

## THE VALUE OF THEATRE GAMES

Well, now it's my turn to rant and ask for advice. I need to set the scene.

Last year our "pro-arts" superintendent proposed that a fine arts center be built as part of the high school renovations. He formed a committee of teachers, administrators, community leaders to work on this project. We went to auditoriums and schools to tour their science labs and media centers as well. I especially worked hard on this project as I am the only person in the school system that has EVER had any real knowledge of how an auditorium works. We met over and over and over. I was even given the chance to voice my opinions on three proposed plans. Then all of a sudden the school board got cold feet and jerked the plans out from under us because of a petition that was signed by less than one percent of the district's population. Well, you can imagine how I felt about starting the school year.

During this time as well, I was given notice that the school would no longer be paying my stipend for sponsoring the drama club. I would still get a stipend for my productions, but not for the administrative work that I do.

For the past two years, I have repeatedly told our head of guidance that a technical theatre class must be in place each trimester. For the past two years, he has chosen (because of numbers) to only fill in two trimesters leaving me with one tri to build the set after school. Now, the tech theatre class does more than build the set, but they spend the most time on it. This class is set up so that kids who would like to take an IT class, but can't fit it on their schedule can at least get some practical experience in construction. This morning, my department head (who never defends ANYTHING for the LA department) informed me that only one trimester will have a tech theatre class, leaving me with two trimester with no one to build my set except after school. I know some of you have no tech theatre class at all, and I appreciate what you do, but I will say that I was hired as a theatre teacher, not an English or TV Production teacher (which I also teach without complaint) and I am seeing my classes being cut left and right. My advanced theatre arts class (a two trimester course) has been condensed to one trimester as well.

Not only that, Beginning Theatre Arts USED to be an oral communications credit in our class. THAT was taken away this year and when I looked at the graduation requirements that are posted on the student course outline paper, THEATRE CLASSES WERE NOT LISTED UNDER ANYTHING AS A WAY TO EARN CREDITS!! The courses were in the course description section of the paper. Of course, I went to the guidance head about this who basically blew me off. I went to the principal and she was sympathetic to it all but said, that it only counts as general elective next year because it was too late to do anything about it this year. And the reason for only one trimester, not enough kids signed up for it...do you THINK there is a reason for this problem???? I mentioned to the principal that the theatre classes should be listed under Fine Arts as that is how the state of Indiana lists it.

Today, when I went to the principal about this latest development, she mentioned that she said something to the guidance head about theatre classes being a part of the fine art and he DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT THEY WERE LISTED UNDER THAT ACCORDING TO THE STATE! Now, as head of guidance and scheduling don't you think he should know that? My numbers have fallen every year since he took over. (Oh, btw, he is a swim coach) Am I being paranoid about there being a conspiracy? The principal did tell me that he is going to give guidance a directive that any schedule conflicts should suggest tech theatre in order to possibly get one more section entered.

So anyway...I'm seriously thinking of getting out of theatre education, be an English teacher with no extra curriculums/and or leaving the profession completely.

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Could you start a quiet but persistent campaign to win over your Principal? You'll need to drop articles in his mailbox about the importance of theatre arts in enhancing language arts SAT scores; about the crucial interactive skills learned in doing theatre that prepare students for the workplace (I have a great article for this); about the value of theatre for the school community, and the community at large.

Also bring him figures about the college scholarship money available to active Thespians; about the hundreds of career paths available to engineers, mechanics, writers, technicians, computer whizzes, etc. etc. etc. in the arena of performing arts--careers they won't know about if there isn't a strong theatre program in place... There's a new publication out of Calif. detailing the newly adopted career standards, that makes it clear how vital the performing arts industry is to our country.

Send him internet links re theatre in education and all the incredible connections with history and literature... Start collaborating with a history teacher to do "reenactments"--make history come alive in a way the students will never forget. Make your next few shows enhancements of curriculum-- hit him over the head with a mallet as to the "relevance" of theatre and how it teaches us about ourselves.

It sounds like your guidance guy is clueless-- but the principal is more receptive. So aim your campaign at him (and maybe a few other choice admins, or the elite teacher group that confers on school matters)...

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