

Professional Development – Lesson 2

10 Strategies to Make Your Theater Department More Inclusive with Fran Sillau

Lesson Recap:

1. Include ALL arts disciplines.

- Develop ways to authentically include the visual art arts students on aspects of the scenery and music students on the sound effects.
- Devise ways for the dance team members to choreograph one dance to take some of the load off you as the teacher.
- Invite students from other art forms to join the ensemble to encourage friends of members to join.

Why should I try to reach out?

- Enabling these opportunities helps to create important intersections within the arts disciplines.

2. Collaborate with student groups.

- Reach out to class sponsors to enable marketing opportunities for your production.
- Create opportunities for clubs to sell items in the lobby before the play.
- Promote goodwill and a positive school community through theater.

Why should I collaborate?

- Collaboration shows your program's investment in the school, which in turn will come back to you in positive ways.

3. Find ways to be authentically inclusive.

- Develop collaborations that enable inclusive and self-contained special education students to learn drama and theater skills at their own pace.
- Provide opportunities for leaders in your program to help teach theater games to special education students.
- Find ways for special education students to share their strengths.

What does successful inclusion look like?

- Successful inclusion looks different in every situation, so use instinct and check in with your colleagues to ensure things are going well along the way.



4. Collaborate with non-arts colleagues.

- Team up with your non-arts colleagues to conduct dramaturgical research that will enhance your production.
- Teaming up can give your actors new understanding of their roles.
- Teaming up makes learning come to life for non-theater students.

This seems like a lot of work, so is it worth it?

- This collaboration bears fruit in the short and long term because it can directly and indirectly bring students into your process that many not have previously joined.

5. Create Joint Fundraising Opportunities

- Fundraising is hard, especially for busy educators, so partner with other colleagues to create fundraisers for both of your departments.

Are joint Fundraisers worth it? Is this misplaced or needed?

- Only the teacher can decide if something is worth, but some money is better than no money.

6. Deepen Student Learning

- Create opportunities for students to learn about cultures that are not their own.
- Reach out to community organizations that can give you insights to authenticate your production.

Finding collaborators is overwhelming. Where do I start?

- Begin your search with Google.
- For example: If you are producing a play about the Holocaust, visit The Institute for Holocaust Education website.

7. Do Your OWN Research Regarding Marginalized Groups

- Don't shy away from the important issues' theater can raise.
- Be ready to collaborate with professionals to help you answer the hard questions.
- Do your own homework. Please do not go to your marginalized students for the answers.

How do I find those collaborators?

- Let Google be your start.
- For plays involving justice against marginalized groups, you might reach out to The Anti-Defamation League: <https://omaha.adl.org/>



8. Utilize Universal Design for Learning: <https://www.cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl>

- Developing accessible scenery from the start can ensure every individual can authentically utilize the entire stage.
- Designing accessible scenery can evolve into interesting stage pictures.
- Creating accessible scenery reinforces positive representation.

What if the scenery is not perfect?

- You can be a little UDL and you can be a lot UDL. You can use the part of the framework that works for you and leave the rest.
- There is no such thing as perfect accessibility. Just try your best to make sure that all students can fully access the scenery.

9. Showcasing Student Writing

- Invite student writers to contribute to your program.
- Invite friends to collaborate on writing short stories that can be developed into short plays.

What if the stories do not fit the play I am producing?

- You can always give prompts that pair with the themes of your play.
- And remember that the play is not always the “thing.” Serving the students is the “thing”.

10. Find opportunities for student leadership.

- Take pressure off yourself to do everything, give leadership to student leaders when you can.
- Remember that by giving away your power, you are creating the leaders of tomorrow.
- Do what is best for you and your students.

What if I cannot give students full control of an aspect of the show?

- The students do not have to direct a whole scene, they just need to feel like they can lead for a short moment and feel successful doing it.



Creative Extensions:

- Analyze and discuss the theater program at your school. What about the program promotes inclusion? What are areas that could be improved?
- Write a dialogue with 2-4 characters inspired by the themes of a performance at your school. Brainstorm ways to showcase this original work for your school community.

