Beginner's Mind: Teaching From a Position of Not Knowing

Tara Lynn Sullivan
The University of Montana

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BEGINNER’S MIND: TEACHING FROM A POSITION OF NOT KNOWING

By

TARA LYNN SULLIVAN

BA Theatre, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 1999

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Approved by:

Perry Brown, Associate Provost for Graduate Education
Graduate School

Dr. Ann C. Wright, Chair
Creative Pulse, College of Visual and Performing Arts

Dr. Randy Bolton
Creative Pulse, College of Visual and Performing Arts

Dr. Hipólito Rafael Chacón
Creative Pulse, College of Visual and Performing Arts
Most students believe that their teachers are experts in all aspects of the field they teach in. In April of 2009 my drama students asked me to teach Commedia dell’Arte during the upcoming school year. I did have a strong knowledge of the subject but I decided to approach the project with a beginner’s mind and take a risk teaching a form of theatre I knew little about. Over the course of the school year, my students and I learned together. We researched the history, movement, and production elements of Commedia dell’Arte. The end result was a Commedia inspired performance where Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet collided with A Midsummer Night’s Dream. While studying Commedia dell’Arte the students learned how to take risks, work together, write a show, produce a show, and enjoy the journey to an end result. I discovered that it is not necessary to be an expert in everything I teach. All it takes is a willingness to risk and approach the subject with a mind open to possibilities.
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Introduction

Students often assume that teachers have all the answers and are experts in the subject they are teaching. I quickly realized how wrong the assumption was when I became a teacher. In the first year as a math teacher I found myself stumped on a difficult problem more than once. I would smile and tell the student, “I am not sure about that at the moment, but I will get back to you with an answer tomorrow.” I found this was the quickest way to save face and not lose credibility. In math, the answers are mostly definite. I couldn’t fake a solution but I could find the answer fairly quickly and appear a math whiz again the following day.

Changing subjects from math to drama, I found it was much easier to appear an expert as due to the creative nature of drama my answers were open for interpretation and the curriculum is not mapped out by my school district so I could stick to teaching topics that I was confident in and had most of the answers. I could appear to be an expert if I stuck to what I knew.

Resting on laurels can make a decent teacher, but it does not make an amazing teacher. So the question is how does an instructor put her ego aside and admit to not being an expert and become a learner along side her students? The answer is to take a risk. In theatre class, there are several sayings I use to push my students to go outside their comfort zone. “If you are going to fail, fail big.” “Go big, or go home.” “It is much easier for me to tell you to tone it down, but much harder for me to get you to go bigger.” I ask them to risk everyday. Now I had to hold up the mirror and ask myself to risk for my students’ growth and mine.

In April of 2009, I took the Timberline High School Drama Club to Ashland, Oregon to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. This is an annual trip we have been making since 2007. On
this particular visit we saw a performance of The Servant of Two Masters, Carlo Goldoni’s
18th century script adapted for the economic climate of 2009. The adaptation was a play
within a play where the Oregon Shakespeare Festival actors were forced to perform Servant
with no budget. They recycled props and costumes from previous shows and rolling
blackouts occurred throughout the performance. The stock characters were larger than life
and the humor sidesplitting. The message in the end was that it doesn’t take money to make
people laugh. All that is needed is space to perform and an audience. It was my students’
first exposure to Commedia dell’Arte and they loved it. The students left the theatre begging
me to teach Commedia the following school year.

“NO,” was my reaction. I was not comfortable with my knowledge of Commedia dell’Arte
and quite frankly, the physicality required scared me. The students persisted. They wanted
to learn Commedia and put on a show. They proposed studying Commedia and adapting
Romeo and Juliet in the style for the 2009-2010 school year’s advanced class project. I
pointed out that I did not know Commedia and we would have to learn together. I
emphasized the amount of work involved and the fact that I would be essentially flying blind.
I expressed again and again that it would take patience on their part because I would not have
all of the answers. They did not care. They unanimously agreed they wanted the challenge.

Over the summer break I weighed the pros and cons of tackling a project that I knew nothing
about. The theatre productions I have directed in the past all had small unknowns but my
theatrical knowledge allowed me to know how to get from point A to point B. Even though I
am an experienced actor, director, and drama teacher, I was going to have to work from a
position of not knowing where to start and not knowing where we would end. A concept inZen Buddhism called the beginner’s mind encourages people, regardless of level, to practice with an empty, ready mind. In *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind* Shunryu Suzuki states, “In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities, but in the experts mind there are few (Suzuki, 1).” Approaching a subject with a beginner’s mind is when an individual really learns (Suzuki, 2-3). I decided to clear out my mind to make room for potential. My student’s enthusiasm forced me to put my fears aside, take a risk, teach from a position of not knowing, and jump in with both feet to the world of Commedia dell’Arte.
Researching Commedia

I began the research on my own. With school district money I purchased several reference books on Commedia. The first book was *Commedia dell’Arte; An Actor’s Handbook*, by John Rudlin. As an actor’s handbook, the text explained each stock character thoroughly going over name, costume, status, gestures, relationships, status, mask, walks, speech, plot function, origin, props, movements, characteristics, improvisations. It also had a detailed introduction to the history of Commedia. I purchased *Playing Commedia; A Training Guide to Commedia Techniques*, by Barry Grantham, for Commedia warm-up games and movement exercises. *Commedia Plays; Scenarios, Scripts, Lazzi*, also by Barry Grantham, is a collection of Commedia plays for beginning troupes that I acquired for examples of the format of Commedia inspired scripts. *The Italian Comedy*, by Pierre Louis Duchartre, covered historical pictorial representations of Commedia. For instructions on how to create a Commedia Troupe, I chose *Commedia dell’Arte; a Handbook for Troupes*, by John Rudlin and Olly Crick. Lastly, *Lazzi; The Comic Routines of the Commedia dell’Arte*, by Mel Gordon covered over 250 lazzi, or comedy routines.

These were helpful as to the history of Commedia, characteristics of the stock characters, how troupes were organized, and how performances were structured. Most of the text instructed how the stock characters moved but I struggled interpreting the movement for each from the written instruction. Commedia is physical theatre. Learning the physicality of the stock characters was the most important element of my project and I was working from a
position of not knowing. My solution to this problem was to find a DVD that showed visual, physical, step-by-step examples of the physical walks and mannerisms of each of the stock characters so my students and I could learn them together.

In Commedia stock characters are stereotypes that represent fixed social types (Rudlin, 67). Each stock character has specific physical movements that make them who they are. The zanni are foolish servants who do their best to serve their masters but somehow find a way to mess everything up. Gilligan in the sitcom Gilligan’s island is a perfect example of a zanni. The innamorati, or lovers, are the male and female who are in love with being in love. The lover’s heads are in the clouds and their emotion ranges from complete elation to complete despair. The lovers coined the phrase ‘airhead’. Pantalone is an old man who only cares about money and flirts with women. Il Dottore is a doctor who claims to be wise but diagnoses everyone regardless of gender as pregnant. Il Capitano is a braggart, false general, who claims to be brave but is afraid of his own sword. La Signora is the wife of Pantalone who is very calculating and over the top. No one messes with La Signora. There are many more characters but these are the most general.

Again, the physicality of the stock characters in Commedia frightened me the most so I searched for a solution to being unable to interpret movement from written text. I needed a visual, audio, and kinesthetic approach so I searched for a video that would teach the movement of each stock character step by step and came across a DVD by Maestro Antonio Fava, a world-renowned authority in the field of Commedia. He directs the International School of the Comic Actor in Reggio Emilia, Italy and teaches Commedia workshops to
actors all over the world. The DVD *Commedia By Fava: The Commedia dell'Arte Step by Step* is footage taken from one of his workshops.

Commedia is an art that has been passed on orally from generation to generation. Starting in the sixteenth century and over the following two centuries, Commedia was developed and performance techniques were passed on to siblings and troupe members. According to John Rudlin in *Commedia dell'Arte: A Handbook For Troupes*, these professional secrets were only for a selective few (Rudlin, 2). Professional secrets that were not written down, but designed to be taught in person.

Having a video was the closest I could come to flying Antonio Fava in from Italy to teach my students and me. The video was very expensive but fortunately, I convinced the school district’s instructional media center to purchase it.

In the video, Fava teaches the traditional physicality of the Commedia stock characters. For example, he begins with the zannis and demonstrates each of their numerous walks. In addition to the movement of the zannis he covers the innamorati, Pantalone, Il Dattore, La Signora, and Il Capitano. The film also includes canovaccios, vague plot outlines acted out, for the different masks, also known as stock characters. The canovaccios were helpful in
seeing the instruction put into action. I found Fava’s video to be invaluable to our process. Without watching the physical demonstration by Fava, Commedia in my classroom would have been a research project that stayed on the page versus a physical exploration of the art form.

Once I had a pretty decent grasp of the basics of Commedia and had gathered the purchased texts and DVD for the students, I sent the students out to do their own research. In addition to the students studying the history of Commedia, I assigned a stock character and history of Commedia assignment. Each student wrote a one-page paper on the history of Commedia in addition to researching one stock character that I assigned. The students collected information on the stock character and presented the information to the class in a three-minute speech or skit. The goal was to create mini experts on the stock characters for future reference during the class performance project. When we worked on the show, we asked the students who studied that particular mask if we missed anything or got something wrong.

The assignment enlightened all of us on the variety of stock characters. I did not realize before the presentations that a stock character can branch off into several different masks. For example, there is just a Zanni, or as depicted in M. Sand’s 1860 artwork of Masques et Bouffons, there is the zanni Brighella (figure 2) or Arlecchino (figure 3). As stated earlier, a

(Figure 2)  
(Figure 3)
zanni is a low class servant who can’t do anything right. Zanni is the general name for this stereotype. It is the name given to an unnamed character or “…a person whose actual identity you cannot be bothered to discover (Rudlin, 67)”.

As one student stated in her presentation, it would be like calling every American male John. Brighella is a zanni but has a name because he has other qualities that set him apart from the general zanni. Brighella is usually an inn-keeper and will stab anyone in that back or steal their money. Arlecchino, another named zanni, is very acrobatic, quick-witted, but never malicious.

Through the in-class presentations we discovered that some of the minor characters were close cousins to the major stock characters.

The stock character assignment proved that two heads are always better than one and thirty-five heads allows little information to fall through the cracks. While one student thoroughly described the lovers’ birdcalls, another student who also had the lovers would add how the lovers’ props are a hand mirror and a handkerchief. Some students found hearing the information more than once redundant, while others felt like they remembered it more hearing it twice. I found that the details of each character stuck with me much better after the students presented it than when I read it in John Rudlin’s book, Commedia dell’Arte; An Actor’s Handbook.

Through the activity, we also found some information and a trait of a character found in different sources was contradictory. For example, two students were studying Tartaglia and one found that his animal was an owl while the other found that his animal was a pig. According to Rudlin it is a cross between a duck and an owl but no one really knows
because, “…there is no primitive origin to point to. (Rudlin, 154)”. I was not surprised to find contradiction as my research made it clear that knowledge of Commedia is mostly through iconography and word of mouth since the original Commedia troupes were mostly comprised of people who were illiterate (Rudlin, 2). Without written documentation it would be impossible to get the details of each character exact. Just like a great grandma’s spaghetti recipe is known to the family, a sister may add a new spice while an uncle may cut down the salt passing ‘Great Grandma’s Family Recipe’ down with modifications or embellishment but still calling it ‘Great Grandma’s Family Recipe’. This doesn’t even begin to address the issue of the different regions of Italy that Commedia was performed and how that most likely had an effect on the evolution of stock characters during the passing down of information. The discovery that the characters had a basic structure but were open for individual interpretation played a key role later in our production process.
After researching the history and stock characters, it was time to physically move. The students had become restless with the historical side of Commedia and wanted to dig their teeth into the acting side. We began to watch the Antonio Fava DVD to learn the different walks and physical movements on the stock characters. The students fell in love with Fava. They all began talking in bad Italian accents and imitating him. I started them with the movement for the lovers. Since the lovers are the Commedia stock characters that do not wear masks I thought it would be the easiest place to start. I showed the students the entire clip of Fava explaining and demonstrating the physicality of the lovers. Then I had the students get up and try the movement. It did not work well. The kids felt awkward and struggled to remember what Fava demonstrated. I tried to review the movement with them, but I couldn’t even do it.

Sensing their frustration, I reminded myself that I was learning with them. I thought, how would I learn this best? I recalled watching a clip from John Medina’s *Brain Rules*, “Memory recall jumps if the learning experience is participatory or if it involves doing the real thing (flying an airplane vs. reading about flying one).”(Medina) So I switched gears quickly and had them watch the clip again, stopped it after each lover example, played it again and we got up and tried the movement with Fava. If we felt like we didn’t get it, we watched again and tried again. Watching the clip and doing the movement simultaneously was the key to learning the movement. We finished the lovers and I had them partner up and
create short canovaccios for the lovers to show me that they understood the material. We repeated this process with the DVD for the movement of each stock character Fava presented and this was how we learned the traditional physicality of Commedia dell’Arte.

As we worked through the physicality of each stock character, it was very clear that some students were natural Zannis, Lovers, Il Capitanos, etc. I actually had one female student who was a natural Pantalone. I observed and made notes as to what characters each student ‘fit’ best so I would have the information for casting the show. Many students were frustrated with the physicality. Some have never been asked to move that specifically before. They do drama warm-ups every day but some have never been able to transfer the physical into their character. They were very disconnected from their bodies. I even found myself getting frustrated because I had trouble getting the steps ‘right’ and I have had dance training. I went back to my books to see how important it was to be exact. In Playing Commedia: A Training Guide to Commedia Techniques, by Barry Grantham, I found this quote and read it to the class,

One really nice thing about Commedia is that no one is debarred; you can never be too young or too old, too fat or too thin, too tall or too short, too ugly or too beautiful. Oddness of form or feature, even disabilities, can be turned to advantage, and if you show the ability to play Commedia, the troupe welcomes you. (Grantham, ix)

I told my students that we need to not worry about getting it right, just do the steps in your own way. Just commit to moving like the character and your own personal quirks will bring more life to it.
Creating the Show

The class became more and more comfortable with the movement as we practiced and it was time to create the show. I assigned reading from *Playing Commedia; A Training Guide to Commedia Techniques*, by Barry Grantham. The introduction of the book gives a concise description of the role of the Capo Comico, argumento, scenario, and lazzi. The Capo Comico is the stage manager for a Commedia Troupe. He tells the actor what play they are to perform and presents them with the Argumento. The Argumento is the outline of the story. The scenarios are summaries of action points that need to happen in each improvised scene. Throughout the play lazzi, performance gags slipped in at opportune or inopportune times, are performed to keep the attention of the audience. The reading gave the students necessary information to understand how Commedia shows were constructed.

Once the students were familiar with the Commedia performance terminology, I broke them into groups to read “The False Turk – in Twelve Minutes” (Grantham, 4-18). I found “The False Turk – in Twelve Minutes” to be a perfect example for many reasons. It was short, had scenarios listed in addition to scripted scenes, the lazzi were scripted in so they could see how they fit into the show, and the Capo Comico is one of the players so they could grasp the Capo Comico’s role better.

In the play, “The False Turk – in Twelve Minutes”, a Capo Comico shows up to prepare his cast for the upcoming performance. Only one actor is present. The other actors start to drift
in and the actor playing Arlechino is missing. The actors ask to perform the play “The False Turk”. By the time Arlechino shows up, it is too late to do “The False Turk” because the show takes two hours and they only have twelve minutes. Arlecchino suggests performing “The False Turk” in twelve minutes. The cast agrees and the show is now “The False Turk – In Twelve Minutes”.

After reading the play we brainstormed ideas for our show. Originally we had planned on a Commedia adaptation of “Romeo and Juliet”. As our discussion evolved we came to the conclusion that “Romeo and Juliet” was problematic because the show didn’t have enough parts for thirty-five students. This concerned the class greatly. In my program I stress to the students how important ensemble is. They are a very tight knit group and were adamant that every student had a part to play in the project. This care for each other led to the suggestion that we combine “Romeo and Juliet” with “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. Another student piped in and said that we could go off the same idea of the ‘False Turk’ where the actors meet to do the show and the lead actor is missing and comes in too late to do the show in it’s entirety so they have to change gears and adjust the show to fit their circumstances.

For our show, we used the concept of “The False Turk – in Twelve Minutes” and came up with the following solution: we would split the class into two casts; one cast for “Romeo and Juliet” and one cast for “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. Each cast would have a Capo Comico. The two casts would show up at the same venue to perform their show and realize that there was a mistake and both shows were booked for the same night. The actors get upset, the Capo Comicos argue, apologize to the audience, and with a suggestion from the
stagehands decide to do both shows at the same time, switching shows each scene.

Everything goes well until Act II where everyone starts getting confused and the two shows start to collide. Romeo ends up kissing Hermia, Lysander gets mistaken for Romeo, etc. By Act III everything is completely out of control, but they find a way to resolve it.

This idea was brilliant. It solved the problem of having a part for everyone. It tripled the amount of lovers, doubled the Pantalones, La Signoras, Il Capitanos, and multiplied the zannis. We even threw in some stagehand zannis to be the go betweens for each cast. We wrote out the large cast list and what stock character fit each role. The students requested their first and second choice for the stock character they wanted to play. With the combination of the request list and my notes from the Fava rehearsals, I cast the show.

We were ready to tackle the actual writing. We looked at both shows and found the scenes that we thought were important to the plot and came up with a logical progression for the three acts. We agreed that some of the scenarios could be improvised, but that some of the more complicated pivotal scenes with multiple characters needed to be scripted.

Because we were taking Shakespeare and combining it with Commedia, we had to have some Shakespearean text for the scenes to make the premise that these troupes were prepared to do a full Shakespeare show believable. The students are required to read “Romeo and Juliet” in ninth grade English and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” tenth grade English so they were already familiar with the material. For the scripted scenes the writers reviewed Shakespeare’s text and borrowed lines to write into their written scenes. For the improvised
scenes the actors reviewed Shakespeare’s scenes and picked a few lines to throw into the scene before they broke away from the actual text.
Troupe Training Techniques

To help the writers with their scene writing, I introduced the class to Impro cards from *Commedia dell’Arte: A Handbook for Troupes*, by John Rudlin and Olly Crick. The cards are rehearsal materials provided for troupe training. The goal of the cards is to build up skills for the group so they are prepared to perform in public (Rudlin and Crick, 137). The cards from Rudlin and Crick’s book deal with traditional canovacci for the stock characters. I had the students start with a two person Impro Card.

**Flavio, Arlecchino**

*Arlecchino* pretends to be Petunia, the object of his master’s affections, so that *Flavio* can practise all the arts of courtship. (Rudlin and Olly, 146)

(Figure 4)

The students really struggled with these cards. The main problem was trying to maintain the physicality of Commedia and speak at the same time. An odd occurrence was that they all attempted performing the Impros with Italian accents. I believe it was due to watching Antonio Fava. All of our practice was imitating Fava who spoke with an Italian accent. They had memorized the accent in addition to the movement. It was very difficult to break them of this habit. To help them see that they did not need to use an Italian accent while doing an Impro, I jumped up to try one. I was quickly reminded that I was learning alongside them when I opened my mouth to speak during my Impro and out came a bad Italian accent.
I turned to the class and said, “Wow! That really is hard. I can’t even do it. Well, we will just have to keep working on it.” It was a very humbling experience.

The challenge of the Impro cards came as a surprise to me. My students have very strong improvisation skills. In class, we work on improvisation every Friday and put on Improv shows much like the television show Whose Line is it Anyway? for paying audiences 4 times a year. Over half of the class has been participating in the show for three years now. I thought that the cards would be easy for them. We worked on the cards using traditional stock characters for about four class periods. There was improvement, but not much.

We transitioned into replacing the cards with the scenes we had chosen for the show. The goal was to improvise the scenes and have the writers take notes. The writers could use the Impros for ideas for their scripts. We found that the students had a much easier time improvising with the characters for “Midsummer” and “Romeo and Juliet”. I believe that these were characters that were well known to the students and this gave them more confidence because they had more material to work with. The exercise gave the writers many gems for their scenes. Several of the moments made it into the final production. Even though the students improved on the impros once the subject matter changed, they were still struggling with using the traditional Commedia physicality while improvising a scene.
Outside Help

The students and I hit a wall once the Impros began. We did not know where to go. I came across some research in The Italian Comedy, by Pierre Louise Ducharte, that basically convinced me that I was insane to try to tackle Commedia with thirty-five high school students. “The success of the commedia dell’arte depended almost entirely on the acting rather than on the scenarios. In the opinion of Gherardi and Riccoboni it was easier to train ten actors for the regular theatre than one for the extemporaneous stage” (Ducharte, 30). Evariste Gherardi and Luigi Riccoboni were actor-authors from the seventeenth century who both belonged to a line of improvisators (Ducharte, 32). Fortunately, the text went on to say how it was important for the actor to have ‘a spirit of camaraderie’ and ‘mutual cooperation’ which I was confident my students did have so I knew we could figure it out. The down side was that we were running out of time. I called for help.

Unfortunately, the one person I knew in Boise that had extensive Commedia experience was on sabbatical in Europe, ironically to study Commedia. So I contacted a professor at Boise State University who put me in contact with an actress from the Idaho Shakespeare Festival. Luckily the actress, Katie Mueller, was a graduate of the high school where I teach so she was more than happy to help. After several emails, I called her up and explained to her what we were trying to do. At this point, I expressed that I was at a loss. I had done all my research and decided it would be impossible to do a traditional Commedia show. True Commedia actors study and rehearse their stock character for years to perfect it. I was trying
to teach all of Commedia and have high school actors perform a character in three months. Not only that, I hadn’t even gotten into working with actual masks yet. I told her I was leaning toward changing my show to ‘Commedia Inspired’. I felt this was the way to go. As stated in Commedia dell’Arte; A Handbook for Troupes in regard to people claiming that historical Commedia dell’Arte is dead,

“…historically speaking, Aristophanes, Moliere, Goldoni, Shakespeare, to name a few, are also dead. Old texts have been shown to need new forms, so consequently perhaps old forms need new texts? Either way, live theatre cannot solely feed on the justification of historical accuracy (Rudlin and Crick, 52).”

If I was going to change my game plan and create new text for an old form, I needed help to see if I was on the right track.

Katie stated that Commedia was all about the characters. If the actors can nail the characters, it will work. She came in on a block day, which is a two-hour class period, and worked with the students. Having a guest artist come in kicked the students into gear. They wanted to show her what they had learned so instead of just going through the motions, they actually started to commit. Katie reviewed leading centers as a warm-up. Leading centers is when an actor picks a part of her body to lead with. For example, if an actor leads with his nose, he could possibly be a stuck up aristocrat or a detective. The concept of leading centers had been introduced to the class before but not linked to Commedia.

Katie pointed out that Commedia is about the physical. Because the troupes performed on the street by people and for people of different local dialects, in addition to open-air conditions, wearing masks, and troupes traveling outside of Italy the actors had to rely on
physicality not the language to tell the story (Grantham, 11). The goal of using leading centers was to encourage the students to get out of their heads and connect to their bodies. Using the leading centers, the students explored finding a leading center for the character they were cast as. They used the information that they studied for their stock characters and combined it with how they felt their character would move.

As the students worked, the characters physically come to life. The actress playing Titania started leading with her hands. Titania evolved into a diva. The actor playing Lysander began leading with his chest making him a conceited yet air-headed lover. We split the students into their two casts and did some Impros with their characters. We kept it simple, just two people passing in the street. Some of the interactions did not even involve talking but the comedy was there. The students started to gain confidence that they could do Commedia.

Once the exercises were over the students had a question and answer session with Katie. The biggest question the students asked was the same one that I had. “How important is it to do the classical Commedia movement?” Her response was exactly what I was hoping for. She stated that they needed to embrace the physicality and the humor would come. The most important thing is to exaggerate the physical. Now, it is important to play truthfully but Commedia is the antithesis of naturalistic acting (Grantham, 12) so you have to commit fully to being over the top to make it work.
After Katie left, the students stated how relieved they were that they did not have to stick to Fava and the traditional steps of Commedia. They expressed frustration that we had spent so much time on researching the characters and traditional physicality. The show was three weeks away and we hadn’t worked on the performance yet. I pointed out that I understood their frustration, but I disagreed. The months of research allowed us to take what the guest artist had to offer us to a new level. Had we not had the knowledge of Commedia, we would not have been able to grow from the exercises she brought.

Without realizing it the students had experienced transfer. To help them understand the importance of all our research I used the example of a math student does not see the value in solving basic one-step equations over and over again in the beginning of an Algebra One course. As the year goes on, he moves on to two-step problems and eventually multi-step problems. He still complains of the drill of solving these problems and fails to see how it will help him later in life. When he gets to Chemistry, or Physics he is whizzing through multi-step Algebra problems with ease, most likely not recognizing that it was the skills in Algebra One that allowed them to make strides in the sciences. I pointed out to the students that we needed a strong knowledge base of Commedia to move on to the next level. Spending time on learning the history of Commedia and the traditional physicality was necessary to have the tools to break away and create.
Scenarios

We were back on track. We had done Impros on most of the important parts of the play and many of the writers had given me written scenes for the moments we decided to script. Now it was time to write the scenarios. A scenario is a script of action point to action point. There are no lines to memorize like in full script in traditional theatre. Part of the risk taking in Commedia is that every scene was improvised. There were many reasons historians speculate why the scenes were not scripted. One, as mentioned before, was due to the lack of literacy among the actors. Another was due to the troupes not wanting their best work copied or, for a better word, stolen by other Commedia troupes. My favorite explanation as to why Commedia used scenarios versus a traditional script was due to censorship. Some of the lazzis were politically charged and according to Mel Gordon in Lazzi: The Comic Routines of the Commedia dell’Arte, many lazzis were morally inappropriate which meant the troupes could get in trouble so if the details were not written down, they could not be censored and without written proof they could stay one step ahead of the authorities (Gordon, 6).

One might argue that a show is not truly Commedia if it is not working entirely from scenarios. Stanley Allan Sherman, of the totally unaccredited Roving Classical Commedia University, would state that a true Commedia show can only work from Scenarios and if any part is scripted it is a play using aspects of Commedia (Sherman). Since we were straying from using the classical movements of the stock characters and had decided on not using masks due to time constraints I accepted that our production would be a play using aspects of
Commedia. This development left the student relieved. They were quickly beginning to understand that true Commedia was very difficult to perfect and switching to ‘Commedia Inspired’ calmed their anxiety about the project.

I had originally given the assignment of writing the scenarios to three people. Unfortunately, we had some communication issues and the job wasn’t getting done. I decided that the job was too big for the students and three people was too many to get a unified script so I took over and wrote the scenarios for the first two acts. Once my head writer saw the format and the overall vision, he wrote the third act. I must point out that the scenarios were constantly being edited up until the performance.

The students had the scenarios in their hands and we began rehearsing the show in order. Most of the students had worked their scenes before but now we were going for the continuity of telling the story. As we worked scene to scene, I pointed out important points that needed to be included. The students would improvise one run of the scene and create a brilliant bit with pivotal information. The second run, they would forget the bit and add something else in that wasn’t important. I would stop them after each scenario and say, for example, “Good. But don’t forget, we have to know that the Friar is supposed to tell Romeo that Juliet isn’t really dead. That sets up the Friar getting distracted by the nurse and Romeo killing himself because he wasn’t given the information.” When we started, the students were getting so wrapped up in the comedy, they forgot about the storyline. They improved the more we rehearsed. I kept reminding them that scenarios were posted backstage and should be reviewed before each scene to make sure they hit their character’s objectives.
As we approached performance, I ended up scripting a few more scenes than I had intended. The main reason was due to style. As discussed earlier, the premise of the show was that two acting companies had come to perform a Shakespearean play. In order to make this believable, the actors had to have some of Shakespeare’s lines in the scene. Not exactly an easy thing to slip in while improvising. I found the scenes that needed more Shakespearean text and wrote short scripts for the actors. I gave them permission to go off of the text but asked them to try to get the Shakespearean lines into the scene. Giving them the script actually gave them more freedom. The structure was comforting and having a script to fall back on gave them more courage to take risks. Keep in mind, not one scene I wrote or the students wrote ended up in the show verbatim. The actors took the liberty to explore and came up with some great raw live moments in rehearsal and performance.
The week before the show we brought Katie Mueller back in to see the progress. Having a guest raised the bar and the actor’s pushed themselves further but the pacing was lacking. Katie suggested doing an Italian run through. In an Italian run through the actors perform the show as fast as they possibly can. Lines and entrances are done at lightning speed. From rehearsals for shows before the Commedia project the students knew an Italian run as a speed through. The goal of the Italian run was to get the actors to get to the point in the scenes and as a result pick up the pacing of the show. While improvisation is very freeing, it is easy to go off in different directions and make a scene that should only be two minutes, five minutes. The Italian run forced the students to get on stage, accomplish their objective quickly and get off stage. The following rehearsals were Italian runs where I took extensive notes and rewrote several scenarios to help the actors be more specific. Aside from my notes, the Italian run helped the students experience that ‘less is more’ and they began eliminating moments that were not necessary to the show. After the third speed through, continuity started to click and the students gained confidence in the project. They really started to believe that they could, in fact, pull it off.

With the show quickly approaching, we found that we would fix one problem and create another. They students had gotten Shakespeare into the scene, were hitting the important information, were quick-witted with the improvisation, the pacing had improved, but they had lost one of the most important elements of Commedia, their physicality. This did not
concern me. After directing several musicals it has always been my experience that when
working on musical numbers the actors focus on dancing and get it down. Then they focus
on singing and sound beautiful. The cast puts the singing and dancing together and it is a
train wreck. Making it all work simultaneously takes rehearsal. The skills are there, they
just need time to work together. I called the lack of physicality to their attention and because
they felt confident with the other components, they put all their energy back into the
movement. They connected to their bodies again and the show took off. The only thing they
needed was an audience.
When putting this show together, I had to get creative as to where we would perform. Oregon Shakespeare Festival’s *Servant of Two Masters* was performed in a black box theatre. They had it set up as theatre in the round. Which made sense as Commedia dell’Arte was performed on the street right in the middle of a thoroughfare. Unfortunately, all I had at my high school is an auditorium that seats about eight hundred people and my classroom that can only fit about sixty (and that is cramped). I decided to ask the choir teacher if we could use the choir room. It has stairs for stadium seating that could accommodate about 100 chairs and four entrances for the actors.

For the performance area I ordered a portable stage from the district. We needed two levels
to accommodate the balcony scene and give the audience some sight variation. I went to our storage unit and found about eight 4X8X ¼” pieces of plywood with trees painted on them. It was perfect for transforming the room from a choir classroom to a forest stage. The entire set was simple and most importantly, free. As keeping with the budget cut theme of Oregon Shakespeare’s Servant of Two Masters, I did this show for less than fifty dollars. We set up portable lights in the back row of the audience. There were two light trees with three lights apiece. This gave just enough light to make it theatrical and to avoid using the fluorescent classroom lights.

(Figure 6)

The choir room was perfect for the effect we were trying to achieve. We needed space for 35 actors and our audience but we wanted that space to be intimate. Our show was going to be interactive and we needed the close quarters to encourage the audience to participate. We
were anticipating about 60-80 people each night. To our surprise the closing night attendance was around 120 so we had to seat people on the floor. It got pretty cozy but the energy was incredible.
My students decided to advertise for the show by advertising for *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* individually. They created posters for each show advertising them both for the same night in the choir room. The idea was to prepare the audience for the confusion right off the bat.

The program was double sided. Folded in half, the front side was *Romeo and Juliet*. You open it up and it is the cast for *Romeo and Juliet*. If you flipped it over, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was upside down. You turned it upright; it was a program for *A Midsummer
Night's Dream. You opened it up and the cast for Midsummer was on the inside. It was a reversible program for two shows.
Performance

The first night was a small house. We had sold about sixty tickets. I had the students put a summary of Commedia dell’Arte in the program to explain the style of the theatre to the audience so they weren’t completely lost. I also did a curtain speech and explained what Commedia was and what to look for. The show went very well, but the audience was quiet. They laughed and enjoyed the performance but were a bit confused by what we were trying to do. It was a theatrical experiment so I was not surprised. I treated it like a workshop and the next night came up with a better idea.

The second night our crowd hit eighty plus. During the curtain speech, I spoke about Commedia and the class project. I explained a stock character and had students come out in character as an example. I informed the audience that there was no script, only scenarios. I explained what a scenario was and that the actors are all improvising and welcomed audience interaction. The introduction made all the difference in the world. It warmed up the audience and gave them permission to relax and enjoy themselves. The show was alive and electric. So amazing that word traveled and we maxed out our audience capacity on the third night.

Each performance was a different journey. The first night the students were a bit reserved. The show itself was strong. They hit all their action points and told the story well. The just didn’t take many risks. The second night the students had new confidence. They had had a
successful first run. The feedback from the audience helped them realize that they had a pretty amazing show. They could feel the energy from the audience that second night and they went for it. They were taking huge risks on stage. They stuck to the scenarios but worked off of each other. They were all offering, accepting, and not upstaging. They made each other look good and stuck to the story. The audience was in hysterics and the kids knew they had them in the palms of their hands. I was so proud of their work.

I wish I could say the third night was as incredible as the second. The third night they spun a little out of control. Some of the actors became so excited about the second night that they grandstanded on the third. The show was still good, but we hit a point where the risks the students were taking were not in the best interest of the ensemble or the show. Many actors were upset and felt cheated of their moments. It was a little bit of a let down to end on that note, but a learning experience for us all. It was part of the risk.

The highlights of the shows were many in number. I had one student who could not find his character until he walked on stage the first night. He saw the audience and in that moment made a choice. He was a favorite among the patrons. The student playing Juliet was terrified of improvisation until Romeo got a bloody nose on stage the first night and she had to figure out how to help him. The student playing Romeo could barely speak on stage until this experience and by the third night he was throwing out lines left and right with confidence. These students not only learned, they had an experience by combining theory and practice. They put themselves out there, took risks, supported each other, and made people laugh. As Barry Grantham stated,
Above and beyond any additional skills the performer can bring to the part are three essential qualities: the willingness to work as a team, the gift of being able to seize the ‘moment of opportunity’ in improvisation, and the ability to act with truth and sincerity. (Grantham, 16)

There was not one weak link out of thirty-five students and I believe it is because they truly embraced the spirit of Commedia.
Post Performance

As with every show I do, I like to do a post performance wrap-up to tell the students how I felt they did and find out what they learned. Most of the students loved the experience. One student stated that he was filled with adrenaline every time he went on stage because he did not know what was going to happen. He could not wait to see what his fellow actors were going to throw at him and how he was going to respond. It was very exciting for him.

Another actress did not enjoy the experience at all. She is very organized personality and the lack of script left her feeling very uneasy. She had fun in the end but the process was stressful for her. The students who felt they lacked improvisation skills all felt like they were stronger after this experience. As a class of thirty-five, they felt bonded now and wished we would have done the show earlier in the year.

We discussed the process and what worked and what didn’t. The class was still divided on how much research was really necessary to pull off the show. They wished we could have started acting sooner. I pointed out again that this whole project was an experiment and know that we have paved the road I will definitely take that into account the next time I choose to do a Commedia production. I plan to teach the basics of Commedia in my Theatre Arts III class but will wait a year or two before I tackle a project of this magnitude again.

The issue of the third night upstaging was addressed. I expressed that I wish we had had one more night to try to correct the issue but I was confident that they all learned why it was a
problem and how it broke trust among the ensemble. They all agreed that it was a valuable lesson and while it was frustrating, they understand now why it is so important to always keep your fellow actors in mind.

One of my colleagues asked if I was going to do it again next year. I told him I would introduce Commedia to my beginning classes but my returning advanced students most likely needed a break. He encouraged me to reconsider. He said that it was one of the most exciting things he had attended in awhile. The intimacy of the audience, the energy in the room, and the truthful moments needed an encore. He also stated that there was an incredible amount of learning happening on stage. All of the students were becoming stronger actors as the show went on and it was an amazing thing to witness. Again, I think I will wait a year and revisit this project with a new group of students.
Conclusion

Through this experience I learned that I, just like the students, need to take risks. I was afraid to dive into a subject that I wasn’t an expert in. I came into this project knowing very little about Commedia dell’Arte. I feared not knowing. The truth is, I still know very little about this very complicated form of theatre. It will take much more than a few books and a Fava DVD to be a scholar. According to Howard Gardner in *5 Minds For the Future*, “Much research confirms that it takes up to ten years to master a discipline (Gardner, 3)”. I have come to the conclusion that mastery is not necessary to be a leader. I know enough to inspire my students to study something new, to gain the knowledge that process is so much more valuable than product, and that the possibilities are endless when you know where you want to go but have no idea how to get there.

Teaching through a position of not knowing and working with a beginner’s mind allowed me to work without limits because I did not know what the limits were. I grew as an educator when I took a risk and approached teaching as a learner. My students were not afraid to ask questions because they knew that they were not the only ones who did not know the answer. They were not afraid to take risks because they knew I was taking them as well. Kim Hermanson states in *Getting Messy: A Guide to Taking Risks and Opening the Imagination for Teachers, Trainers, Coaches and Mentors*, that “Being a learner is what allows creative insight to happen (Hermanson, 5)”, and Howard Gardner states that the creating mind is
influential and can make great breakthroughs in the future of the world (Gardner, 7). A valuable asset to all.

In the past, I have prepared my lessons with the fear that if an administrator walked in, I would have to produce a lesson plan and justify that I had mastery of my subject and was teaching it in a ‘correct’ and ‘approved’ way. From now on, I will let go of that anxiety. Through this experience I have found that more learning and creative thinking happened when we emptied our minds of preconceived thoughts of how things should go and instead just went for it and rolled with it. We asked questions and searched for answers, and when we couldn’t find answers and created our own solutions. A goal is necessary, but the journey does not have to be meticulously planned. There are unexpected turns in the road that need to be explored if the experience is to be worthwhile.
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Introduction
### Appendix B

**Commedia Cast List**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romeo and Juliet Cast</th>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Stock Character</th>
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<td>Aspen</td>
<td>Zanni</td>
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**A Midsummer Night’s Dream Cast**

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<tr>
<td>Lysander</td>
<td>Ike</td>
<td>Lover</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puck</td>
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<td>Hamlet</td>
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<td>Ophelia</td>
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<td>Witches</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cody</td>
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Appendix C

Commedia dell’Arte Research Paper
Theatre Arts IV and V
Ms. Sullivan

You will need to research the history of Commedia and write a 1-2 page paper on the history of Commedia and a stock character assigned to you. You must use at least four resources. If you choose to include pictures, you must still have 1-2 pages of text. Please use one and half spacing, Times New Roman 12 point font, and set your margins and 1 inch.

The Stock Characters:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Zanni</th>
<th>The Lovers</th>
<th>Pedrolino</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Isabella</td>
<td>Pucinella</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brighella</td>
<td>Il Cavaliere</td>
<td>Scapino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pantalone</td>
<td>Il Capitano</td>
<td>Scaramuccia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Il Dottore</td>
<td>Colombina</td>
<td>Tartaglia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While researching these characters look for the following information:

- Name
- Status
- Origin
- Physical appearance
- Costume
- Mask
- Props
- Stance
- Walk
- Movements
- Gestures
- Speech
- Characteristics
- Animal
- Relationships
- Relationship to audience
- Plot function

This assignment is due Friday, January 15. It must be typed. I will be looking for accurate content, grammar, and spelling. If you turn it in late, it will be marked down one letter grade for each day it is late.
Appendix D

Romeo and Juliet’s Midsummer Night Dream Scenarios

ACT I
I Two Companies
Players: Both Casts and Capocomicos
The two casts show up for the performance of their play. The Capocomico of each troupe discusses how their show should be performed. After bickering, they ask the audience which show they would like to see. They come to the conclusion that they are to do both shows.

II On with the Show
Players: Stage hands and Capocomicos
The Capocomicos explain to the stage hands how the show is supposed to oscillate between the two productions. Stage hands plan how to make this happen.

III Two Households
Players: Lady Capulet, Capulet, Lady Montague, and Montague
The actor playing Capulet does not show up and the Midsummer Capocomico has to fill in. Capulet and Montague give the opening speech of R&J. The parents meet in the street. The wives stare each other down while the men apologize to each other.

IV Nunnery
Players: Hippolyta, Theseus, Egeus, Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius
While Hippolyta and Theseus plan for their wedding, Egeus brings a complaint that Hermia is not obeying him. Theseus states that Hermia has to make a choice, marry Demetrius, become a nun, or die.

V Rosaline
Players: Romeo, Mercutio, and Benvolio
The boys talk to Romeo about the ball. Romeo Mother Lazzi.

VI Fleeing
Players: Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius
Hermia and Lysander decide to head to the forest to be together, Hermia tells Helena, Helena tells Demetrius and he follows.

VII Raising Juliet
Players: Juliet, Lady Capulet, and Nurse
Lady Capulet tries to talk to her daughter but can’t do it alone so she makes the Nurse speak for her. Juliet is asked to marry ‘Valiant Paris’.

VIII Mechanicals
Players: Mechanicals
The Mechanicals set up for their rehearsal. Assign parts.
IX  Oberon and Titania
Players:  Oberon, Titania, Puck, and Fairies
Oberon and Titania fight over the young Indian boy.

ACT II
I Masked Ball
Players:  Both casts
No one shows up for the ball.  The Stage Hands push the casts from both shows on stage.  All six lovers are on stage.  Burglar Dance Lazzi.  The ball continues with Romeo falling in love with Hermia, kissing Helena, then eventually Juliet.  Lysander is mistaken for Romeo and is kicked out of the ball.

II Balcony Scene
Players:  Romeo and Juliet
Romeo and Juliet meet for the classic balcony scene except Romeo ends up on the balcony and Juliet on the floor until the Nurse steps in.  Nurse Baby Picture Lazzi

III Oberon and Puck
Players:  Oberon, Puck, Demetrius, Helena,
Oberon observes Helena and Demetrius fighting and exit.  Oberon summons Puck to mess with Titania by putting love potion in her eyes.  Oberon asks Puck to also put the potion in Demetrius’s eyes.

IV Friar
Players:  Romeo, Friar, Juliet, and Nurse
Romeo goes to the Friar to see if he will wed them.  Friar/Romeo Pregnant Lazzi.  Helena objects and the Friar pulls a witness from the audience.  Romeo and Juliet are wed.

INTERMISSION
Players:  Capocomicos
The Capocomicos come out and say if Romeo and Juliet was a comedy, the show would be over but instead it is just intermission.

V  Love Potion #9/Cat fight
Players:  Stagehands, Oberon, Puck, Hermia, Lysander, Helena, Demetrius, R&J, Fairies
Stagehands pull all the lovers on stage.  Puck finds the lovers asleep and puts potion in their eyes.  The fairies move the lovers.  They wake.  The actors get confused as they are all in love with the wrong lover.  They break character, Capocomicos sort it out.  Romeo and Juliet exit.  Continue with the cat fight scene.

VI Tybalt’s Death
Players:  Mercutio, Benvolio, Tybalt, Romeo, Lady Montague, Hermia, Helena, and Stage Hands
Tybalt walks in and starts a fight. *Romeo Mother Lazzi*. Mercutio, Romeo, and Benvolio end up dying. They are killed by Hermia and Helena whose fight carries on into the scene. Tybalt is extremely confused. *No One Dies in Comedia Lazzi*

**VII Fairies/Mechanicals**

Players: Stagehands, Mechanicals, Fairies, Titania, Oberon, and Puck

Titania calls her fairies and the stagehands push on some of the mechanicals with fairy wings on. *Fairy Starbuck Lazzi*. Titania falls asleep. The Mechanicals meet in the forest for rehearsal. They work through their play and Bottom walks off and Oberon turns him into an ass. Bottom returns and scares the players. Titania awakes and falls in love with Bottom.

**VIII News of Tybalt**

Players: Juliet, Nurse, Paris, Friar

Juliet learns that Romeo has killed Tybalt. She doesn’t care. The Nurse informs Juliet that Romeo is banished and that she is to marry Paris tomorrow. *Friar/Paris Pregnant Lazzi*. Paris leaves upset with news that he is pregnant and Juliet gets death potion from Friar.

**ACT III**

**I Wrong set**

Players: Stage Hands, Capocomicos, Witches, Titania, Bottom

Stage hands are totally confused and set up things wrong. Instead of the forest setting they set for the witches scene in McB. *McB Witch Lazzi*. Capocomicos sort things out.

**II Oberon’s Mistake**

Players: Bottom, Titania, Oberon, Puck, Fairies

Bottom and Titania are in love. *Bottom is pregnant lazzi*. Oberon gets mad and tells Puck that he needs to fix it. Oberon tells Puck to fix it. *I do believe in Fairies lazzi*.

**III Romeo and Juliet Escape/ New Love**

Players: Romeo, Friar, Nurse, Puck

Romeo is trying to get to Juliet and the Nurse stops him. The Friar rushes in to tell Romeo about Juliet and the potion. The Friar sees the Nurse and forgets to tell Romeo. Romeo tries to set up the Friar and the Nurse. It isn’t working, so he runs backstage and pulls out Puck, steals his potion and uses it on the Nurse. Nurse and Friar turn into lovers and Romeo runs off to find Juliet.

**IV Mortal Kombat II- or, That Fight Scene, Cont’d.**

Players: Helena, Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius

Those chicks are still going at it and the dudes are just hanging out watching.

**V Romeo and Juliet Death**

Players: Romeo, Juliet, Lady Capulet, Lady Montague, Capocomicos, Ophelia, and Hamlet.

Juliet is lying dead in the tomb. *Hamlet Lazzi*. Romeo and Juliet death. The parents show up and cry. The Midsummer Capocomico gets upset, throws himself on Romeo and Juliet and says they can’t die. He revives them while the R&J Capo explains that Romeo and Juliet
have to die because it is in the script. The Midsummer Capo is so upset, they decide to let Romeo and Juliet live.

**VI Getting the Kids Out of the Forest**
Players: Egeus, Hyppolyta, Theseus, Lysander, Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, and Capos
All the adults find their children in the forest. At this point the Capocomicos are just onstage overseeing. Lysander and Demetrius flatter each other. Egeus objects acting like the Pantalone he is. Theseus declares that they will all married.

**VII Mechanicals pt. 3**
Players: Mechanicals, Cast
The mechanicals are upset that Bottom is not at rehearsal. Then Bottom shows up. They start to get ready. The scene is taking a long time. Capos call cut, both casts huddle. Bottom announces that they are moving to the finale.

**VIII Finale**
Players: Both casts.
Capos explain that everyone gets married, they continue. Mechanicals perform Pyramis and Thisbee. It takes to long so Ms. Sullivan demands that they speed through.

**IX Puck’s Monologues**
Players: Both Casts
Puck delivers his ending monologue. (Applause) Oberon says, “Yeah, what she said.”
Curtain!

**FINIS**
Appendix E

Scene I: Two Companies – by Tara Sullivan

David: Welcome to the Wolf Pack Players performance of Romeo and Juliet. The cast has worked really hard on the show and cannot wait to perform for you. I would like to take this time to ask you to silence your cell phones. Enjoy the show. Exit

Cody: Welcome to the Wolf Pack Players performance of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. The cast has worked really hard on the show and cannot wait to perform for you. I would like to take this time to ask you to silence your cell phones. Enjoy the show. Exit

Both casts enter and meet center stage.

David: Cody, what are you doing here?
Cody: I was about to ask you the same thing. My group is performing Midsummer tonight for these lovely people.
David: That is funny because my group is here to perform Romeo and Juliet for these lovely people.
Cody: Well, according to the poster. Midsummer is tonight.
David: Wait a minute, according to the poster Romeo and Juliet is tonight.
Zoe: We were trying save paper. You know budget cuts.
Cody: Looking sheepishly at audience. So folks, we seem to have a slight problem. Apparently we are double booked.
Casts: What?! Does that mean that we don’t get to perform. Ect.
David: Calm down. Calm down. Okay everybody on the ground. Deep belly breathes. Imagine you are on a beach. Relax. To Cody. What are we going to do?
Cody: I don’t know, I mean we have an audience. Groups start to stir. Keep breathing and RELAX! Back to David. Maybe we should ask the audience.
David: That is a good idea. I am sure they want to see the more classic Shakespeare piece Romeo and Juliet.
Cody: Excuse me sir, would you like to see a lovely carefree comedy with fairies or a show where two people kill themselves.
David: NOT FAIR!
Cody: It is perfectly fair and if we are going to go with which cast is more prepared to perform...Small banter
Selaah: Excuse me, I have an idea. Why don’t we just do both?
David: Romeo and Juliet will go first.
Cody: No, you will take to long and the audience will leave after your show because they will be depressed.
Sara: Ooh! Ooh! I know. We can do a scene from Romeo and Juliet and a scene from Midsummer and go back and forth.
Selaah: Yes we will make signs so the audience knows which show is up next.
David: Okay, but how can we be certain that Cody’s divas don’t hog the show time.
Cody: SULLIVAN!
Sullivan comes on stage.

Can you time us to make sure that we each have equal time?
David: Here is a bell. Just hit it when we have to wrap it up or speed it along.

Sullivan agrees and sits back in audience. David and Cody tell their casts.
Appendix F

ACT I
Scene VIII – Mechanicals
By Jesse Lanza

*Mechanicals meet in square. Peter Quince with scripts in hand.*

QUINCE. Is all our company here?

BOT. You were best to call them generally, man by man according to the scrip.

QUINCE. I have here a list of all who are thought fit to play a part in our performance to the Duke and Duchess on their wedding day.

BOT. Tell us what the play is about and say who's playing who and then shut up!

QUINCE. Fine... Out play is The Most Lamentable Comedy and Most Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisbe.

BOT. Ahhh very nice! Now Peter Quince call the actors and their parts.- Masters, spread yourselves.

QUINCE. Answer as i call you.- Nick Bottom, the weaver?

BOT. Ready. Who am I?

QUINCE. You will be playig the part of Pyramus.

BOT. What is Pyramus? A lover or a tyrant?

QUINCE. A lover that kills himself most gallant for love.

BOT. I guess I'll have to cry on cue! And I will make all the audience weep as well! But I could also play a tyrant! listen!

The raging rocks and shivering shocks shall break the locks of prison gates.
And Phoebus’ car shall shine from far and make me mar the foolish fates.
That was my tyrant, but don’t worry my lover will be much weepier of course.

QUINCE. Francis Flute, the bellows mender?

FLUTE. Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE. You will be playing Thisbe.

FLUTE. What is this Thisbe? A wandering knight?

QUINCE. It is the lady that Pyramus must love.

FLUTE. NO! I have a beard coming!

QUINCE. No arguing, you are Thisbe.
BOT. Let me play Thisbe too! I'll speak in a monstrous little voice: "Thisne, Thisne!"- "Ah, Pyramus, my lover dear, thy Thisbe dear and lady dear!"

QUINCE. No. You must play Pyramus. And Flute, Thisbe. Robin Starveling, the tailor?

STARV. Here, Peter Quince.

QUINCE. You will play Thisbe's mother- Tom Snout, the tinker?

SNUG. Here!

SNOUT. You're not Snout I am!

*The two argue for some time with Bottom breaking in and mixing it up more till Quince sets it straight and continues.*

QUINCE. Snout you are Pyramus' father- I'm Thisbe's father- and Snug, the joiner, you will play the lion.

SNUG. I hope there aren't too many lines...

QUINCE. All you do is roar.

Bottom wishes to be the lion as well and roars loudly till Quince cuts him off and says he would scare the ladies and they would all be hung. He argues that he would roar, "as gently as any sucking dove." Quince once again tells him he will only play Pyramus. Hands out scripts to all actors, Bottom's is ripped, and Snug's wrinkled slightly.

BOT. Quince? Quince?... Quince?...

Others join in.

QUINCE. WHAT?!

BOT. My script is ripped...

Quince takes script, rips it in half, and hands it Starveling taking his script.

QUINCE. Now, I ask that you memorize your lines by tomorrow night and meet me in the palace wood, under the giant oak tree at 2 o'clock. Make sure to show up, all of you.

BOT. Wait.. 1?...2:30?... 3?

QUINCE. 2!! No earlier, no later! Exit QUINCE

BOT. See you all there at 3! Exit BOTTOM

QUINCE (offstage). 2!!!

SNUG. What's a tree? All confused making tree shapes Exit.
Appendix G

Act II
Scene I: Masked Ball scene (or something along those lines)
By Laurel Bettis

_Lights up on scene. Capulets and other dancers should be on scene in the background. Enter Romeo, Benvolio, and Mercutio._

Romeo and Mercutio exchange a few lines continuing previous argument over whether or not to come to the ball

_Enter Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, and Lysander. Lysander is dressed very similar to Romeo, and Hermia is dressed like Juliet (when she enters) in a white dress, for instance. Romeo sees Hermia._

ROMEO: what lady is that which doth enrich the hand of yonder knight?

BENVOLIO: the girl in the white dress? I heard that the Capulet’s young daughter was wearing white to the ball. You know….to show that she’s eligible for marriage.

MERCUTIO: go talk to her, Romeo! What’s her name? ….Juliet! That’s right. Go ask Juliet to dance, or I will instead.

ROMEO: O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright! (starts shuffling towards her, entranced, then loses his nerve) I can’t do it, you guys!!

Mercutio and Romeo improv some physical comedy to get him closer to Hermia, who he thinks is Juliet. By this point, Lysander has wandered off arguing with Demetrius, and Hermia is looking for him. She sees Romeo and mistakes him for Lysander because of their similar clothes. The lovers see each other from opposite sides of the room, in a very exaggerated West Side Story-style pose, before coming together in the center.

ROMEO: if I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle fine is this. My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand, to smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

HERMIA: (giggling) oooh….I didn’t know you had such a way with words…

ROMEO: (thrown off by her simple response) um….saints have lips too…

HERMIA: what?

ROMEO: (trying to catch his train of thought) and…they pray a lot…

HERMIA: (flirting) would you just kiss me already?
They lean in and have a brief kiss (lips or hand) then lean in in lover’s pose, hands touching.

ROMEO: ahh, Juliet!

HERMIA: (at the same time) ahh, Lysander!

Both immediately realize their mistakes and leap back from each other, horrified. After a lot of panic and improv, Hermia ends up with Lysander and Romeo goes back to his friends. Juliet enters as Romeo is explaining his embarrassment to his friends, who are very confused. He turns and sees her, this time even more awestruck.

ROMEO: woaaaaaahhhh.

MERCUTIO & BENVOLIO: what? (seeing her)...ohhhhh.....

Another improv takes place of trying to get Romeo over there to talk to the real Juliet. They finally get him right next to her (who hasn’t seen him yet) and he is extremely nervous.

ROMEO: (panicking) um....my lips are pilgrims!?!?

JULIET: (startled) what?? (turns, sees Romeo, love at first sight) ...hello

ROMEO: (entranced again, deep breath) If I profane with my unworthiest hand this holy shrine, the gentle fine is this-- My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand to smooth that rough touch with a kiss.

Romeo leads Juliet to the dance floor, they start to dance. After a few lines, Helena physically drags Demetrius on to the dance floor next to R & J, and forces him to dance while he’s trying to escape. The stage is kind of a split screen between the two couples dancing.

JULIET: good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much, which mannerly devotion shows in this; for saints have hands that pilgrims’ hands do touch, and palm to palm is holy palmer’s kiss.

ROMEO: have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?

JULIET: ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer

ROMEO: oh then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do. They pray, grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.

JULIET: saints to not move, though grant for prayer’s sake
ROMEO: then move not while my prayer’s effect I take. Thus from my lips, by yours, my sin is purged. (kisses Juliet)
At this point, both girls spin, and Demetrius, desperate to get rid of Helena, snatches Juliet, and Helena spins into Romeo’s arms, who still has his eyes closed from his kiss.

ROMEO: O, trespass sweetly urged! Give me my sin again! (kisses Helena)

HELENA: (shocked that somebody finally loves her) Wow!

Romeo opens his eyes and realizes his mistake, freaks out and jumps back from Helena, who is batting her eyelashes at him. Romeo retrieves a very confused Juliet from Demetrius and they begin to dance again. Helena realizes once again that she is unloved, and storms off the dance floor. Demetrius exits in the opposite direction.

ROMEO: um…give me my sin again. (kisses her, they go back into lovey dovey mode)

JULIET: you kiss by the book.

Enter Nurse

NURSE: madam, your mother craves a word with you!

Juliet ignores her, Romeo and Juliet are in a lover’s trance

NURSE: madam….madam? (losing formality) oy! Lover girl!

Juliet starts, then looks sadly at the nurse. She and Romeo improv a very over-the-top goodbye, with the nurse obviously losing patience. Nurse manages to drag Juliet away, and Romeo exits.

NURSE: so, how was your night? There were some nice lookin guys here! I even hear there were a few party-crashers from the Montague place.

JULIET: what?

NURSE: yup! Even young Romeo, the Montagues’ only son, was supposed to be here. They said he was wearing (describes Romeo’s outfit)

JULIET: My only love sprung from my only hate! Too early seen unknown, and known too late! Prodigious birth of love it is to me, that I must love a loathed enemy!

NURSE: (after a really confused awkward pause) uh…what?

JULIET: (backtracking) nothing! It’s…a song I heard! Yeah…I hear it’s all the rage in Athens….(awkwardly tries to sing a few lines)
NURSE: (looking at Juliet like she’s crazy): ok….well, anyways, your mom needs to talk to you. (exits)

JULIET: (now alone on stage) Oh, sweet Romeo! You are the only son of my hated enemy! But that won’t stop me from loving you. Our love is so strong, our families won’t be able to break us up, no matter what! Even if our families want to kill each other, I will keep loving you. I mean, what’s the worst that could happen? (exits)

End scene. Or, after Juliet’s exit, Lysander comes running across the stage chased by Capulet, who is screaming insults and “get out of my house!” (thinking Lysander is Romeo because of their similar outfits) Lysander is extremely confused and yells “what is going on???” they improv a little chase scene before exiting.
Appendix H

Act II
Scene V

Midsummer Cat Fight Scene
By Alyssa Schaffer

(The scene opens with HERMIA, HELENA, LYSANDER, and DEMETRIUS asleep on the ground. HELENA awakens first and sees LYSANDER asleep.)

HELENA: But who is here? Lysander, on the ground? Dead or asleep? I see no blood, no wound.—Lysander, if you live, good sir, awake.

(LYSANDER wakes)

LYSANDER: And run through fire I will for thy sweet sake. Beautiful Helena! Where is Demetrius? Oh, how I would love to fight him!

HELENA: Do not say so, Lysander. So what if he loves Hermia? She loves you back, so be happy.

LYSANDER: Hermia, shmermia. Not Hermia but Helena I love.

HELENA: Why do you mock me? Is 't not enough, that I did never, no, nor never can, deserve a sweet look from Demetrius' eye, but you must flout my insufficiency?

(DEMETRIUS, hearing all the noise, wakes)

DEMETRIUS: O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine! Your beauty makes even me look better! Oh, how ripe in show thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!

(DEMETRIUS tries to kiss HELENA, but LYSANDER intervenes, and DEMETRIUS kisses his cheek instead. The two separate in disgust, LYSANDER wiping his cheek, and DEMETRIUS wiping his mouth)

LYSANDER: Move out of the way, Demetrius. 'Tis I who wishes to kiss Helena.


LYSANDER: I had no judgment when to her I swore. Now, it’s for Helena that my soul burns.

DEMETRIUS: (to HELENA or Audience) He just has indigestion. Come, Helena, let us go, and leave Lysander to his love.
(DEMETRIUS picks up HELENA and turns to leave)

LYSANDER: (pulling on HELENA’S foot) That is cheating.

(DEMETRIUS and LYSANDER continue to pull, while HELENA grows angrier and angrier)

HELENA: ENOUGH!

(DEMETRIUS sets HELENA down, and the two take a step back)

So now you two don’t just hate me, but make fun of me too? You both are rivals, and love Hermia, and now both rivals to mock Helena.

(A pause, and the trio looks over to where HERMIA lay fast asleep)

HELENA: (pointedly) And you love Hermia.

(HERMIA continues to sleep, and even lets out a snore)

HELENA: (walking over to HERMIA) And you LOVE HERMIA!

(HERMIA awakes with a jolt and looks around)

HERMIA: Dark night, that from the eye his function takes, the ear more quick of apprehension makes.

(She spots LYSANDER)

Lysander, love!

LYSANDER: I am not your love. I am Hermia’s.

HERMIA: Oh, honey, don’t joke about that.

LYSANDER: ’Tis no jest that I do hate thee and love Helena.

HERMIA: (to HELENA) You juggler! You canker-blossom! You thief of love! What, have you come by night and stol'n my love’s heart from him?

HELENA: (placating) Now Hermia….

HERMIA: I bet you used your height to sway him, you painted maypole!
HELENA: Let’s not fight.

HERMIA: And your shoes don’t even match!

HELENA: (furious) WHAT WAS THAT?!

HERMIA: You heard me!

HELENA: Well, your… your… outfit is too gaudy!

HERMIA: These are designer clothes. Are you blind?

LYSANDER: (rushing inbetween and taking HELENA’S hand) I’m blind… with love!

HELENA: (pushing LYSANDER out of the way) Forgive me. I was never cursed. I have no gift at all in shrewishness.

HERMIA: I am amazed and know not what to say.

HELENA: It’s best then that you watch your tongue, bean sprout!

DEMETRIUS: (intervening) Even though that was a horrible comeback, I still love you.

HERMIA: (pushing DEMETRIUS out of the way) I am not yet so low but that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

(The girls start to cat fight, pulling hair and flailing arms. When the boys try to intercede, they’re knocked out. The girls then proceed to fight off of the stage. Several fairies enter the stage and carry the unconscious boys off.)
Appendix I

ACT II
Scene VI
Romeo & Juliet: Mercutio/Tybalt fight/death scene
By Angel Koyoyoung

MERCUTIO and BENVOLIO enter.

Benvolio: I pray thee, Mercutio, let's retire. The day is hot; the Capulets, abroad; and I'm starving!

Mercutio: Nay! I shall not quit until our friend Romeo is found! Neither weather nor vile Capulets will dissuade me.

Benvolio: But he's obviously not here so –

Mercutio: Then we shall look elsewhere, Benvolio, again and again until he is found! Who knows what dangers might have befallen our friend!

Benvolio: Well, I think he might have mentioned a girl.

Mercutio: A girl? What need would he have for women? Now, real men defend their honor and fight! Fight cowards like those Capulets!

Benvolio: Now, Mercutio, remember your blood pressure.

Mercutio: But the worst of them all is that scoundrel Tybalt!

TYBALT enters.

Mercutio: (gasps) You!

Benvolio: Oh no.

Tybalt: Yes, it is I! The dashing and finely sculpted Tybalt. Good afternoon, gentlemen. A word with one of you.

Mercutio: Enough talk! Let us fight!

Tybalt: What? No, no, I have no reason to fight with you. I come to issue a challenge with Romeo. Thou consort with him, yea?

Benvolio: Aye, that we do! But let us retire and speak of our business somewhere private away from the prying eyes of the public.
Mercutio: I shall not budge.

Tybalt: Come, come. Produce your friend.

Benvolio: Look, we don't know where he is.

Tybalt: Oh? Or is he too cowardly to face me?

Mercutio: Cowardly? Why, if Romeo were here –

**ROMEO enters.**

Romeo: Hey, guys, I – *(sees Tybalt, tries to leave)*

Mercutio: Ah, here he is! *(grabs Romeo before he can leave)* Romeo, this man has insulted your honor! Take up your sword.

Romeo: ...No.

Mercutio: No?

Romeo: Yeah, I'm cool. No hard feelings. Right, Tybalt?

Tybalt: Romeo, thou art a villain and a coward. But, it is no great wonder that you should fear to raise a sword against me. For I am a brave and experienced soldier who would wipe the ground with your mama's boy butt.

Mercutio: Are you just going to stand there and let this cad insult you?

Romeo: Yes?

Mercutio: No, you are going to duel him. *(hands him a sword)*

Romeo: I am?

Tybalt: You are? Oh, all right. Have at thee!

Benvolio: Okay, guys. We need to calm down and think about this. It's all fun and games until someone gets the plague.

Romeo: You know, that's some good advice. Have at it, Benvolio.

**ROMEO throws the sword to BENVOLIO who starts walking away with it. MERCUTIO grabs the sword from BENVOLIO and hands it back to ROMEO who throws it back to BENVOLIO. They repeat this process for some time until ROMEO accidentally stabs MERCUTIO.**

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Romeo: Uhh, are you all right?

Mercutio: Tis but a scratch, I think... Nope. (falls down)

Romeo: Mercutio! Have courage, man! The wound cannot be much.

Mercutio: No, no, tis nothing. But, pray, come closer. Closer, closer. (urges both Tybalt and Romeo to come closer) A PLAGUE ON BOTH YOUR HOUSES! (coughs violently on both of them then falls down dead)

Romeo: This gentleman, the Prince's near ally –

MERCUTIO's body coughs and spasms.

Romeo: My very friend –

Interrupted by Mercutio's coughing.

Romeo: My very friend, hath got his –

Interrupted again by Mercutio's coughing.

Romeo: Are you done?!

Mercutio does something to indicate that he is? (improve it out you guys)

Romeo: Hath got his mortal hurt in my behalf. My reputation stained with Tybalt's slander. (to Tybalt) This is all your fault!

Tybalt: But-but-he's supposed to die... right? Right? That's what the script says?

Romeo: Oh... really?

Tybalt: Quite sure.

Romeo: Oh. Then everything's okay!

Benvolio: Everything is not okay! Mercutio is dead! I told you someone was going to die!

Romeo: No, you said someone was going to get the plague.

Benvolio: It's the same thing! Enough!

BENVOLIO begins gathering the swords and walks away with them intending to throw them away when all of a sudden HERMIA and HELENA come storming in, still caught up in their cat fight. They grab the swords and proceed to kill everyone but TYBALT before exiting, dueling all the way.
Tybalt: Hahaha! Behold! Through the sheer force of my manly strength and bulging muscles
I have defeated the son of the Montagues.

   HELENA and HERMIA come back on stage fighting and kill TYBALI before
storming offstage.

Benvolio: Romeo.

Romeo: What?

Benvolio: We're not supposed to be dead.

Romeo: Are you sure?

Benvolio: Yup.

Romeo: Well, all right then. It's a good thing I don't die in this play.

   BENVOLOIO and ROMEO exit. INBETWEEN ZANNI enters

Zanni: Hey. Hey! You can't die. You're not supposed to be dead.

Mercutio: But the scrip says we die.

Zanni: But this is commedia. Nobody is supposed to die, comprende?

Tybalt: Really?

Zanni: Really!

   Everyone exits.
Appendix J

ACT III
Scene V
Romeo and Juliet Death
By Tara Sullivan

*Juliet lies on the floor.*

HAMLET
Ophelia. No Ophelia.

DAVID
No! What are you doing?

CODY
Kevin. No Kevin.

HAMLET
What? Isn’t this where Ophelia dies.

DAVID
One of your actors?

CODY
Yeah, this is Kevin

KEVIN
Hi.

JULIET
Hi Kevin.

*In runs Ophelia with a life preserver.*

OPHELIA
It is okay Hamlet. I have beaten Shakespeare!

HAMLET
*(To Ophelia.)* Apparently, We have the wrong night. Sorry.

OPHELIA
Oh, so I don’t get to outsmart Shakespeare. Okay.

*Hamlet and Ophelia exit. Juliet goes back to sleep.*
ROMEO
A grave? O no! a lantern, slaughter'd youth,
For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
This vault a feasting presence full of light.
Here's to my love!

Drinks

O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick. Thus with a kiss I die.

Dies

Juliet awakes.

JULIET
What's here? a cup, closed in my true love's hand?
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:
O churl! drunk all, and left no friendly drop
To help me after? I will kiss thy lips;
Haply some poison yet doth hang on them,
To make die with a restorative.
(Kisses him)
Thy lips are warm.
O happy dagger! (Snatching ROMEO's dagger)
This is thy sheath; (Stabs herself)
there rust, and let me die. ( Falls on ROMEO's body, and dies)

Cody who has been watching from stage runs on in a fury.

CODY
No! She can't die. He can't die! It is too sad. We should have just done Midsummer. I can fix this! (begins giving CPR to Juliet and then to Romeo)

DAVID
Capulet! They are gone.

Ladies come on lamenting trying to get Cody to play along. He will not. Finally Romeo and Juliet get up. Throw fits and but eventually are so worried about Cody they stop. David talks Cody down and all the actors decide that no one will die and they are going to move on to Midsummer.