

ABCDE FOCUS



December 2013 Newsletter

President's Message

It's finally here! The last week before the much deserved Christmas break. Congratulations to everyone who mounted productions this fall. I trust they were the right blend of stress and success and that you are looking forward to your break. Perhaps, like me, you are in a holding pattern ready to mount your production in January. Or, maybe you run a linear program and are enjoying the mid-rehearsal chaos. Wherever this finds you, I wish you the best of the holiday season with family and friends. Come back refreshed and ready to inspire.

Happy Holidays.

Lana O'Brien

“The stage is a magic circle where only the most real things happen, a neutral territory outside the jurisdiction of Fate where stars may be crossed with impunity. A truer and more real place does not exist in all the universe.”

— [P.S. Baber](#).



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Tour of the Gray Monk Winery—Fall Conference 2013, Vernon, B.C.



Travelling in style with the ABCDE Party Bus!

ABCDE Teacher Awards

Two awards were given at this year's conference. **DRAMA TEACHER OF THE YEAR** was awarded to a very worthy recipient for her dedication to continually striving for great theatre, and setting a high standard for her students. Lori Mazey, from Vanier Secondary School in Courtenay, deserves the recognition.

The award for **DRAMA IN EDUCATION** was given to someone who has shown outstanding work in the field of Drama as an excellent teacher, an advocate of the arts, and as a facilitator and/or teacher of other teachers. Brenda Laycock, from the Powell River School District was the recipient of this award. Congratulations Lori and Brenda!

Fall Conference, Vernon B.C.

In October, dozens of Drama teachers from across the province traveled to Vernon to attend the annual Fall Conference, held this year at W.L.Seaton Secondary School. It has been several years since the conference was hosted outside the Lower Mainland, and Lana O'Brien and her students were excited to bring Drama teachers to their school, and their great theatre facility. The Fall Conference is always a perfect opportunity for teachers to meet, re-connect, share ideas, and learn new things, and this year's conference did not disappoint. Many workshops, including drumming with Bobby Bovenzi, Improv with Graham Myers, Playwriting and Script Interpretation with Lindsay Price, and many more, were well received, and teachers enjoyed the opportunity to play and learn in the way their students get to on a daily basis.

One of the best parts of the weekend was the opportunity for colleagues to talk about the job we all do. At breaks and lunches, teachers sat sharing ideas, having intense conversations about theatre, laughing and re-connecting. In workshops, they were inspired, played, learned, and sometimes taught each other. They also socialized in the evenings. A highlight for many was the tour and five-star gourmet meal at Gray Monk Winery! The tour was entertaining, the wine was delicious, and the food was amazing! It was an event that will be hard to top in future conferences!

Plan to join us next year, when the conference returns to the Lower Mainland!

**“Good teaching
is one-fourth
preparation and
three-fourths
pure theatre.”**

-Gail Godwin

ABCDE

Executive

2013/2014

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SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year, the ABCDE offers one \$750.00 scholarship to a grade 12 student entering a post-secondary institution to pursue further theatre training. It's never too early to start thinking about students in your program who may be candidates for the award.

Students must apply by May 31, 2014, and their teachers must be active members of the Drama PSA.

Information about the scholarship, including an application form, can be found at www.bcdramateachers.com. Follow the [ABCDE Student Scholarship](#) Link on the website.

"Try to be original in your play and as clever as possible; but don't be afraid to show yourself foolish; we must have freedom of thinking, and only he is an emancipated thinker who is not afraid to write foolish things."

ANTON CHEKHOV, letter to A.P. Chekhov, April 11, 1889



Youthwrite 2014 is a playwriting opportunity sponsored by the ABCDE for all secondary students in British Columbia. The deadline for submission is approaching quickly. All entries must be received by January 31st, along with a \$20.00 reader's fee and application form. Top scripts will be invited to attend and perform at the Provincial Drama Festival this May.

Information about *Youthwrite*, including guidelines for submission, and the application form, can be found at www.bcdramateachers.com. Follow the [Youthwrite](#) Link on the website.

Lesson ideas...

STANISLAVSKI EXERCISES: A useful and quick introduction

Submitted by Colin Plant

Stanislavski's acting technique has inspired all the major acting methods developed in America in the twentieth century, yet a lot of beginning actors still find it difficult to understand. For a quick look at the basics of the "Stanislavski system", below are four of Stanislavski's acting principles, each illustrated by a simple acting exercise.

1) Using your imagination to create real emotions on stage

Stanislavski encouraged his students to use the magic of "what if" to believe in the circumstances of the play. Actors use their imagination to answer questions like: "What if what happens in the scene was really happening to me?" "Where do I come from?" "What do I want?" "Where am I going?" "What will I do when I get there?"

A simple exercise you can do anywhere to develop your imagination is to simply observe people surrounding you as you go about your daily life (for example, in the subway or at the coffee shop). Then, invent details about their lives and use your observations to make up a biography for each person. The next step is to write the biography of a character you're playing.

2) Action versus Emotion

Stanislavsky encouraged his students to concentrate on actions rather than emotions. In every scene, the actor has an *objective* (a goal of what he wants to accomplish) and faces a series of obstacles. To reach his goal, the actor breaks the scene down into beats, with each beat being an *active verb*, something the character *does* to try to reach his objective. Here are a few examples of active verbs that can be actions in scenes: To help... To hurt.. To praise.. To demean.. To leave.. To keep.. To convince.

A simple exercise to get used to this way of working is to get a piece of paper and continue this list, adding as many active verbs as you can think of.

3) Relaxation and Concentration

Actors who study Stanislavski's acting method learn to relax their muscles. The goal is to not use any extra muscles than the ones needed to perform a particular action on stage. They also work on concentration so they can reach a state of *solitude in public* and not feel tense when performing on stage. In this acting technique, relaxation and concentration go hand in hand.

Here's a simple Stanislavski concentration exercise to get started. Close your eyes and concentrate on every sound you hear, from the loudest to the most quiet: a door slamming in the distance, a ruffle of the leaves in the trees outside, the hum of the air conditioner, etc. Try to focus solely on sounds, excluding everything else from your mind. The next step is to open your eyes and try to retain the same amount of focus.

4) Using the senses

Stanislavsky students practiced using their senses to create a sense of reality on stage. For example, if their character just walked indoors and it was snowing outside, they may work on an exercise to remember what being outdoors in the snow feels like so they can have a strong sense of where they're coming from.

Here's a quick example of how you would approach that type of exercise... Close your eyes and imagine you are outdoors in the snow, then ask yourself the following five questions:

What do you see? Is the snow pristine? Muddy? Is it sparkling in the sun? Is it more of a dark cloudy day?

What do you smell? How cold is the air as it enters your nostrils and goes down to your lungs?

What do you hear? Is it more quiet than usual?

What do you feel? How does the snow feel as it falls on your face? Is it sticky? Powdery? Wet? Are your toes cold?

What do you taste? Imagine that a snowflake falls on your lips. How does it taste? Is your throat dry from the cold?

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Carihi Secondary School , Campbell River, BC

Programs:

- Drama 9, 10, 11, 12
- Stagecraft 10, 11, 12
- Musical Theatre 9-12
- Canadian Improv Games – Junior and Senior Improv teams4
- Drama Festival participants at North Island Regional Drama Festival

Facility:

Carihi theatre is somewhat antiquated and limited as far as lighting and sound, and needs updating in many ways. The theatre is a black box theatre measuring 40' wide by 64' long. It is part of a "dramnasium" set up, and is located next to the gym, separated by tall, moveable doors that are opened for major shows and some school events. Our lighting grid is accessed by a tall extension ladder, which is very inconvenient, but without a catwalk we are limited. Recent renovations include the removal of a cumbersome riser set-up that took up the entire stage left wing space. We ripped out the rickety wooden risers to reveal the theatre floor underneath, repainted, and had stairs built to our tech area. Our floor space is so much bigger as a result of the reno. There are no curtains in our facility, so we rely on flats. We continue to upgrade our lighting equipment, and plans for a backdrop are also in the works. We continue to find ways to build the theatre into something more functional, but despite all the short-comings of our space, we continue to grow, and do amazing theatre with our students.

Teachers; Christine Knight - Christine.Knight@sd72.bc.ca Colin Riddell – Colin.Riddell@sd72.bc.ca

Current productions:

- This is Not an Issues Play, by Greta Hamilton and Colin Riddell - Jr. Festival entry – February 2014
- The Ugly Duckling, by A.A. Milne – Sr. Festival entry – February 2014
- Bonnie and Clyde – The Musical – May 2014



Buck and Clyde Barrow—Bonnie and Clyde, the Musical



A class production in our cozy space

What I learned by being in a Musical

By Christine Knight

This November I returned to the stage as an actor and singer, in a local community theatre production of “The Sound of Music.” (The fact that I was cast as The Mother Superior is a whole other story, especially if you know the real me.) After 20 years of teaching and directing, performing again made me realize several things. I realized, again, that being on stage is hard work. I have to say, that memorizing lines, and building a character, and working hard to not look like a complete idiot in front of a small town audience that knows I am the local high school Drama teacher took effort. It made me appreciate the work that my students do when I aim huge expectations at them year after year. I challenge them and they rise to the challenge every time! I also learned that high school theatre kids are good, skilled performers, and often (mostly) know more than the adults they share the stage with in community theatre shows. They have more experience, and it shows. I was proud to share the stage with several of my students, and they motivated me to step up my game. I learned that not everyone thinks high school students are capable of great theatre, and will disregard them in the rehearsal process, in favour of the adults. I want to do even better theatre at my school now, just to show those people what young actors are capable of. I also learned that I understand directing, which for me was a reassuring lesson, because doubt has a way of creeping in once in awhile. I realized, as I bit my tongue and clenched my teeth during rehearsal process, that I understand what it takes to put on a good production, and being part of someone else’s directorial vision is not always easy. I’ll have to remember that when I am directing my students. Finally, I realized...or rather remembered something about the magic of theatre. Our little community production turned out great! I was worried for awhile, in the same way I sometimes worry about some of my shows, when time is running out and there’s too much to do. The show, most of the time, magically comes together. I’ve seen it happen again and again. If the team is committed, and they believe in the work, and care for the show, it magically comes together. That magic comes from everyone, because when it comes right down to it, everyone wants to succeed. It was fun acting again, and learning these lessons, but I think I’ll go back to calling the shots!

“Directing is so interesting. You know, it just sort of encompasses everything that you see, that you know, that you've felt, that you have observed.”

~Barbra Streisand



How I solved my MARIA problem.

"How's the play going?" or "Why I do theatre with students?"

By Colin Plant



Each Fall and Spring when a play opens at my school several of my colleagues ask me, "How's the play going?" It becomes a bit disingenuous for me when I repeatedly reply, "great" or "super" or whatever else seems to answer quickly and in a way that somehow convinces them they should attend.

However, this year I have come to a bit of an epiphany. There are really two answers to their question. The first is a response to their inquiry as to how *good* the show is. I'm sure they do want to know if it is a production that is a good piece of theatre that they should come and see. And hopefully each year one can answer yes.

This Fall I chose a script that wasn't the best script ever written (ask me the title next time you see me in person). As a logical consequence I have to admit that the play was not the best piece of theatre I've ever done with students. However, our audiences enjoyed it. And while I appreciated the support, I was reminded of a quote from Hamlet's advice to the players: "though it make the unskillful laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve, "

But more importantly (and certainly why I am writing this article), is my new response in answering the question. Instead of solely referring to the quality of the production, I now respond stating there are two answers to their question. The first is, indeed about the production itself. The other is about how successful the play has been in providing an educational experience for the students. And let's face it, in the long run the second element is far more relevant to most Drama teachers.

The second answer addresses how successful the production has been at teaching the cast and crew about commitment, the creation of community and the development of their confidence as a result of being part of a public theatre offering.

These learning outcomes are the reason why I am proud to offer theatrical experiences to my students in addition to their Drama curriculum learning outcomes.

From now on whenever someone asks me how the play is going, I will answer in a way that is more descriptive of what we do in Drama as well as how well we're doing onstage. I'd encourage you to do the same.



PuSh International Performing Arts Festival

The PuSh International Performing Arts Festival is Vancouver's mid-winter festival presenting ground-breaking work in the live performing arts with theatre, dance, music, and various forms of multimedia and hybrid performance. The 10th annual PuSh Festival takes place January 14–February 2, 2014 at venues in and around Vancouver and offers work from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, and the United States. Many of these performances are eligible for special discounted rates for groups of 10 or more.

Contact Group Sales Coordinator Jenn Upham at groups@pushfestival.ca for full details.



Become a member of the ABCDE... a PSA of the BCTF

#1 Do you want to join/subscribe to the ABCDE? Need to re-new your membership? Online registration can be found at <https://www.bctf.ca/psa/join.aspx>

#2 Do you prefer to print off the application and mail it in? Find a link to the form at www.bcdramateachers.com

#3 Join our moderated email list-serv and connect with other Drama practitioners! Share ideas, ask for help, post info about your shows. Almost anything Drama-related goes. Anyone can read our list-serv, but only members/subscribers can post (membership has its privileges). (*sometimes we will post FREE offers for teachers on behalf of non-members)

To join our list-serv:

Use the drop-down list to select "psa-abcde" (fortunately we are the first one in the list!). To post a message to our list-serv, please send our Past-President Colin Plant an email at colinplant@shaw.ca Our list-serv is moderated to avoid getting spammed.

#3 Not sure of your membership status? Please contact the BCTF at 1-800-663-9163 and ask for the PSA Division.

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Drama Conference



Pictured, from top: W.L. Seaton student helpers, in costume, Two students in the make-up workshop, Lana O'Brien introducing the dancers, Gord Hamilton...working again/still!