

Creating Flashback: A Community Based Service Learning

Project for Actor's Youth Theatre

by

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## ABSTRACT

In this document I detail the inception of the community service learning program, "Flashback," that I created for Actor's Youth Theatre (AYT), of Mesa Arizona. I first provide the organization's history and then expound upon my beliefs and how the ASU theatre for youth program, along with the needs of AYT, led me to create the program. I then describe the goals and processes of implementing the community based project. I also define service learning and why the program was designed around its principles. Finally, I describe the program's curriculum, devising process and Flashback's first trial run, and then continue, evaluating the performance and reflecting upon the process. The appendix includes the devised script, photos of the performance and interaction with the community, some of the planned curriculum and portions of my journals written during the process.

## DEDICATION

This document is dedicated to Cara Palmer and the first eight members of AYT's Flashback. Thank you for your creativity, caring and all the fun! I also have a loving wife and family who supported me through it all.

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## CHAPTER 1

### TERMS

As I attempt to explain the process and implementation of the Flashback program, it is important that these few terms are defined for the reader to understand the full scope of the project.

Service Learning— “Service-learning is a method by which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service.” ([www.learnandservearizona.com](http://www.learnandservearizona.com)) Service Learning is usually a program implemented by government education, collegiate or public school organizations to further educate students through community involvement. Service learning supports a reciprocal benefit to both the community and the student. It should fulfill a need within the community and for the student, promote, “. . . personal academic and social growth, civic responsibility and career exploration.” ([www.learnandservearizona.com](http://www.learnandservearizona.com)) Service learning provides valuable and needed interaction between public education and the community, where students have the opportunity to become socially aware and responsible.

Devising— “Devising or collaborative creation is a process of generating performance.” ([www.palgrave.com](http://www.palgrave.com)) Although there are many ways of “generating performance”, for this document, devising represents the collaborative effort of the students in Actor’s Youth Theatre’s “Flashback” program and their development of an original scripted performance that was performed for seniors in their community. In this form, the devising process begins with teacher or director facilitated activities that allow a group to create and improvise scenes and dialogue, followed by group collaboration in writing, choreographing and directing, leading to the creation of a fully scripted production.

Community based: In her book “Local Acts,” Jan Cohen-Cruz refers to community as a group of people “constituted by virtue of shared primary identity based in place, ethnicity, class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation”.(2) She also describes communities as fluid and ever changing, stating “Identities are so complex and multiple that it may not be obvious who is of the community”(3), but we are part of “many communities”(3). I agree with this statement and for me, community represents everyone that affects our daily lives or that can be affected by us.

Community based theater and initiatives focus on social issues and bringing community together in promoting understanding and purpose. Cohen-Cruz says, that community based art is “a collaboration between an artist, or an ensemble and the community” (1). Thus community based theatre serves a broad spectrum. Whether it be for education, service or to explore an issue, community based work often engages the community in connections and explorations that fill needs not being met or aid in problem solving. Although the types of community based work range widely, in this document the work is referred to as a program that is created for young artists to connect generations through interaction, service, education, devising and performance. In this sense, community based theater is used to create conditions for youth to practice cultural exploration, and develop a sense of who they are as invaluable members of a broader community.

## CHAPTER 2

### MY BACKGROUND AND BELIEFS

Before I go into detail about the Flashback program, I would like first to give some background about the theatre, myself and my beliefs. The reason for this introduction is not only to give background on the organization, but also to help you understand where I've been and how my past and the history of Actor's Youth Theatre has influenced the conceptualization of this program and my choices in creating it. It has been my great pleasure for the past ten years to work with the youth of my community through a non-profit youth theatre. I founded the theatre with my sister, on the basis that we wanted to make a difference in the lives of those youth. My goal, as a professional in the community, is to continue educating, entertaining and enriching the lives of young people through the art of theatre. My work centers on helping young people discover their potential. My spirituality, family, and education play important roles in my endeavors. I firmly believe that much of whom we are as adults stems from our experiences in our youth and that lives can be changed through the theatre experience. My work cannot exist without community support and thus community is vital to the art.



Teaching young artists is a passion of mine. After obtaining my bachelors degree from ASU in 2001, I taught youth theater classes and produced and directed youth plays and musicals for four years at The Phoenix Center for the Arts. Focusing on inner-city youth populations, I developed curriculum, taught classes and directed young actors in plays and musicals.

I then went on to co-found and become the Executive Director of Actor's Youth Theatre (AYT) in Mesa, Arizona. Since 2002, I have produced, directed, designed, choreographed and stage-managed many of AYT's productions. As the Executive Director of a non-profit youth theatre, I was able to gain first-hand experience in theatre management, to create a 501(c) 3, manage fundraising and grant writing, plan community involvement and to create many programs and processes essential to the health of this youth organization. Through AYT I have had the opportunity to prepare curriculums and teach many theatre classes and workshops, including a highly successful lineup of summer workshops.

I believe that theater helps young people learn important traits and life skills that are not gained through our current education system. Winifred Ward, founder of the Evanston Children's Theatre and one of the founders of what is now the American Alliance for

Theatre Education said the following: "When a child studies and portrays a character in relation to other characters, he is studying life itself. His horizon is broadened, his interest in people is deepened, and his power of expressing himself grows strong." She continues, "Whether he is in the cast or stage crew, he learns much from the experience of working closely with others toward a common end. Self-discipline in the subordination of self, democracy from working with children of other stations in life, other races and beliefs, responsibility, good sportsmanship, poise " (Combs 124). Other traits I would add to Ward's list would be patience, tolerance, compassion, humor, trust, and courage. I believe young people who participate in theatre are able to handle life experiences with more wisdom and courage than youth without theatre. By studying and acting out the lives of others, young people vicariously learn from their stories and I would argue that there is no other extracurricular activity through which a young person can gain more life skills. Linda Hartzell, Artistic Director of the Seattle Children's Theater said, "I taught for 17 years and I've seen first-hand that theater makes for smarter, braver human beings. Theater helps connect the head to the heart" (Wood 1). I've had a front row seat in witnessing these developments in the youth I serve, and I cannot think of a more rewarding experience.

I have now served AYT for ten years, and although it is one of my biggest passions, I have many other facets in my life that demand my attention. My wife and I have four children together. We started and lost two different businesses over the last 7 years and in-between those ventures I've worked full time for two production and event companies. In 2008, I began to feel more overwhelmed than ever with these ventures and took a job in another city thinking I would leave AYT and my life in Phoenix for good. All my responsibilities seemed to muddle my area of expertise and squelch the passion for the work that I once had. After moving, I immediately realized that my work at AYT was much more important to me than I realized, and in 2009, after juggling jobs I was able to return to Phoenix and resume my work. It was through this process that I realized if I was going to work doing what I loved, I had to get further education and a higher degree, so that in the future I could combine my need for income with my passion. In returning to the university, and ASU's Theatre for Youth program, I had goals of learning how to further develop AYT in hopes of making my position more profitable to the organization. What actually happened was a rekindling of a spark that I had for the work with young people, their issues, and projects about which I am passionate. I was especially inspired by the professors and the passion

they each had for their work. Each of them was working on projects that they found inspiring or important. The Flashback project was inspired by the many influences of the ASU TYA program and the new skills and philosophies I acquired.

## CHAPTER 3

### HISTORY OF ACTOR'S YOUTH THEATRE

In 2004, Julie Clement and I came together with a desire to involve East Mesa youth in theatre. With over 25 years of experience behind us, we opened Actor's Youth Theatre. I became the Executive Artistic Director of Actor's Youth Theatre and Julie the Producing Artistic Director for the organization.

In 2006, AYT became a non-profit organization, and as such formed its board of directors with Kristen Bowler as the new General Manager. Hundreds of students (ages 8-18) are involved in AYT performances, classes, and workshops each year.

AYT now attracts youth and audience from across the valley. The 2010/11 season of productions garnered over 30 AriZoni award nominations (an organization that awards theatre excellence in Arizona) and won various National Youth Theatre Awards. AYT has its "home" at Ballet Etudes, a premier dance studio in the Mesa area, where students may enroll in acting classes, audition, and study theatre, music and dance.

### Mission Statement for Actor's Youth Theatre

"The Actor's Youth Theatre of Mesa is a performing arts organization with the mission of educating, entertaining, and enriching the lives of young people and their families through the art of theatre. We provide opportunities for youth to develop their acting abilities and musical talents through comprehensive performing arts workshops, community service, performance opportunities and the presentation of theatre productions for school and family audiences." ([www.actoryouththeatre.com](http://www.actoryouththeatre.com))

## CHAPTER 4

### WHAT LED TO THIS PROJECT

Being able to listen to and learn from the teaching artists in my classes these past semesters has compelled me to focus on work that I am truly interested in. I've actually been able to drop projects that, in the past, I would never have been able to say "no" to, because I now understand the importance of working and creating something meaningful and of value to myself and others. My experiences at ASU have helped me to further realize how my organization can benefit youth and the community. Thus, I continue to work endless hours without pay to keep the organization alive. Before my time at ASU this would have led to burnout, but now the purpose/mission of AYT and how it can benefit youth and the community is clearer and more meaningful to me.

My education in the TYA program at ASU gave me insights into many aspects of working with young people, but what really stuck with me is the wonderful enlightenment that can take place when a young person is empowered to create his/her own work or improvise his/her own point of view. In a "Methods of teaching Drama" class I learned to lead young people through improvisations and the creative process. In

my Touring Theatre and Devising Theatre classes, I experienced various methods of devising and how to develop those methods into performance. I studied the devising methods of Jacques Lequoc, Eugenio Barba, Phillip Zarilli, and Richard Schechner, as well as the improvisational games and methods of Augusto Boal and Viola Spolin. In a Community Based class I learned how to use these methods in work within the community and researched many inspiring programs and organizations that were implementing service based initiatives with passion and success. The Flashback program was inspired by these classes and the experiences that I had while at ASU. It was from the experience I gained in these classes that that I formed the model for "Flashback," which I will expound on later in this document.

Through interacting with many young people who have been involved in the various plays and classes at AYT, I have heard the question over and over: "Can this count for my service learning hours?" After investigation into the "service learning" initiative by the Mesa Public School District, and after seeing the community service that the requirement inspires in youth, I knew that adding service was an essential piece of the larger community based theatre project.that I had been contemplating over the past few semesters as the



culminating experience of my education. After studying the service learning model, it was easy to see how devising a work for community engagement could fit the service learning standards. For example, in my touring class, my fellow students and I devised a work for production and were assigned responsibilities outside of just acting in the production such as scheduling or script writing. This example fits the service learning model by giving ownership and community connection opportunities to the participants. I was sure that a group of responsible teenagers would be able to go through the same process, if guided correctly, thus engaging them in a "hands on" initiative, while they created something to present to the community.

As the Executive Director for the non-profit youth theatre, I've assisted in the creation of many programs that are essential to the organization. At the same time I was completing my university classes, the Board of Directors of the theatre requested that we create a much needed community service program that would satisfy the requirement of some of the various grants for which they were applying. I decided if we chose a project carefully, we could include this service learning paradigm to serve our community and bring mutual benefit to all: to me as my culminating project, to the board as

their community service program and to the youth as their service learning opportunity. The fact was, that simply performing in a community youth production did not fit the service learning requirements and I hated explaining to these young people why I would not sign off on their rehearsal hours as service learning. To me, service learning requires much more than simply rehearsing and performing, it requires community interaction that involves the student in a much more personal experience of community service.

In my "Community Based Theatre" class at ASU I studied an organization in New Orleans that exemplifies this interaction. The Young Aspirations Young Artist Organization empowers youth through art to become successful adults. The students use their art to beautify the city as well as sell their creations through local businesses. The interaction comes as these young people are required to approach and deal professionally with local businesses and community members. As the students learn to interact and be professional, the community and business owners take a role in fostering the development of these youth, ultimately connecting the two groups and fostering relationships between the two. Although the YAYA organization isn't focused on service learning, they bring about the interaction between

students and the community that should be experienced through a service learning program. With examples like YAYA, I was able to focus AYT's community based theatre project toward this interaction.

## CHAPTER 5

### WHY THIS COMMUNITY BASED MODEL?

Since applying for their last grant for Actors Youth Theatre, the board of directors and grant writers had been discussing additional ways that they could connect with the community and thereby better align with the theatre's vision/mission. It became my responsibility as the Executive Director to come up with and implement a program that would achieve this.

In trying to choose a project, I first began looking at the demographics of our community and what populations were disconnected to the youth. I also felt that it was important that the young artists participating were able to serve in a way that brought deeper meaning to their lives, helped them become more socially aware and gave them a service learning opportunity. I have a niece who performs at a clinical retirement home each weekend for Alzheimer's patients. After asking about her experience there, she informed me that hardly anyone comes to see these people and that they enjoyed having such a youthful presence in their midst, and it helped them remember and relive old memories. It seemed a natural fit that our youth could perform and interact with these patients. I

concluded that a need in our community was to engage the senior citizens, particularly those who had no community relations, in meaningful activities and connections with the young people of the community.

This by no means would be the first program of this type. In creating my project, I looked for examples of similar work and discovered that there has been a significant amount of work and research done to support the benefits of this interaction. The Age Exchange Theatre Company of London has spent over 25 years connecting these two populations and lists such benefits as, "passing on heritage, learning from another's experiences, and bringing communities together, giving individuals, "A strong sense of who they are" ([ageexchange.org.uk](http://ageexchange.org.uk)). The Full Circle Theatre Troup at Temple University in Philadelphia has brought together youth and seniors for 30 years to, "reach all audiences to encourage change, helping to break down stereotypes that young and old might have about each other." (Shuey) The results of their performances have dispelled stereotypes and fear the separate generations have of each other. There are many other programs of this nature, and even some in our own community. However due to the city's large senior population I felt that AYT could assist in connecting these two groups of people.

I have older parents that are alone and who literally live for their children come to visit them so they can tell stories and enjoy their company. Having observed how they perk up and are energized by my children, I can't imagine being there age and not having someone to retell my experiences to and visit with. I see this now as an obvious need in the community, and the people that we were going to be visiting and entertaining would feel that same feeling of being valued and belonging that my parents feel when I visit them. Through this interaction the youth would develop confidence, responsibility, respect, awareness of the past, awareness of the health issues of seniors, meaningful community relationships and respect for the differences between themselves and the senior population, and the seniors would reminisce, feel valued, feel connected and loved.

The East Valley and East Mesa, Arizona, the part of town where AYT has its home, is the largest retirement area in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area, with 16 assisted living communities currently in Mesa. Nearby, Apache Junction has 4 and Gilbert has 1. In reaching out to those 21 communities, I developed a beginning concept for the project as follows: Actors Youth Theatre would create a new performance troupe called Flashback. Flashback would consist of 10 to 20 performers, ages 10-15 designed to connect and build relationships

between youth and seniors in our community. Flashback would tour the Valley's assisted living homes, adult communities and senior centers, performing their own devised production, which would include music, dance, and comedy from the 1940's, 50's and 60's. The Youth would not only perform but also participate in service projects, play card or board games, or simply spend time listening and talking with seniors in the community.

The rehearsal process would be designed to help young actors get a feel for the devising process. Through improvisation and guided activities, the group would participate in putting together a production that would relate to and entertain the senior generation. Young actors would also be given responsibilities within the group to design, promote and assist in performances.

Interested youth would audition for the group on September 14th at 7:00 p.m. at Ballet Etudes in Mesa and the group would be directed by Marcus Ellsworth and Cara Palmer. Flashback would rehearse Thursday evenings from 7:00-8:30 p.m. and would not conflict with other AYT productions or classes. The devising and rehearsal process would take place throughout one semester and the group would perform throughout the following months. There would

be a \$125 program fee which would cover rehearsal space, music and instructors and there would also be a one-time \$20 polo shirt fee.

Again, the above concept was just a start to what would later develop into the full program. As the artistic director at the time, for AYT, it was my responsibility to propose this program to our board of directors. At the time the AYT board was very focused on fund raising, and due to the recent popularity of Fox Television's "GLEE," there was extreme pressure to create a group of this nature that would sing and dance. I felt that by just creating a "GLEE" group we would fail to achieve our needs as an organization of enriching and serving the community and helping AYT become more grant worthy. This had become clear to me in my "Community Based" Class at ASU where after researching many community programs such as the Age Exchange Theatre, I became aware of the importance of the actual personal contact and engagement that needed to take place. There had to be a personal connection and a sharing of mutual appreciation and benefits.

I presented the project to our Board at one of AYT's monthly board meetings (see appendix Journal Entrée 1). At the meeting, after presenting my idea, I was met with skepticism that the program would not be popular, or that these young people would not see this program



as current or keeping up with pop culture and the latest craze. At the time, I felt these board members were hugely underestimating the maturity of our young actors, especially after everything I had learned at ASU. I know that young people today do care and love to serve; they just have to be given the opportunities and inspired with the drive to do so. With this in mind, I made it very clear to the board, that in order for our organization to apply for many of the grants we were interested in we had to have a program that mutually benefitted the community as well as the youth participating. Those board members that had been working on grants were in agreement. By explaining that the program would be "GLEE" like, in a way that it would fulfill our community involvement needs and by raising the tuition a bit, I was able to secure the green light for the program. After getting the board's approval, it was up to me to create and implement the program.

## CHAPTER 6

### STRUCTURING THROUGH SERVICE LEARNING

As I began structuring the new program, it was important to me that this opportunity for young artists could count as service learning hours in their perspective public school programs. However, in order to structure this project to comply with the school district's service learning standards, I needed to understand, in some depth, just what service learning involved and how a theater project like this would fit with service learning standards. By studying the Mesa Public School Districts rules and requirements found on their website, and referring to the national and state service learning standards, also found on their websites, I found support for my conviction that using this model was an excellent fit to the service learning criteria. I will go into more detail of how they fit later in this document, but I also learned that if the students completed 150 hours of approved service learning, and turned in the proper paper work to their school district, that they could receive either a \$500 or \$1000 scholarship for higher education, a point that the AYT board found very exciting.

I would like to show here how the "Flashback" project and devised theatre projects of this type in general fall in line with service learning criteria. The following standards of Arizona's service learning

program are listed on the Learn and Serve Arizona website [www.learnandservearizona.com](http://www.learnandservearizona.com). I will italicize each standard and then show how the "Flashback" program complies.

*Service-learning is a method by which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is . . .*

*1. conducted in and meets real needs of a community (schools may be defined as community)*

"Flashback" performances are conducted in community retirement homes and centers. The program meets the needs of youth and seniors. I believe it helps both groups to feel connected to each other, validated and socially accepted.

A manual for intergenerational programs put out by St. Thomas University states, "When the old are not allowed to tell their story, the young grow up without history. If the young are not listened to, we have no future." It also states, "Approaches that recognize the need for youth to be stimulated and busy in critical times of development attest to outcomes that have shown that resilient youth are those that feel that they have some talents and are able to share those talents and feel that they are important to someone." The manual also states that, "seniors often experience a need to feel that they are

contributing to the next generation, in some way. Many fill this need through their relationships with their children and grandchildren. Many others, who have no children or grandchildren of their own, look for other means to make a positive difference in the lives of younger people. Intergenerational programs can fill this void.”

([www.stthomasu.ca/research/youth/manual/conclusion.html](http://www.stthomasu.ca/research/youth/manual/conclusion.html))

2. [Service learning] *is integrated into and enhances the academic curricula of students. . . .*

The Flashback program directly correlates with various state theatre standards. For example: “THEATRE: Strand 1: Create; Concept 2: Acting; Intermediate; PO 202. As a character, play out her/his wants by interacting with others, maintaining concentration, and contributing to the action of classroom improvisations: (website)

AYT has been and is assured that the program is enhancing the need for social education and providing theater education through communicating with the teachers of the students involved. The students, as part of the service learning process, are given forms that they must fill out describing their activities and hours that are then approved by their teacher.

3. [Service learning] *Provides structured time for students to reflect on their service experiences and demonstrate knowledge or skills they have gained.*

The students are able to demonstrate what they've learned and reflect on their experiences through performance, talkbacks with students after performances, and by having them share highlights of their experiences on Facebook.

4 [Service Learning] *Helps foster civic responsibility. . . .*

It is through the interaction that both seniors and our young artists experience a community unity. Seeing and listening to the elderly in their state of care and need brings about a consciousness that makes the students aware of the needs of these community members and fosters a caring and compassionate spirit towards them.

In following the criteria above, I found that the Flashback project is exemplary of the service learning model. By structuring the program in accordance with these guidelines, the project not only qualifies as service learning for the students, but also benefits these young people in so many other ways. This kind of learning creates more responsible and caring

individuals that will contribute to the community and the world, now and in the future. When done through theater, there are even more benefits to be seen, as performance and the study of theater itself provide many benefits for young people, such as those listed earlier in this document. Theater gives young people an emotional outlet and means of expression that they may not get elsewhere. Betty Kessler Lyman, a pioneer of the Federal Theater Project," believed the theatre's program aided child development through encouraging freedom of expression, by providing an emotional outlet" (Heard 102) Stress in a young person's life can be worked through and dealt with in a safe space for creativity and expression. Theater and improvisation provides just that. For example, just this summer I had a 17-year-old young man thank me for saving his life after he had participated in our youth theatre's production of "*Les Miserable: School Edition*". I asked him how. He said to read his Facebook page. He wrote the following:

" For the longest time, I thought my life story had been most like Fantine's. Life in the past couple years has brought me so many disappointments and realization of all the bad that life really comes with. I learned about death, I watched death, and I

stared at death straight in the eyes. I've lived with feeling like life was not worth living anymore. There was so much loss in my life, than I didn't feel like I had anything left.

Then I watch Valjean give his last confession to Cosette. It reminded me that I have a purpose. I have a purpose to be who I am, and leave something behind on Earth after I die. I'm only 16... And I can do so much more. As sad as I am, as painful as it gets, I need to know that "even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise." Joy comes in the morning sky, and it's hard to remember that sometimes.

My depression has been difficult, for the past two years. I have regrets. Just like Jean Valjean. But I have been, and will continue to make up for them. This is my life, and once you really think about it, it's a lot more meaningful than it really seems. I have people to love, places to go, and many, many more things to learn. Life has this to offer for me. So I think I'll stick around. I will join your crusade, and I will be strong and stand with you. There is a world beyond the barricade that I long to see, and I WILL see it. I will find light in my darkest times. I will live." ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com), 2012)

I know that theater can have a positive influence on a young person's life as it did with this young man. "Flashback" is so much more than service learning; it is a community experience that can truly change lives.



## CHAPTER 7

### STRUCTURING THROUGH DEVISING

As stated in the proposal for the project, "Flashback" would tour the Valley's assisted living homes, adult communities and senior centers, performing their own devised production, which will include music, dance, and comedy from the 1940's, 50's and 60's." Therefore, in planning the process in which the devised production would be put together, it was important look at the requirements and preparations that would be needed to produce such a show.

I allocated rehearsal hours and a rehearsal space for the devising of the show. I chose to hold rehearsals only once a week on Thursday evenings for 2 and ½ hours. I had to create a budget for an instructor/director, the rehearsal space, printing, music and for any costumes, props or scenery that would be needed. As AYT was operating on a very lean budget it was important for us to charge a minimal fee to the participants to cover these expenses. I was able to charge the participants \$125 for the semester as well as a \$20 for polo shirts with matching logos. Finally, I had to find the right co - instructor for the job and it had to be someone familiar with the creative learning and the devising process. I chose to have two instructors, because of schedule conflicts I had with some of the

Thursday night rehearsals. Choosing the right instructor was imperative to the project's success. Cara Palmer is a niece of mine who had recently graduated from Virginia Southern University in theater education. After speaking with her, I found that we both had many of the same ideas in mind: mainly that we wanted to empower the students to devise their own work and foster a creative process that gave these young people the power and atmosphere to create. We also had learned many of the same processes of devising in our education. Because we knew and were familiar with each other and each other's work it made me very comfortable to begin this program with her.

We (Cara Palmer and I) only planned activities for the first few sessions in order to give us the flexibility to assess where the group was in their progress and also to let the group have more control at that point over their own process. Together we then created a curriculum for these first few sessions using devising exercises and improvisation to inspire the young actors' imaginations and create an atmosphere of acceptability. Our goal was to use initial improvisation exercises to help the group feel comfortable with each other and bond as a team. We began with exercises that involved everyone improvising at once and evolved into improvisations that featured one

or two people performing for the rest. We decided the first rehearsal would be used to get everyone comfortable with each other and to bond as a group. We began with an introduction exercise where the students mingled in a street as reporters; they were each given a name and a list of questions to ask the person, such as: "What is your favorite place to visit?" Then in a circle they took turns introducing each other to the rest of the group as reporters. By doing this not only did they each meet someone in the group, but they also let the group learn something about them. We then played some of the group improvisation games that I learned in the TYA program such as an activity where the students walk the room and the instructor calls out a number. The students would then band together in groups of whatever number was called out and those that are not in a group with the correct number must step out. We used other games like this to get the group comfortable with being near each other and to break down inhibitions. We ended the session with our first group devising activity in which we divided students into groups of two and three and gave them a title of a 1950's television show or movie. Each group then created their own scene around the title they were given we gave each group time to present their scenes and filmed them for later review. This was very similar to an activity used to devise in my

"Touring Theatre course at ASU. We made it a rule that they had to use each person in their group in the scene, that there had to be a beginning middle and an end, that it could not be over two minutes long and had to be kept to a PG rating. Young people always seem to understand immediately what the movie rating system means. We were amazed how creative the kids were with these scenes. Already we were seeing characters and scenarios that would later be used in their created script. After this activity we ended with a reflection discussion where we discussed a possible basis for our show. Many great ideas were thrown out, and at the end we, as instructors, decided we would step out of the room to let them decide together on two or three of these ideas they would like to explore next class. At this point we felt comfortable doing this as we had already seen each of the students in action, and they were already collaborating so well. We knew that letting them decide on their own would be a way to help them take ownership of the process and their production. This worked well and they came up with some great ideas. (see appendix for journal of first session)

We allocated the next three rehearsals for instructor lead devising activities. We realized this was a short amount of time to devise, but knew that we needed the rest of the rehearsals to actually

rehearse the show, learn vocals and choreography. We created a calendar that scheduled which of us would direct or teach each song, lead each exercise and teach any added choreography.

The goal of our devising process was to help the participants develop their own show using their own ideas, while being inspired by the materials of the era or theme on which we were basing the performance. I was able to adapt some of the exercises that I learned in classes at ASU to fit the age levels we were working with (see appendix for full session plans). Because we decided to theme our first devised show using television and films from the 1950s and 1960s, we knew that our cast would have limited experience with the source material. It would be up to us to introduce this material to them in a very short time. We did this by recommending sources to the cast that they could watch or listen to as homework of sorts. Youtube was an amazing resource for this. During the devising classes, we used the now familiar source materials as a basis for improvisation, writing and other devising exercises. Not only did using these materials help with ideas but it also helped the cast relate to our audience and in the end we found that they cared more to listen to the stories and experiences that our audiences would share. One of the most helpful planned activities we used was a story-telling activity

that I learned as an undergraduate at ASU. We would take existing ideas for plot lines and then, sitting in a circle, begin furthering the story line with each person contributing to the story. For example the first student would say, "Once upon a time there was a horse and then . . ." the student to his right would then continue, "The horse escaped from his barn, and then . . ." and it would continue until the story was resolved. We would then discuss the stories as a group to decide which parts we liked and then the students assigned to writing would quickly jot down the general plot. It became very important to remind the students that not all of these activities had to be comical or silly. Young actors tend to resort to comedy as a way to impress or be accepted by the rest of the group. In leading the activity we plainly explained that in order to develop a legitimate story line, the contributions to the story would need to be plausible and further the plot, funny or not. At this point in our progression the group was able to do this quite well.

In the next couple sessions we continued our devising process and settled on a few specific inspirations for parts of the show. We also started choreography, which was set to an opening song that was generic for the time so that it could fit in with whatever the show became. It was important to start right away on this as to at least

have a couple of quality choreographed numbers. It seemed valuable to the parents that their kids were learning something they could come home and physically show off.

For the next two rehearsals we continued exploring the topics that we had chosen. Another activity we used with the group that worked well, is where we had them reenact or mime parts of old television shows that were given as homework to view for the rest of the cast and then had each pair of actors construct alternate endings and perform them. It was during this exercise that some of the more entertaining parts of the script were devised. After the fourth rehearsal, our script writers had a general script. It became necessary at this point for us as instructors to sit down with the writers and help them edit their content for time as well as content. We did not tell them which lines to cut but rather helped them talk through and decide which scenes were working and which were not. By the term "working," I mean scenes that we felt would hold the audience's attention and were consistent with the overall theme of the piece. Again, it was important to let them ultimately decide which cuts and edits were to be made so that they felt that the work was theirs. This process was very educational for those who were participating in the writing. As the editing progressed, the students began suggesting the

cuts and doing all the discussing. They began to stand up for the parts they really liked and compromise on parts that weren't as important. We were able to listen and give validation to their reasons for wanting to keep or cut dialogue. By doing this they truly felt ownership over the production.



## CHAPTER 8

### PROCESSES AND MORE STRUCTURE

Before auditions we developed an invitation letter that we sent to targeted individuals that the theatre had worked with before in order to insure we could gather enough participants to create our program. Our audition sign-ups were set up on [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com), where you can have your auditioning students sign up and include their information. We also sent a mass e-mail to all past participants at AYT about the auditions.

The auditions themselves consisted of filling out a registration form, an informative meeting, introductions, improvisation, singing and dancing. The registration form collected their personal contact information for the actors as well as their parents, it then detailed the experience they would be having and gave a detailed rehearsal schedule. The form provided a space that the actors could list any conflicts that they would be having and explained the importance of consistent attendance in this type of program. It also provided a space to list all conflicts with the rehearsal schedule. Making sure all conflicts are listed is extremely important as lengthy absence can create very uncomfortable circumstances, especially when working in such a short timeframe and in such a collaborative way.

During auditions, groups of eight prospective cast members were brought into the room at a time. Each in turn introduced themselves and then drew an improvisation card. They would immediately read the card and then respond with an improvisation. The cards read things like: Declare you will now run for president and tell why at a press conference, or Perform the opening number of the Lion King by yourself. It did not really matter what they did just that they did something to show they were able to overcome inhibitions and produce ideas quickly. We then taught all eight students the same song that each had to perform individually and then did the same thing with choreography. Each audition lasted about one half hour. By giving the students "on the spot" things to learn, perform and improvise we were able to see which of the young artists would be up to the devising process. Out of the thirty five or so young people who auditioned we ended up casting eight girls and four boys. We felt important to keep our cast size small, so that we could adapt to any performance space.

Having only an hour and a half each week, it was important that the students understood the rules and expectations immediately. For this we used the AYT handbook of rules of expectations that AYT uses in any show and read them aloud together. Again, we wanted to

create a safe environment where everyone's ideas were good and accepted and made this extremely clear to the cast from the beginning. After reading this from the hand book, we stopped and discussed how we would react to any idea that seemed strange or ludicrous and let the students comment on how they felt these ideas should be handled. This way the students knew and felt comfortable that their ideas would not be rejected.

To help qualify the work as service learning and to help them feel ownership of their created show, we gave each member a working role in the production. These included assistant director, stage manager, tech director, choreographers, booking agents, a secretary/writers, properties designer and costume designer. By giving the cast members these roles it not only educated them in their perspective roles, but also kept them more invested in the actual production. It also helped us as instructors not to bear too large of a burden in the implementation of the program and production. We decided that at the end of each rehearsal we would then meet as our administrative roles and report on our progress, providing accountability and helping motivate the cast members to fulfill their duties. We also created a Facebook group page where we would be able to connect with our cast and give updates. It was a great place

for the actors to reflect upon their experiences which also kept us in line with service learning requirements. It was in our second rehearsal that we discussed possible administrative and creative roles that each participant might take and the responsibilities of each role (see appendix for journal entry) we assigned the following positions to those who were interested: 2 Booking Agents, Stage Manager, Secretary, Costumes, Assistant choreographers and, 2 script writers. Note that we did not just assign these roles. Each student in the group was approached by the group with what they would be interested in doing to help with the show. If they did not have a certain interest we, as instructors, would suggest a role and explain the commitments of that role. In the end it was important to us that each student was comfortable and interested in the roles they were given. This way they would take responsibility for accepting their role and would perform the role as if it were their idea. Young people are much more passionate about things when it's their idea.

During the weeks after the first four sessions, we gathered the music and backing tracks that we would use in the show, while the rest of the cast was creating choreography, setting performance appointments, gathering props and costumes and finishing the script. Roles and solos were assigned by small auditions, held during

rehearsal, and time was allotted at the end of each rehearsal to meet about each cast member's individual responsibilities. All subsequent rehearsals were divided up by scenes and musical numbers and slowly but surely by December we started pulling together a full forty-five minute show. The final rehearsal of the semester was a performance for the cast's parents and family in the studio. In the future I would like to generate a feedback form that parents could fill out at this performance as it may benefit the actual performances.

When the devising process was complete, the show that the group created was a collection of invented scenes and musical numbers from television movies of the 50's and 60's including "I Love Lucy," "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and "Singin in the Rain." The set included a couple of small tables and chairs, while the costumes were just hats and jackets that were used to show character changes.

Our first performance happened at the Arbor Rose Assisted Living Center in Mesa. The audience consisted of thirty seniors with assisted living needs and their caregivers. The stage was the center of a large living-room-like space with couches and recliners circled around a large television and our backup accompaniment was on an Ipod run through a small boom box, which was plenty of volume for the small space. Many of the audience members were in their wheel

chairs. As the group placed their set, props and costumes, I introduced them and let the audience know that the actors would be coming around to introduce themselves after the performance and possibly listen to a few of their stories.

As the performance proceeded I was able to watch the interaction between the cast and their audience and saw a profound respect grow between the two. Before the performance the seniors seemed bored and tired, and by the end they were clapping and talking. The actors were so nervous to begin with, and by the end, they were energetic and couldn't wait to interact. The performance ended to a great applause and the cast immediately set out to talk to their audience. One of the cast members later commented on Facebook, "I loved talking to them. Once I got them started about their grandchildren they couldn't stop talking! It was so cute!" One of the senior audience members commented to the kids, "I will see you all on Broadway!" You could just really tell that they appreciated the show and what impressed me even more is how much the kids enjoyed talking and hearing stories from these folks afterwards. We stayed for almost an hour after the performance was done and before leaving the center had our own talkback, outside the facility, where the students exchanged stories about their interactions with the

seniors. I challenged the students to record their stories on the Flashback Facebook page, but their feedback was limited. In the future I would record these story sharing sessions immediately after the performance so that we could document them.

## CHAPTER 9

### REFLECTION

In the end the performance and program was a success. It was a success in that the young actors really did connect with the seniors and took time to listen and had patience in hearing them out. It was a success in that these kids could not stop talking about the stories they heard and were so excited to be able to do it again. It was a success in that the seniors really got involved in the performance. We saw tapping feet and clapping hands and quite a few shouted comments during the show at which the actors improvised so professionally.

I felt the entire experience was extremely beneficial to the cast members. They came away with a meaningful experience where they performed their own work, were appreciated and afterwards gave of their time to people that were eager to be heard. They were also able to rack up a substantial number of service learning hours that they used towards scholarships and their education.

The seniors also benefited. After speaking with a few of them, you understood that they ached for this type of interaction and it really brought back to them memories of their youth that they were able to share. One woman expressed that she always wished she had performed and was so proud that these kids were living their dreams.



Another was in tears, touched that these kids would give that much effort for them. One man, perhaps inspired by the material we presented, told an entire war story to one of the boys.

If I were to change a few things it would start with more rehearsal time each week. With their busy schedules, these students could hardly retain something for a full week. I would meet more often. I would also pre-plan a little more of the show before entering the devising process, just to provide a little more direction in the beginning. I could be very nice to get input from the seniors the group will be visiting and incorporate their ideas into the show as well. It really did help to have a second instructor; however, I would make sure the instructor could also be present at some of the performances. I would clarify with my co-instructor that she would need to attend performances because when it came down to it, she was not available.

One of the biggest things I will try in the future is to extend this opportunity to a younger age group. For this first group, all performers were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Although I feel it greatly benefited them, I think a younger group will have more time and be more committed. Older teenagers have so many opportunities at school, such as competing choir concerts and other arts related rehearsals that they tend to over book themselves.

Going forward, we have already begun the second semester of Flashback in which we have implemented some of these changes and it is going great. I believe we have created a program that is going to stick and hopefully have an effect on generations to come. Actor's Youth Theatre has since received two grants that we feel were accepted in part to our new service learning program.

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APPENDIX A  
DEVELOPED SCRIPT

Using their own creativity and imagination, working on their own, this is the actual script that was developed by the Flashback Team, all typos and errors are the result of the student's writing and editing ability:

- *There is a chair and some kind of old tv on stage left. Maybe a foot stool or something too... maybe some other "old people" decorations.*

Boy: (Walking in from stage left) I'm so bored. Grandma and Grandpas house is no fun. (Pulls out his iPod and sits in chair)

Grandfather: (Walking in with grandmother from stage right cross to left) Kids these days! They don't know music, I remember back in my day when music actually meant something instead of this garbage now-a-days.

Grandmother: You're right! I wish there was a way we could show him what it was like when we were young! To show him all the great music from our day.

Grandfather: (gasps) Well maybe there is! Hold on (grandfather exits.)

Grandmother: (Awkwardly) So... whatcha doing?

Boy: Nothing... (AWKWARD)

Grandfather: (Walks back in) Boy, I have something for you to do. Here you go. I found our old remote and thought some TV would interest you. (Him and the grandma wink at each other and exit)

Boy: Cool. Something to do. (Boy sits down and, *Click*)

Nicest kids in Town (*Click*)

(The factory tables move on with all the supplies. People are walking by- some have shopping bags. The manager sets up a sign reading, "Chocolate Factory has 2 job openings. See manager for details.")

There are less people walking by now. The manager sees the boy)

Manager: Where have you been!

Boy: Where am I?

Manager: Don't you play smart with me! Get inside and start working. (Hands him bucket and towel. She takes him downstage to scold him. Ethel and Lucy- with their shopping bags -are the last to walk by and see the sign)

Ethel: Oh look! They're hiring at the Chocolate Factory!

Lucy: (Dramatic) You get paid to eat chocolate all day?!

Ethel: I think that means you make the chocolate all day.

Lucy: Well if there's chocolate involved, I'm there.

Ethel: Let's call our husbands and let them know what we'll be doing.

Lucy: Why would we want to do that?

Ethel: Lucy.

Lucy: Okay, fine. (Lucy goes to pay phone. Ricky comes up downstage right reading the newspaper and sitting in a chair. He answers phone)

Ricky: (Annoyed) What is it this time Lucy?

Lucy: Ethel and I are applying for a job at the Chocolate Factory, so we will be out a little later.

Ricky: (Not listening) Uh-huh.

Lucy: Yeah! Isn't that great?! Chocolate and money together!

Ricky: (Still not listening) Mm-hmm. Sounds good Lucy.

Lucy: Okay bye! (They both hang up)

Ricky: Bye. (Lucy and Ethel go inside the factory to apply for the jobs. Ricky puts newspaper down and thinks about what they said. Fred walks in)

Fred: Have you seen Ethel?

Ricky: She and Lucy are applying for jobs at the chocolate factory.

Fred: Oh, okay.

Ricky: Doesn't eating chocolate all day sound better than sitting at a desk all day?

Fred: Yep.

Ricky: Hey, weren't you thinking of getting a new job?

Fred: Well, yeah, but-

Ricky: And how is it fair that our wives will be eating chocolate all day while we sit at our desks?

Fred: Well, you see-

Ricky: That's it, grab your coat! We're leaving. You and I will apply too. (They exit)

Manager: (To Ethel and Lucy) Alright, there are only two positions open, and it looks like you two will do a great job! Since there is no one else here, just go ahead and get started. (Lucy and Ethel go to tables and put on the hats. Ricky and Fred enter)

Ricky: (Announces) We are here to apply for a job in your chocolate factory! (Lucy and Ethel are shocked)

Manager: Ooh! Competition! Well let's see who the best chocolatiers are and- (steps in chocolate and motions for the boy to clean it up) they will get the positions. I need those hats back please. Alright, whichever team can box the most chocolate in the next five minutes will get the jobs. Okay? Okay. Ready, set, go! I'll be back. (To boy) Get to work!

Ethel: What are you doing here?!

Lucy: We were here first.

Ricky: We're here to get a job! May the best chocolatier win.

Lucy: Well...

Anything You Can Do

(They make a mess. Once the song is over, the manager walks in)

Manager: Okay, five minutes is up. Let's see who my two new chocolatiers are... Oh. (Sees mess) You know what, I think you should leave now. (No one is leaving) Now! (They jump on the last "now")

Ethel: I don't think we got the job. Lets go! (Ethel starts walking, but Lucy is trying to get as much chocolate as she can) Lucy! (They all exit. Manager is on edge, and boy timidly comes over to comfort her)

Manager: Why aren't you cleaning up this mess?! Get to work!

(Storms off)

Boy: (Looks around) No! (*Click*)

VitameavangAMIN. (*Click*)

Tyson: (Walks on from stage right and is intimidating to everyone because he has gun in hand) Looks like there be a snake in that there bush!

Becca: (Walks on from stage left with gun also) Let me get that for ya partner.

Tyson: No. I can wrassle that there snake like my grammys puddin.

Becca: Your grammy doesn't even make puddin!

Tyson: Don't talk about my sweet granny like she aint tough!

Becca: Your granny is nothin' compared to these! (Shows off guns, both arm and actual gun)

Tyson: You think you can take me on?

Becca: Everyday.

Tyson: Gather yalls pals, theres gonna be a showdown in this here town right now, ya hear?

Becca: This showdown will go in them history book things forever.  
(SHOOTS GUN)

(They both nod, then part in the middle, but Tyson walks over to Boy, grabs him, and takes him offstage with him.)

One More Angel In Heaven (*Click*)

Old Saloon Cowboy - Well hello there friends, Is your saloon a mess? Well I've got just the answer for you! Calico Jack's Magnetic Spitoon. Catches your mess no matter where you spit it. Let me show you how it works, can I get a volunteer? You there boy in the front. (boy comes up and is handed the spitoon) Now you just stand right over there. Let's try an easy one first. (Old cowboy over does getting ready to spit) (He pretends to spit toward the spitoon and the boy thumps the bottom as if it landed, there should be a tada! and an applause)

Old Cowboy - Now lets's try a little tougher one. I call this the sky high in your eye. (he prepares and spits upward. The boy looks up



running around trying to catch it and after a long pause thumps the pot with another tada and applause) Now for the Bullet! (he prepares and spits straight toward the boy who immediately thumps the bucket)

Boy -Whoa! ( Tada and Applause again)

Old Cowboy - Now for the Big One. I will bounce this one off the light, then that girl's elbow, then the window, (something in the room), and off that gentleman in the audience's head, and into the spittoon.

Boy - Are you sure? .... ookay ( he prepares and spits and it happens just like he said as they watch, but when it gets to the guys head every one stops and says, Ewww.)

Old Cowboy - Well it almost always works. (Click)

Diamonds (Click)

Dad (Tyson): Okay kids time for breakfast!

Girl (Geneal): Oh boy! Rice Krispies my favorite!

Boy (Trevor): Um, okay...?

Snap: (Jodie): (Sung) SNAP!

Crackle (Lauren): (Sung) Crackle!

Pop (Becca): (Sung) Pop!

All Krispies: (Sung) Rice Krispies!

Boy: Who are you?!

Snap: I'm Snap!

Crackle: I'm Crackle!

Pop: And I'm Pop!

All Krispies: (Whisper) We're the sounds your cereal makes!(The kids listen... All krispies start shouting "Snap, Crackle, Pop! Snap, Crackle, Pop!")

Boy: Um, this is weird...

Girl: You're scaring me! Mom...

Boy: I'm not hungry anymore.

Snap: No you'll love us!

Crackle: We're delicious!

(All krispies start shouting "Snap, Crackle, Pop! Snap, Crackle, Pop!")

Boy: Ahh! (Click)

(One person holding an end of blue fabric runs from stage left to right, so two people are holding it and waving it up and down like it's the ocean. Jaws music starts playing, and a girl comes out pretending she's swimming. Soon, a person with a shark cut out face comes out. She frantically runs in slow motion, shark catches up to her and "eats her", shark grabs her arm and drags her off. Boy shrieks. Click)

Singing In The Rain

Boy: Seriously? (Click)

Salesman (Ben): Hey ladies! I'm sure some of you are sick of your no-hold hairspray. Well introducing new Ultra-Clutch

Hairspray! Our new formula gives you superior control (Girl enters), has long-lasting support (Girl enters), helps with incredible styles (Girl enters), creates extreme volume (Girl enters), and gets your gentlemen's attention (Boy enters)! Buy it now, only three dollars. And isn't it worth it to be beautiful? But wait! Act now and we'll deliver the hairspray straight to you! (Girls rush toward the boy)

Boy (Trevor): What?! No! (*Click*)

Happy Days

(Girls are standing by table, boy sees them and gets happy.)

Boy: I like this scene! (Walks over, combs hair, checks armpits, starts flirting with Geneal. Fonze enters)

Fonze (Tyson): Hey! (Geneal runs over to him and they flirt while boy is mad. Boy notices that Lauren is still there)

Boy: Is your dad a jewel thief? Because he stole some diamonds and put them in your eyes. (She giggles. Ben enters.)

Ben: Woa! What are you doing with my woman? (Angrily grills boy around the table, and by the time they are done circling table, girls and Fonze are gone.)

Boy: Where did they go? (Ben punches his hand in a violent gesture, boy *clicks* up to his face.)

Boy: Oh good! I'm back at home. I was starting to get tired. (Sits down in chair and falls asleep)

Singer: (Runs on and shouts) Come on everybody! (Everyone runs on)

Lauren: (Pulls up Trevor) Get up boy, why are you sleeping?!

Boy: Ughh! What are we even doing? (Song starts)

Come On Everybody

*END.*

APPENDIX B  
PICTURES OF PERFORMANCE



APPENDIX C  
JOURNAL ENTREES WRITTEN BY MARCUS ELLSWORTH  
DURING FLASHBACK

### August 13, 2011

"Tonight was the Actor's Youth Theatre board meeting in which I had to present my proposal for the Flashback program to the AYT Board. The program was received with enthusiasm. A few members are familiar with my history as a show choir instructor and really wanted to see the Sound Revolution program brought back instead of this new outreach program. I had to reassure them of the purpose for this particular program and sell them on the need. The Board also wanted to charge more for the program and compromises were made involving other classes so the organization could afford this one. After much discussion the program was approved with the promise that some show choir element could be involved. I assured them that there would be. The auditions were approved and will take place after Pajama Game Auditions August 27th.

### August 22, 2011

With my schedule and employment this semester, I need to hire a directing partner to assist in rehearsing this group. I have asked various students and not one has been available. I approached a former collaborator Tina about the class. Tina is mainly a youth dance instructor and choreographer after about two days she responded and could not. I finally contacted a Theatre Education major who recently graduated from Southern Virginia University and she responded with a yes. We met last night and discussed our methods for the auditions and the rehearsals. We decided to have an improvisation centered audition and then interviews with the kids to make sure they would interact with the seniors appropriately. We also decided to teach them a song and have them sing it back to us individually. As for the rehearsal process, we decided to spend the first rehearsal getting to know each other and working together as a group on warm ups and games, then we would finish the rehearsal with some guided improvisations centered around TV, music and movies of the 40s, 50s and 60s and let the kids put some scenes together based on these songs. Even though this seems a little quick, with the rehearsal time we felt it

would be important to start right away on some type of devising ideas.

### September 13, 2011

The first rehearsal went well. We started with group exercises like flocking and walking in a circle. We did some games and then sat down and discussed schedules and the semester. We are trying to be flexible, but I can't believe how crazy teenagers' schedules are. Many of the kids will have to miss a few or more rehearsals. We ended with group improvisations, each group of 3 picked a popular TV show from a list of top ten songs from the 40's 50's and 60's. They then each tried to recreate a scene with a beginning, middle and end. It turned out great, and in our after discussion we discussed a possible basis for our show. Many great ideas were thrown out and at the end we as instructors stepped out of the room to let them decide together on two or three of these ideas they would like to explore next class. This worked well and they came up with some great ideas!"

### September 16, 2011

Last night at rehearsal we assigned the following positions to those who were interested: 2 Booking Agents, Stage Manager, Secretary, Costumes, Assistant choreographers and, 2 script writers. The group seemed excited about these. We had two in the group this week that were cast in another production and quit. We asked the group to see if they had friends that would like to audition to join the group and they said yes, so we decided to have them bring anyone who was interested next week. We discussed our ideas and decided on one direction to go with our show. We also learned Elvis's, "C'mon Everybody" as a closer to whatever show we might design. By the end the actors had picked 5 TV shows or movies that they wanted to improvise bits from and it was decided that the show would be about a kid watching TV at his grandparent's house and changing the channels. They had great ideas for this, and our script writer was willing to start something for next week. So all seems to be going very well and we are on track for some November performances. The next few weeks will be split between Cara and I.

APPENDIX D

1- 4 LESSON PLANS FOR FLASHBACK



AYT: FLASHBACK DEVISING CURRICULUM  
Session 1

**Age Group:** 13 -18

**Material Needed:** Pens and Pads of Paper, AYT Handbook Copies

**Time:** 2 hours 30 minutes

**Objectives/Student Objectives:**

- Define rules and boundaries
- Enable student to get to know each other
- Enable students to feel comfortable with each other
- Enable students to express ideas freely
- Introduce students to devising

**Warm-up: *Reporter:*** 30 minutes

Objective: To introduce each student, create opportunity for individual spotlight and form new relationships.

Process: The students are each given a pen and a pad of paper with a list of, get to know you type, questions. They are to imagine they are reporters out to get the latest story. They are then instructed walk the room filling in all space. When the instructor says stop, the reporters are then to go to the person nearest them and interview them using the questions provided. They will be given 3 minutes each to interview. After the reporters are finished interviewing each other, they will then form a "press conference" circle in which they will each take turn giving the story of the new person they interviewed.

*Sample questions:*

*What is your favorite movie?*

*What did you have for breakfast this morning?*

*What is your favorite place to visit?*

**Warm-up: *Numbers game:*** 10 minutes

Objective: To enable students to feel comfortable in each other's personal space, and provide further interaction.

Process: Students are instructed to walk the room filling in all space. The instructor will then call out a number. The students, as quick as they can, band together in a group of that number by linking arms or grabbing on to each other. Any who are not liked in a group of that number stand to the side or are out. The game continues until there are only one or two students left. Then all students may rejoin and play again.

**Review AYT Handbook:** 30 minutes

Objective: To define rules, boundaries, commitment and address concerns

**Activity:** *What Are You Doing?:* 30 minutes

Objective: To further group interaction. Enable students to express ideas comfortably. Introduce students to improvisation.

Process: The students will stand in a circle. One student stands in the middle and pantomimes an action. Another student steps in and asks "What are you doing?" The other student will respond with an action that is not what the first student is pantomiming. For example, if a student is brushing their teeth, the other may respond that they are riding a horse. The second student will then pantomime the action the first responded with and the first student will leave the middle and allow another student to step in and repeat the process.

*Variation 1:* The middle student begins pantomiming an action. Another student will join the "scene" and improvise a conversation. At some point (making sure there is plenty of time) another student will ask "What are you doing?" and the second student will respond with a different action that the second will begin another scene. This should continue until all students have had a chance to participate.

**Activity:** Scene Devising: 30 minutes

Objective: To introduce students to group devising and performance

Process: Students are divided up randomly in groups of 3 or 4. Strips of paper with names of 1950's and 60's TV shows, movies and songs are mixed in a bucket. Each group will draw a name and based on whatever they know or think, they are to devise a scene of no longer than two minutes based on the title they are given. (Note: Make sure the groups know it does not have to represent the actual show or tune) Groups will have 10 minutes to discuss and rehearse their scenes. Presentations: Each group will present their scene for the group.

(Encourage applause and positive feedback after each presentation without criticism) After each group presentation the entire group will discuss each scene and how it related to the Title.

**Reflection:** 20 minutes

Objective: To discuss devising, and come to a consensus on a theme and direction for our show.

AYT: FLASHBACK DEVISING CURRICULUM  
Session 2

**Age Group:** 13 -18

**Material Needed:** Folders with job descriptions

**Time:** 2 hours 30 minutes

**Objectives/Student Objectives:**

- Continue the devising process
- Further promote group unity
- Enable students to generate ideas
- Assign group roles

**Warm-up:** *Zip Zap Zop:* 10 minutes

Objective: Promote group interaction and focus.

Process: Have students stand in a circle. Start the game by pointing at another student in the circle and saying "Zip." The student must immediately point to another player and say "Zap". That student must, in turn, immediately point to another person and say "Zop" And that person must immediately point to someone else and say "Zip" starting it over again. Continue until someone makes a mistake by either saying the wrong word, or by hesitating too long. That player is out, and the player to the left begins again. Keep playing until only two people are left.

**Warm-up:** *King of France:* 10 minutes

Objective: To promote quick thinking, idea generating, and focus as a group.

Process: The group stands in a circle with someone in the center standing. The center person (The king of France) stands in the middle and begins by saying "I'm the King of France and I've lost my hat and [another student's name] knows where it is." The person in the center then faces the student whose name was said and the two then say the following:

Student: Who sir, me sir?

King: Yes sir, you sir!

Student: No sir, not I sir!

King: Then who, sir?

Student: [Insert another name], sir!

The person in the middle must then try to say "I've caught you" before the person named can say "Who sir, me sir?" If caught, the person becomes the King.

**Activity:** *Mime Exercise*: 30 minutes

Objective: To improvise pairs and perform in front of the group.

Process: Students are divided into random pairs. In the previous session, the students were given a list of 1950's and 60's you tube videos of TV shows and movies to watch as homework. Each pair must choose one of the videos and silently mime a 1 minute portion of one of them. The other student, as an audience, and only after the scene is over will then guess which scene they were miming.

**Activity:** *Alternate Endings*: 45 minutes

Objective: To continue the devising process and work in groups.

Process: Students, in groups of 2 or 3 will chose one of the Youtube videos that was assigned, and create an alternate ending that they will perform for the group. The alternate ending must last more than 2 minutes and must include each member of the group. All groups will have 10 minutes to devise and rehearse and then perform their scenes for the entire group.

**Reflection:**

Objective: to discuss the improvised scenes as a group and decide which if any of the idea could be built upon for a skit in Flashback's show.

**Role Assignments:** 30 minutes

Objective: to discuss and assign production roles in the group.

List of Roles: assistant director, stage manager, tech director, choreographers, booking agents, secretary/writers, properties designer and costume designer.

AYT: FLASHBACK DEVISING CURRICULUM  
Session 3

**Age Group:** 13 -18

**Material Needed:** none

**Time:** 2 hours 30 minutes

**Objectives/Student Objectives:**

- Continue the devising process
- Establish a beginning script
- Enable students to generate story ideas
- Begin choreography

**Warm-up:** Lakes Rivers Streams: 10 minutes

Objective: Promote group focus and quick thinking.

Process: Students sit in a circle. A rhythm is started usually a pat - clap- snap. The first person in the circle starts by saying the words "lakes, rivers, streams" saying each on the snap of the rhythm. Then he announces the category that will be played such as "Cereals" or "Type of Birds" he will then begin on the next rhythm to say an example from the category, (so if the category was "states" he might say "Mississippi". Then the game proceeds clockwise around the circle with each person saying an item or name from the category on the snap of each rhythm. If they repeat or hesitate they are out and will move to the end of the circle. The goal is to oust the leader. The rhythm keeps going around the circle until someone messes up. That person is then sent to the end of the circle and everyone else moves up.

**Warm-up:** Farm Animals: 15 minutes

Objective: To promote quick thinking, group interaction and focus.

Process: In a circle each participant chooses an animal with an accompanying, two beat, action and sound. for example: Animal-a cow, sound- "moo moo" action- pulling the hands down like you are milking the cow. Each participant will then share their animal sound and action with the rest of the circle. A two beat rhythm is then started and the leader begins by doing his/her own sound and action and passes to someone else by doing theirs. That person must receive by doing his/her own action and sound then passes by doing someone else's. The rhythm continues till someone messes up. They would then be out. The game continues until 2 people are left.

**Activity:** Alternate Story Circle: 20 minutes

**Objective:** To introduce group to improvised story telling.

**Process:** Students sit in a circle. One student begins by saying "once upon a time there was a \_\_\_\_\_ and then..." The next student in the circle would continue the story adding an event. (each should be rather short). For example the first student would say, "Once upon a time there was a horse and then..." The student to his right would then continue, "The horse escaped from his barn, and then...", and it would continue until the story was resolved.

**Continued Story Circle:** 45 minutes

**Objective:** To improvise plausible story lines that could be used in the Flashback show.

**Process:** The instructor will explain to the group that they will now be focusing on the story lines for our show (and that they need to be plausible) the instructor will begin the story by telling the beginning of one of the scenes that the group has been exploring. The student will then continue the plot in the same story telling fashion.

**Reflection:** 10 minutes

**Objective:** to discuss the improvised stories as a group and decide which if any of the stories could be used in Flashback's show.

**Choreography:** 50 minutes

**Objective:** Begin choreography to "All Shook Up"

AYT: FLASHBACK DEVISING CURRICULUM  
Session 4

**Age Group:** 13 -18

**Material Needed:** none

**Time:** 2 hours 30 minutes

**Objectives/Student Objectives:**

- Continue the devising process
- Establish a more developed script
- Enable students to generate scene ideas
- Begin planning process for production
- Continue choreography

**Warm-up:** Yee Haw!: 10 minutes

Objective: Promote group focus, quick thinking and fun

Process: Students Stand in a circle. One student begins by shouting "Yee Haw" and performing a connected arm action to the left or the right. The person next in the direction of the action will continue the action by also shouting "Yee Haw" and passing it along. The following action is then added and can be mixed in.

- "Hay Barn": Hands pointed above head signifying the action to skip the next person.

- "Bang": Hand held out like a pistol pointed at someone across the circle. That person receives the action by saying, "You got me" and then continues with an action of their own.

- "Rattle Snake!": The person throws the snake on the ground to the right or left as everyone around the circle screams and jumps over it until some one says, "Got it" and then continues an action.

Other actions can be added as desired.

**Warm-up:** Contact: 10 minutes

Objective: To promote growing group comfort and interaction.

Process: Students walk the room as the instructor shouts out a body part (sticking to the safe ones). The students then have to connect to the person closest to them with that body part. The instructor may shout two or even three parts. Like "head, arm and toe". Finally the instructor can shout out two different parts like "head to knee" and students must connect in that way.

**Activity:** Tableaus: 60 minutes

Objective: To continue the devising process.

Process: Students are divided into groups of three or four and given

a space in the room. The instructor will then shout a story the group has been focusing on or a key plot element. The actors will then form an instant picture from their immediate thoughts. The group will then take turns exploring the other tableaus. At any time the instructor may say action to any of the tableaus and they must come to life and improvise a scene from that position around that title or plot element.

**Reflection:** 10 minutes

Objective: to discuss the improvised scenes as a group and decide which if any of the scenes could be developed for Flashback's show.

**Role Meetings:** 30 mins

Objective: This time will be used for student in their production roles to meet with the instructors and do preliminary planning and/or develop concepts.

**Choreography:** 60 minutes

Objective: Finish choreography to "All Shook Up"