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APPLIED DRAMA: A FACILITATOR'S HANDBOOK
FOR WORKING IN COMMUNITY
INTELLECT: BRISTOL

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FOUR

RISKING, TRUSTING AND BEING

4.1 Building trust/creating community

Jonothan Neelands (2009) has written about the importance of creating an ensemble when working together with students/participants through drama:

Working together in the social and egalitarian conditions of ensemble-based drama, [participants] have the opportunity to struggle with the demands of becoming a self-managing, self-governing, self-regulating social group who co-create artistically and socially... The ensemble serves as a bridging metaphor between the social and the artistic [and] has the potential of reconciling the tensions between the social and the artistic. (p. 182)

In working collaboratively through drama, a group of people are functioning at two distinct levels at all times; the social level related to group process and dynamics and the artistic level focused on the making, sharing and reflecting processes of drama. A successful ensemble is capable of seeing these dual functions working within the group, and can also reflect effectively on both the social and artistic aspects of what is happening. This double functioning works through a process of constantly moving back and forth between the metaphors of the drama and the individual and group experience of engaging in those metaphors. An applied drama facilitator must be always conscious of how the group is functioning at these two levels and should include many opportunities for a group to consider their work in ways that are sensitive to peoples' feelings yet critical enough to be of value.

[C]ommunities of identity are constructed when people recognize their own experiences in others, and share an understanding of each other's values or stories.

– Helen Nicholson, 2005a, p. 9

[C]ommunities of identity are constructed when people recognize their own experiences in others, and share an understanding of each other's values or stories.

– Helen Nicholson, 2005a, p. 94

One way to begin to build trust within a group as a means of helping it to grow into an ensemble over time is to begin each session with a check-in of some kind. This may be as simple as asking participants to give a number between one and ten indicating how they are doing that day. Any numbers five or below may require closer attention to see how the group may support a member who is having a bad day. Then there is a more local check-in that invites participants to share any events of interest with the group, from the personal to the cultural to the political. Depending again on the nature and purpose of the group, another way is to have a check-in on a more global level, to process significant world events or issues that have had an impact on the group. For example, in our own experience, two days after 9/11 we spent a whole class processing this event. Our judgment as instructors was that talking about this event (which, oddly, students had not yet done in any of their other classes) was an emotional imperative in creating a community of identity (Nicholson, 2005a). These check-ins demonstrate that human experience is always part of what we are doing in drama. How we feel and what is concerning us will always be a part of the work. The decision a facilitator needs to make, often in the moment, is whether the event should be processed through more simple and direct conversation that meets the social needs of the group or through the work (as in dramatic forms) that offers a richer, deeper experience. For example, our colleague Peter O'Connor, working with teachers and students in Christchurch, New Zealand helped these survivors of a major earthquake process their emotions in a safe way through drama (*A Teaspoon of Light*, see Bibliography).

Checking-out is an equally important way to build a sense of ensemble, and is focused on reflecting on what has been done and where the work is going. This is an important weaving together of sessions, as the end of one becomes the beginning of the next. A facilitator needs to prioritize spending the last part of each session in this reflective phase, and manage the time accordingly.

Another way to continue to build a sense of trust and community in a group is to continue using drama games and activities as a way to begin each session. As we have said before, these activities must have a clear purpose and are selected to fit the work to come; for example, "word rounds" brainstorming to prepare to meet the issues that may arise (Miller & Saxton, 2004, p. 32) or, as in this chapter's example, the movement activities that engage students in exploring shapes and feelings, inherent components of *Being 14*. Allowing time for the group to reflect on a game or activity to see what dramatic principles underpin it (as in the Five Cs) is key and then later, seeing how these beginning activities are relevant to the work overall. In other words, all of these activities should be clearly contextualized for participants so that they can see the relevance of these activities within the context of the group's overall mandate or focus.

4.2 Encouraging risk-taking/accepting failure

There are two common misconceptions about drama. One is that drama is about conflict, when tension is a much more useful term. The second is that dramatic process

Conflict: 1. to come into collision or disagreement; 2. to do battle; 3. discord of action or feeling

– Jess Stein, 1966, p. 308

involves consensus, everybody agreeing on how to proceed, rather than the more useful term conspectus. Conspectus means an overall survey or observation of a particular topic or question that includes everybody's view and involves what is called 'radical listening'—the kind of listening in

which participants make an effort to understand others' standpoints without seeking to change them (Kincheloe, cited in Tobin, 2011, p. 20). Neelands (1984) writes:

Conspectus is a more accurate term (than consensus) in that it conveys the sense of a synopsis of opinions, in other words there may be a wide range of opinions (and differences) reflected in the drama... In drama, then, we are saying to [participants] that although we are working together as a group, individual reactions and opinions are still important... The [facilitator's and participants'] role is then to look for possibilities of grouping answers, to look for patterns that establish a conspectus whilst not ignoring or leaving out "rogue" answers that don't seem to fit at first. (p. 40)

Tension: 1. the act of stretching or straining; 2. the state of being stretched or strained; 3. mental or emotional intensity or excitement.

– Jess Stein, 1966, p. 1462

Encouraging participants to express their individual views, and valuing them as part of an overall process, is crucial to creating an atmosphere within which people with little or no experience in drama may begin to take risks.

[Participants] must make themselves vulnerable and visible in order to participate and must know that there is protection and mutual respect for difference from within the group to match the personal and social challenges of taking a part in the action.

– Jonathan Neelands, cited in O'Connor, 2010, p. 140

Prominent drama educator Brian Way (1967) reminded his students repeatedly that the workshop or classroom space for drama was one in which everyone must genuinely feel they have the freedom to fail. While this may seem to be a somewhat contradictory notion, it is a principle for successful dramatic process that reflects what another drama educator, Dorothy Heathcote (Johnson & O'Neill, 1991) termed a "no-penalty zone" (p. 130).

4.3 Creating composite characters

In theatre characters are inhabited by actors who may or may not live closely to these characters in real life. Audiences have the pleasure of seeing actor and character merge into one in a successful performance. Audiences may also be “haunted”, to use theatre historian Marvin Carlson’s term (2001), by other actors who have portrayed a specific character, or by other characters played by the same actor. This ghosting effect is unique to the performing arts and is one of the reasons we are drawn to these social art forms.

In applied drama settings, however, we work more closely and consciously with people’s real life histories, stories and experiences as material. Richard Schechner (1997) calls this “believed-in performance” when this kind of work moves into performance settings in which “people are who they perform, playing their social and/or personal identities” (p. 77). This is a more autobiographical form of applied drama/theatre that we suggest is only suited to groups with more experience and abilities built over time. In applied drama work with inexperienced participants, we recommend the creation of composite characters, as modelled in the drama structure that follows. By this we mean that characters are created in a collaborative process that includes aspects of all participants’ experiences so that they belong to everyone rather than to one person alone. Another form of protection in the use of composite characters is that we fictionalize the characters, endowing them with their own life stories and sets of given circumstances. This is aesthetic distance, as discussed in Chapter 2, and is also known in dramatic art as *ostranenie*, or “making strange” (Eriksson, 2011, p. 103). When participants are freed from the burden of playing themselves, they are unshackled from what they already know and are released to imagine alternate situations, actions and outcomes, which is one of the key social functions of drama.

[D]istancing functions primarily as *protection* for the participants against becoming inhibited by an embedment in reality, i.e. the distancing creates a protective distance between one’s self and one’s fictive role.

– Stig Eriksson, 2011, p. 104

4.4 Drama structure: *Being 14*

1.a. Preparing for the work

This structure is focused on the continuing creation of the ensemble and developing the terms of the drama contract. This structure looks at the movement of bodies in space and the effective use of space in multiple ways, particularly sculptural ones, and offers an opportunity for the group to begin to share aspects of their personal histories toward the creation of a composite character who is 14 years old.

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Throughout these structurés we offer prompts for facilitators to help in the reflection of the work. However, more often than not, the prompt ideas will come up naturally in the participants' discussions. It is important to give participants time to reflect, a good starting question and time to answer before moving into additional prompts.

- **Grouping: Individual**
- **Strategy: Movement**
- **Administration: None**
- **Focus: To get people moving with an awareness of how they are using the space**

Facilitator: Okay, everybody into a circle. I'm going to give you a letter, so try not to forget. [*Walking around the circle, assigning each person A, B or C.*] As raise your hands. Bs raise your hands. Cs raise your hands. Good.

You can move anywhere you want to in this room and the idea is to explore as fully as possible, without bumping into anybody or getting in anybody's way. So you'll need to keep your antennae up. As, you're going to move as quickly as you can without running. Bs, you're going to move at a normal easy pace. Cs you are to move slowly without ever stopping. When you hear the signal, you are to begin, and when you hear it again, you are to stop. This is a movement exercise so try not to talk. Any questions? Standby. [*You may wish to repeat what each letter is doing one more time.*] Off you go [*Signal*].

Let this activity go for about a minute then signal to stop.

Talk to the person next to you about that experience.

Anything anybody would like to share?

Try to use responses to bring out how there were weaving patterns you could see, and that the whole space was being explored.

Right, we're going to do that again, only this time Cs you're going to take over from the As and go very fast. As will walk at a normal pace. And Bs you will be moving as slowly as possible. Everyone got that? This time really begin to play with your speeds and challenge yourself to explore and try things out. Stand by [*Signal*].

[*Signal to stop.*] That was a bit different. What was happening there?

They should be comfortable enough to respond to the whole group. Or they may need a more specific prompt like, "I could see some really interesting patterns and ways of exploring the space. What did you notice either about yourself or the people you were moving through?"

All right, no surprise here, let's do the last switch-up. So you are all doing the third of the three actions. But we are going to add something different. As you are moving, let what is happening around you begin to give you an idea of who you might be and the situation you are in. And let those impulses begin to inform what is happening to you. If you feel the need to stop, that's fine. Ready? [Signal]

[Signal to stop.] Move into groups of two or three and talk about what was happening to you and what situations you might have imagined yourself in.

Let's share some of those ideas and, if you can, what it was that prompted you to think that way. What was the physical thing that happened in your body that clued you in?

Now looking at this exercise of moving through the space overall, what does this tell you about the dramatic element of movement? [You may want to prompt, "What might these movements tell us about people? And, if you used stillness, what is it that prompts you to stop moving?"]

1.b. Preparing for the work

- **Grouping:** Pairs
- **Strategy:** Filling in the Shape
- **Administration:** Music (Pachelbel's Canon, Samuel Barber's Adagio, any other slow tempo classical music, or Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2, trailer music from the soundtrack)
- **Focus:** To see the possibilities of space in shape, to experience self-control, and to make offers to partners

Facilitator: Find a partner and a space in the room where you're not going to interfere with anybody else. Choose A and B.

A, your job is to make a shape with your body that offers some interesting spaces. B, your job is to fit your body into some or all of those spaces. The rule is there will be no touching because the purpose of the exercise is to be able to move in and out. Let's just try that. A, take a shape.

B, fit yourself in.

A, step away, look at the spaces that B is now offering you. You may want to move around the shape to see all the possibilities. Now, fit yourself back in with your partner in a new way.

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Relax. Talk with your partner about that. [*This is a chance for pairs to connect through the experience, and share thoughts if they wish.*]

I'm going to put on a bit of music, Bs, stand-by to take a shape when you feel ready as you listen to the music. A, using the music, you'll fit yourself into Bs spaces and freeze. B, when you fill A is still, then you move away and find new spaces to fit yourself into. Remember the key is to keep offering those open spaces to each other. Everybody ready? Bs stand-by to begin. [*Play music.*]

You may want to encourage by noting some lovely or powerful shapes you have observed. Remind the group to hold still in the shape before one person steps out. Tell them to let the music inform the process. This activity can be revisited in groups of three, and in larger and larger groups. It can involve touch over time and make use of different kinds of music.

Talk to your partner about what you began to feel was going on as you did this. What sorts of ideas or images came up? Was there a moment when you felt that you had created a still image that surprised you or suggested a story or relationship?

Was there anything you would like to share with the whole group?

What kind of skills were involved in this activity? What do those skills tell us about how we work together in drama?

2. Entering the work: Being 14

- **Grouping: Individual**
- **Strategy: Recollecting**
- **Administration: Tambourine**
- **Focus: Remembering when we were 14**

If you are working with teenagers, you might want to ask them to go back to when they were 10 or 11 years old.

Facilitator: Find your own space in the room and find a comfortable position either sitting or standing. Close your eyes. [*Turn lights down.*] Begin to think back to when you were 14. Remember how you felt at that age. What were some of the things that happened? What was a place where you felt safe and had some privacy at that age? As you are thinking, find a position that as your 14-year-old self you would be comfortable in within that space. What would you be thinking about? As your 14-year-old self you are looking back at a moment that was important to you. Let yourself begin to quietly say

out loud what's on your mind. I'll just rattle this tambourine so nobody needs to worry about being overheard.

It may be that you will have a participant who for whatever reason does not feel comfortable revisiting that age. We suggest that you invite him or her to remember a time being a little bit younger or older, but to choose a time that was less challenging. It may also be that the cultural contexts of your group are different from your own in terms of maturation. As ever, your role as facilitator is to create a safe space for everyone and a part of this is to make accommodations for participants in the moment.

Come back into yourself at the age you are now. Just turn to your neighbour and talk about what you were thinking. Let's share with the whole group. How difficult was it for you to look back? Is it easy or hard to recall what life was like then? Why do you think 14 is such a significant age?

Those skills and that sensitivity with which you've been working are going to be important as we move forward into the work.

3.a. *Engaging in the work*

- **Grouping:** Groups of five or six
- **Strategy:** Discussion, followed by sculpting
- **Administration:** None
- **Focus:** To come to a collective decision and to represent that decision in an embodied way as a sculpture

Facilitator: Get into groups of five or six and share with each other your experiences of what it was like to be 14. What did that time in your life mean to you? What do you remember? What issues were important to you then? How have things changed?

I'd like someone in each group to volunteer. [*There is no need to explain what for, but take note of who does volunteer.*] Volunteers, you are going to be the Clay on which the rest of your group is going to create their idea of what it is to be 14. Everyone in the group will contribute their ideas and, Clay, you also can have your say. We all need to be really aware of the ways in which we create this sculpture. Touch, if you use it, should be respectful and whatever positions are chosen need to be ones that the Clay can hold comfortably over a period of time. Remember this is a sculpture and needs to be interesting from all angles. Facial expressions are best mirrored, as nobody wants their face touched. Often, if you talk about the feeling behind the expression, that is more helpful to the Clay. The sculpture will be communicating a number of ideas, so you need to be really clear about

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your focus and the message you want to put across. You may use one or two props, if they will help your ideas. Any questions? Go ahead.

You have just another minute; you can begin to finish up.

Right everyone, Clays, hold the position you've been given. Artists, step away and look at your sculpture objectively. Remember what you had in mind, look at what you've created, are there any details that need to be adjusted or changed. Be sure to look at your sculpture from 360°.

Relax everyone, just sit down in your groups and talk about that process. Be sure to hear from the Clay.

Anything anybody wants to say to the whole group about that?

Because this is the first time participants are drawing on their own history and working together closely, there may be some concerns expressed and these should be addressed by the group and the facilitator. Again, this all about the drama contract and how we are working together.

Each group's task is now to lead their Clay into the middle of the room and arrange these statues as works of art in a sculpture gallery. Again, you need to think in terms of 360°. These are not six individual sculptures but rather six works of art that are in relationship with each other, because each one reflects the theme of this exhibition, *Being 14*.

They may ask to use a box or chair to create levels for a stronger focus. Whenever participants ask for something that has not been part of the instructions, it is helpful to the facilitator if s/he asks the reason(s) for the request. Participants' answers can be great indicators of their aesthetic development.

Step away from the exhibit and walk around it with the eyes of designers. How aesthetically pleasing is the whole effect? What sorts of changes do you think we need to make to this arrangement? Be ready to make suggestions. [*They do that and adjustments may be made.*]

Sculptures, relax, but Clays, remember your positions and stay where you are. Everyone else, move away from the centre of the space and turn your backs to the display.

Now we're ready to really have a look at what we have made. As gallery-goers, you have been attracted to this exhibition because you too were once 14 and this is an opportunity for you to revisit your past as adults. Clay, the task you are about to undertake is highly demanding because you are going to be required to hold your position as if you could neither see nor hear, yet of course you can. So your responsibility is to behave as if you cannot

and remain still so that everyone has the chance to see this exhibition individually and as a whole. Take a moment to remember the meanings that underlie being 14 that you and your group decided upon. Let those feelings infuse your sculpture. Clay, into position now please. And freeze. Gallery visitors, the exhibition is now open. Please enjoy your visit.

As facilitator, you too should be a visitor to the gallery and can make comments or draw attention to something you are noticing. Be sure that the group moves so it observes from all sides.

Stop everyone now. When you feel ready, just say what you see, using sentences beginning with "I see..." or "I feel..." or "I remember..."

Okay, sculptures relax and everyone go back into your original groups. What do your sculptures have to say about their experience of being 14-year-olds? What did you as a group, see and hear in the gallery that you'd like to share? Then, talk together about that whole experience. What sorts of things that were a part of being 14 are still a part of you today?

This could be the end of the workshop in which case you might want to ask participants to share how what they have seen and heard resonates with their own personal experiences of being 14.

Thank you. We've built a wonderful resource now that we can continue to explore (or pick up for next time).

3.b. Engaging in the work

- **Grouping:** Individual, then original groups of five or six
- **Strategy:** Timeline, then role playing
- **Administration:** Paper and pencil for each person
- **Focus:** To enrich the back story for the 14 year-old and to identify significant players in his or her life

Facilitator: Take a piece of paper and a pencil and find your own space in the room. We've been exploring being 14, but we don't just appear full-blown at that age. So what I'm going to ask you to do now is to think back into that life to recall significant events and people that helped to shape who you are. These may be events that happened to you in your own life that you are prepared to share, or they may be events that occurred in the life of the 14-year-old. So these may be actual things that happened or they may be imagined things that happened... that's up to you. We don't need to know which is the real and which is the fictional. On your piece of paper draw a timeline. Mark off 14 spaces, each space to represent a year. On each of those years, mark those events that were important to you before you turned 14. No need to fill in every year, only those that you remember as significant.

Teacher
Talking to
the class

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Finish that up and when you have done so turn your page over so that I know you are ready to move on.

Now, on the back of your paper, draw the place you like to go to be by yourself (as a 14-year-old). Don't worry about not being an artist, this is just for you!

Write somewhere on your paper a phrase or sentence that you remember hearing quite a lot as you were growing up.

Write somewhere on your paper what you wanted to be when you grew up.

Turn your page over again, look at the events that you've marked as significant and write down beside any of them, the names of a person or persons who are connected in your mind with that event.

Now find a partner, not someone in your group, and share only those things that you wish to share. You can use your paper or not. *[By now, you should sense when they are ready to move on but you can always check by saying, "Are we all ready to move on now?"]*

Fold up your paper and put it in a pocket or a safe place and then return to your groups.

So now we've got a wealth of material to draw on. Fourteen-year-old, you've got your role already. Just move away from your group to hear this next step and listen. There are four or five others with roles to be assigned. Each person in the group is to select from the following roles; a teacher, a parent, a sibling, a best friend, someone who knows the 14-year-old on a professional basis, and someone who knows the 14-year-old personally but is not a close family member, so that everyone in the group has a role. As you are choosing the roles, be aware of the dramatic potential that any of these roles offers. *[There are more possibilities of roles than group members, so as to offer a range of choices.]*

If you have a board and chalk or chart paper and pen, they are useful places to record lists. Then the choices can be left for everyone to see.

Clay, resume your 14-year-old shape. Make sure there is space around you for your group to form.

Each groups' first task is to create what we call a sociometric circle. That is, each role is to place themselves in a spatial relationship with their 14-year-old. For example, the mother may see herself as close to or as slightly distanced from the 14-year-old. We are not thinking about clichéd positioning here. These are your roles, so you make the

choices. Do this one at a time so that you can see the picture coming together. Try to do this without talking and when everyone is in place, then relax and take a moment to re-identify your role for the group.

Right. All groups, take up your positions and freeze. Each role, you now have a chance to reflect on the distance between you and the protagonist, our 14-year-old. Your task is to begin to fill that space with what you know about the relationship between you and the protagonist. Fourteen year-old, you will be noticing where each role is placed and you have the same chance to think about those relationships.

Now everyone, including the 14-year-olds, go quietly back to your circle, taking a pencil and piece of paper as you go. Find a comfortable spot, sit down and write, *in role*, about what was going through your head as you thought about your relationship with that child. Don't talk. This is your own private time.

They should have at least five minutes for this. A useful prompt, when you see a pencil being put down after only a few lines of writing, is to say, "I see some people are taking the time to think before they go on writing." It acts both as an encouragement and also a reminder that thinking is a useful and appropriate activity.

Read through what you have written quietly to yourself and underline what you feel is the most significant sentence or phrase and commit that to memory.

Re-form your sociometric circle and someone volunteer to begin. He or she will say what they have underlined. Then hear around, listening carefully to what every role has to say.

Relax. As a group, your task now is to order those lines in a way that supports your feelings about this 14-year-old. If you want, you may repeat one of the lines. What you choose and where you choose to say it will depend upon how you create the dramatic action that lies underneath this still picture.

Sometimes they ask if lines can be changed or amended. Yes, of course, as long as the original creator agrees and the group agrees and they all have a good reason for it. Often, when explaining the reason, they all see that that is not what they want to do but something else, so these opportunities for questioning and explaining are valuable to creative work.

I'm going to give you a couple of minutes to rehearse.

That seems to be coming along nicely. Now, the next task is, for each line, you may make a movement, either before you say the line, as you are saying the line, or after you say the

Facilitator
Talking+4

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line. This new suggestion, may necessitate you changing your original positions slightly, but keep the same spatial relationships.

I think we are ready now to see our 14-year-old protagonists in relationship to the worlds in which they live. Which group would like to go first? We'll watch them one after the other without any comment.

It is helpful to establish that group sharing happens where the groups are situated and not by moving into an "up at the front, audience watching" theatre style. The important thing is that everyone should be able to see and hear from where they are and that the facilitator makes sure that this is so for everyone. If a group seems to be rather quiet and difficult to hear, ask them if they would mind doing it again so that we can all hear.

4. Reflecting on the work

Thank you for this work. I invite you to go back into your groups and talk about how your sharing worked for you as a group and about what you saw and heard from the other groups.

Let's share some of those thoughts together in the whole group. Would you like to move into the big circle or would you prefer to stay where you are?

I wonder if you would like to talk about what you have discovered about being 14 that you perhaps had not recognized or realized? And I wonder what implications might those discoveries have for you now at your present age?

It is interesting that although everyone was working on the same thing and in the same way, every group's response was different. I wonder what that tells us about how drama and theatre work?

This has been a pretty challenging journey that we've been on together. We've certainly learned a number of ways to work dramatically and, perhaps, we've found out a little more about ourselves and each other. Thank you.

OR

Option:

We've been through a pretty challenging journey together. Just take another piece of paper and, writing as yourself in the present, what would you now say to your 14-year-old self?

Thank you. I am not sure what you would like to do with that writing but, perhaps, you might like to keep it for future reference?

This session has been focused on building community through the sharing of personal stories in a metaphorical structure of the composite character of a 14-year-old. At the same time, we are adding theatrical skills of role playing and script writing and a more extended performance piece to share and reflect on. The major focus is still on building community, putting the drama contract into practice and learning more about how we work together.

4.5 Questions for Reflection, Suggested Activity and Further Reading

Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of the risks we enter into when we invite participants to draw on their own lived experiences as a source of dramatic material?
2. In the reflection stage of this structure, reflection is focused on the meanings and feelings of the work before discussion of how we made the work. What might be the reasons for organizing reflection in this way?
3. Working in educational settings, there are many established ways of dealing with students' work. In applied drama settings in various communities, these structures are not as clear and therefore need to be addressed. What responsibility does a facilitator have for looking after the materials that are created in a working session? Are participants to be responsible for keeping anything they've written or otherwise created (visual materials, maps, etc.)? Are you as facilitator going to gather and maintain these materials as documentation of the process? What are the implications of not taking care of these materials, particularly when working with at-risk participants?

Suggested Activity

There are two things that need to be planned in terms of documentation. The first is to plan for what supplies are required in order to keep materials generated organized and safe. If materials are not being kept, what is to be done with them? The second area asks what ways are to be employed to document this process (audio, video, photographic, etc.)? Which bits of the process do you see as most pertinent for documentation? Write a one-page plan for how the process will be documented throughout a group's project. This plan is to be shared and negotiated with participants as an extension of the drama contract. The plan will also be affected by the needs of funding agencies or institutions connected to the project.