers from traditional hierarchy in schools
 - a. As a teacher, I will work to break down pre-conceived notions and biases that may be present in the school environment. I want to cultivate a vision that everyone is capable and valued.
5. Can learn by doing and reflect on their experiences; learning is a lifelong process
 - a. I consider myself introspective and self-reflective in that I often think deeply about experiences that I have and what I learn from them. I ponder how I can change things for the better as I go forward in my effort to improve. Everyone needs to accept learning as a lifelong process—especially teachers.
6. Have a strong passion for teaching and belief in themselves as effective teachers—high sense of self-efficacy; sense of moral purpose, emotional intelligence, quality relationships, quality knowledge, and physical well-being.

- a. I'll admit that I am facing fears that I have of myself and my ability to effectively teach. However, I know that I am passionate about teaching, and I sense a moral purpose and duty to share that passion with my students. I loved a quote from this excerpt in *Signs of Change*, "When teachers see themselves as leaders, they will have a greater sense of satisfaction in their work...understand who you are and be your best self" (Lazarus, pg. 188). I know that I am often too hard on myself, but as I work towards seeing my best self and appreciate the effort that I am putting into my work, I will have a greater sense of satisfaction and my students can benefit from that joy.

Step 1 introduces them to applied theatre and devising activities. Applied theatre/ devised theatre include performance art that is expressive and contemplative; it usually addresses socially relevant topics. The exercises and reflection/ discussion questions that we will have during this first activity, as they pertain to listening and movement will effectively prepare the students for Step 2: creation of character.

Step 1: Activity—Listening to What We Hear

In order to teach the intended principles as outlined above, the students will participate in a series of applied theatre and devising activities.

Part 1: A Round of Rhythm and Movement (Boal, pg. 92)

Instructions: Participants form a circle. One brave soul will go into the middle of the circle and choose any kind of sound and movement—it can be a strange or unusual combination, but it cannot be profane or offensive. Nor can it be something they do in their everyday life. Don't be afraid of being silly, if everyone is silly then no one is! The person in the middle of the circle is the "leader," everyone else in the circle will try to imitate them—trying to reproduce the leader's movements and sounds as exactly as they can, in time with the leader. Then, while still making their movement and sound, the leader will approach and stand opposite to someone in the circle, "challenging" that person to take their place. They will switch places and the new leader will slowly change the movement, the sound, and the rhythm of the two in any way they want. Everyone in turn will follow the second leader. Then, the second leader will challenge a third person, and so on.

Reflection: What happened here? In reproducing other's actions/sounds, we transformed our own processes, trying to understand and make an exact copy of the exterior of the leader in the middle, in order to gain a better sense of their interior. Similarly, communication necessitates listening; we need to seek to truly understand other's opinions—and not parody or manipulate them in our own way. With communicating, we do not need to copy another person's view or feel that we need to persuade them to think just as we do. We need to listen to them, seeking to understand—only then can we truly be understood.

Part 2: Sound and Movement (Boal, pg. 108)

Instructions: Participants will be split into two groups: A and B. Group A will vocalize a chosen sound (i.e. animal, road, etc.) and Group B will do movements which correspond to the

chosen noise (ADAPTATION: Group B can have the option of not knowing what the chosen sound is, they just have to move based on what sounds they hear Group A do).

Reflection: Do we have different ideas of the same thing? Group B, were you really trying to listen to and interpret Group A's sound? Group A, were you surprised at how Group B interpreted your sound?

As aforementioned, step one is structured in such a way that the understanding that students gain in Step 1 prepares them for Step 2. The goal for this activity is for students to be able to identify variations in self-perception between yourself and other's expectations (i.e. parental figures).

Step 2: Applied Theatre Workshop—Creation of Character

Materials needed for the activity: pieces of paper, pens, and an open space for all the participants to move in

Target audience: Secondary Education students (grades 6-8). I chose this audience because of the present themes and goals in our activity, as listed below.

Goals: Identify variations in self-perception between yourself and other's expectations (i.e. parental figures).

Activity 1: A child's dream (Boal, pg. 166)

First, participants write names on pieces of paper along with the name of a person/ mythical figure they wanted to be when they were younger. Next, participants move around the playing space and conveying the characteristics of the other name they wrote-- only using their bodies (gesture, facial expression, movement)

Questions to ask during the activity: How does the person you choose move when they are angry/scared/sad/happy? Start to interact with the people around you without speaking. Does that change the way you move through the space? Does that change how you see yourself?

1. After a moment, the instructor tells them to find a partner and start a dialogue with them. They still can't say anything that will give away who they are.
2. After a few minutes, the instructor tells them to change partners and start a new conversation-- both people working toward developing and maintaining their character. This may be done for a third time too.
3. When that is finished, ask:
What did the participants see in one another without explicitly stating who they think the other people were? How did that affect your interactions?
How did participants show what they wanted to be as well as what dreams they cherished?

Activity 2: What grown-ups wanted me to be (Boal, pg. 168)

Same rules and process as above, but keep in mind that what you decide to portray needs to be concrete; "compare what you actually are with what adult figures expected from you."

4. Do what your parents want you to be equal yourself or the opposite to your dream?

5. Do you agree or disagree with your parents expectations at this point in your life?

Step 3 serves to transition into defining and addressing “oppression.” The students will come to understand the meaning of oppression by creating vignettes, which are short descriptions that portray a situation. After seeing an example of a vignette, students will write their own vignettes and then create a frozen image/ tableau of their vignette. Students will see their classmate’s tableaus as they are exhibited in the space, and then the class will decide what scenario they want to examine further. In examining a vignette, the teacher will serve as the facilitator as the students brainstorm and try out solutions to the conflict that is presented in the vignette.

Step 3: Applied Theatre—*what parents want me to do*

Let’s look at a situation where one of you might feel **oppressed** or subject to harsh treatment. For example, you may feel oppressed by what your parent wants you to do... When have you felt that what you wanted to do seemed insignificant or less important to someone else?

Model a vignette: 2 people (protagonist and antagonist), their relationship, and a situation.

Example: siblings—both want to take the car they share...one wants to go bowling, the other wants to go see a movie across town

Invite two volunteers to play these roles. Then, have the participants in the audience brainstorm possible points that either person could make (ex. already has movie tickets, hasn’t seen the friend she is going bowling with in a while, etc.) After the brainstorm, the two performers will create a frozen image (tableau) before they start to give some visual context...then they will begin.

As the vignette develops, the instructor can say FREEZE at any point, at which point they can ask the audience if the solution that the two performers are coming to is realistic.

Get in pairs and write a vignette: a protagonist, antagonist, and situation.

Create a frozen image of the vignette to share with the others. Note: Be creative; don’t just take a “confrontational” stance. Each group will show their image for the class to observe. The groups will discuss which image they want to explore and proceed into the applied theatre.

From there, the group will choose a person to be the protagonist and another to be the antagonist. They will begin acting out the scenario as described in the vignette, while we serve as the Jokers to test how realistic their solutions might be.

Wrap-Up: What did we learn about the role of our goals and others goals or expectations in our lives? Do you agree or disagree with the “protagonist”? Note: the protagonist/antagonist can change based on perspective (ex. mother/son, father/daughter relationship; authority may be a factor in who is the protagonist/antagonist)

In Step 3, we defined and started working with “oppression.” Now, to transition into Step 4, the students will explore situations under a particular subject: bullying. In this step, the instructor will facilitate a discussion concerning the potential connections between bullying and oppression. The point should also be made that this activity is an experiment—it should by no

means be harmful or offensive to any of the classmates or the teacher. It is serving as an avenue through which students can learn important communication skills (we will elaborate on specific dialogue skills in Step 5) and be given the tools they need to effectively handle a bullying situation that they may encounter.

Step 4: Bullying—Another Form of Oppression

Scenario: Cafeteria. A girl is new to the school and hopes to optimize her chances of meeting people by sitting in the middle of the lunch table. Unbeknownst to her, the spot where she sat is where a boy usually sits every day to eat his lunch with his friends. The following ensues:

Boy: You're in my spot.

Girl: Am I?

Boy: Yes you are. Move.

Girl: I don't see your name anywhere on this spot.

Reflect: Analyze the situation...what do you think should happen next? What possibility should we go through together? After exploring that possibility, try another one. Was it more effective or realistic?

Let's watch a video that illustrates a strategy for stopping a bully. As you watch, write down some things that you find interesting or strategies that you notice him using:

Video: "How to Stop a Bully" by Brooks Gibbs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oKjW1OIjuw>

Discussion: Ask students to ponder their observations of the video and write them down on a piece of paper. After a few minutes, invite students to share their observations. Make sure to include the following points in the discussion:

- Bullying vs. Dominance Behavior; other people trying to overpower others; "alpha male mentality"
- Be resilient, strong, and tough. You need to "seek to understand, then be understood." (Covey)
- It's a game about winning/ losing power; you don't need high levels of self-confidence or self-esteem; just don't get upset no matter what they say—simple logic
 - Assault/ battery= physical harm; you can get upset
 - Empower students to solve their own social problems. Doing so helps them grow in self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-worth

As Step 4 comes to a close, brainstorm what sorts of skills or strategies might be useful in these kinds of situations that the students have worked with. Dialogue (conversation) skills apply to almost any imaginable situation or problem...yet some cases are more difficult than others. Talk about how students need to go into the dialogue feeling respect for the other person. Ask them why that respect might be important. How might it change the outcome of their conversation?

Step 5: Importance of Dialogue Skills (from *Crucial Conversations*)

Let's look at our cafeteria scenario again as we walk through seven important skills for a good dialogue.

1. Describe the specific behaviors you have observed (Patterson, pg. 196); talk about the patterns rather than just a particular instance—then discuss solutions. Don't let serious problems go unresolved, but know that it's alright to come back to a discussion when emotions aren't as high.
2. Utilize contrasting to state your view; be patient. Also, be willing to apologize
3. Everyone should have a sense of accountability. Gain a commitment to solve the overall problem, not just the stated cause (Patterson, pg. 208)
4. Let others know that all ideas are open to question (Patterson, pg. 200); trust is usually offered in degrees and is topic-sensitive.
5. You are the only person you can work on—start simple; you can't control another person's agency, but start building safety in your dialogue with them by talking about how you talk. Don't tolerate insubordination.
6. Know that perhaps your tolerance might be the problem, not their behavior.
7. Talk about expectations, give and take responsibility and then follow-up. If responsibility is not carried through, it is a new problem to address—but still focus on the pattern rather than the instance. Take it one step at a time. Progress is the aim, not perfection!

Step 6: Performance

Step 6 is their assessment; it serves to help students demonstrate their understanding of the principles that have been taught throughout the leadership curriculum (effective communication, humility, understanding, persuasion, and action). This assessment may also require the enlistment of another class. The purpose of their performance is for the students to demonstrate their understanding by performing vignettes that address bullying. In their performance, they will also share what they have learned about understanding one another and taking action towards positive change. There is also potential for this performance to be on a larger scale—perhaps an anti-bullying assembly could be organized for the school, and the students that went through the leadership curriculum would express their learning and understanding through their performances for the student body. Whether this performance is to one class or to the school, it will broaden the student's awareness of bullying as a form of oppression and how they can free themselves from that oppressive state.

Conclusion

This curricular plan for leadership is not a comprehensive curriculum that explains everything that a leader is or needs to have. It serves to give junior high school students the tools they need to communicate effectively and begin mastering the “crucial conversations” that they have with potential bullies. I do not intend to see the full effects of this curriculum on my students; if I am to be successful in teaching my students to be leaders, then their growth in that capacity will be realized well after they leave my classroom. I just hope that, from the experiences that they have had in this leadership curriculum that the students will see themselves as valued and important. That empowerment will change their view of themselves, and consequently it will change their lives.

Works Cited

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