



EXERCISE: MADE TO FAIL "ADD ON" AND "BECOME"

Subject(s): Theatre

Goals: Students will be able to:

- Develop ideas individually and collaboratively.
- Apply communication and collaboration skills for theatre experiences.
- Identify communication strategies.
- Identify and discuss effective artistic leadership.
- Create and maintain character traits with body and voice.

Show Connection: In *Failureland* the protagonist often feels like she is pulled in multiple directions and is put in situations where she just is unable to succeed, like the deck was stacked against her at the start. While this may be true in moments in the protagonist's life as well as our own lives, she ultimately comes to understand that no matter what directions she is pulled in, successfully or otherwise, things work out. She can make her own success. She may not be where her five-year plan had predicted she'd be but the journey she went on will be one that shaped her and made her all the more interesting and well rounded. Students will gain a greater understand and appreciation for just putting their best foot forward, throwing caution to the wind and embracing the freedom of failure in this exercise.

Set Up: Clear a section of the classroom space free of desks, tables and other materials to give the room an open area to work.

Description

Part One:

- Have the students form up as an audience on one side of the room.
- "We will be doing an exercise where we slowly create a living breathing environment together as a class. This environment will only be as clear and strong as the people in it so I ask that the choices you make be specific, honest and relevant to the type of environment we are crafting together. I will declare the type of environment we are creating together. For example, a kitchen. The person who starts the round will then, using their body and facial expressions, silently show themselves inhabiting that space or action. So, if I were the first person to go, maybe you would witness me cooking something at a skillet on a stove top as I adjust the heat and toss items in the skillet. Or chopping items to be cooked on a cutting board. It's up to the person who initiates. The challenge with this exercise is to show us with your body and whole self what you are doing, and

possibly who you are in the space rather than telling us with your voice.”

- Other possible locations to start creating could include:

- Day at the Beach
- Campsite
- Circus
- Hospital
- Mini-Golf
- Fairground

● “We will let one person begin in the environment and slowly we will call on people that raise their hands who have ideas how they can add on more people and action to the environment. So, if we start with one person cooking in a skillet, maybe then we add another person who helps establish that there is a sink and dish washing station on the other side of the space where they are working on cleaning a fresh load of dishes that came from off stage.” Slowly pepper in more and more students into the space. In an ideal world, every student will have added onto the situation by the time the round is called.

- **Side-Coaching:** *Let the other people in the space affect you, what you are doing and how you are doing it. Don't just wash the dishes, wash them with an emotional quality. How do you feel about doing _____ action in this space?*

● Do several rounds of this with the students.

Part Two

● Pivoting to a new exercise. Begin by dividing students into four groups of roughly equal numbers.

● “Alright, I’m going to name a noun of some kind. And you and your group must physically create a version of that noun. Think creating a statue. Maybe in later rounds, we’ll let them move and make sound. One statue per group involving everyone in the group. Work fast, collaborate and make choices quickly. The group that creates their noun in a clearly distinct and correct visual way *first* is the winner.”

● Compete in multiple rounds of this, encouraging students to embrace creating as much detail as possible.

- Couch, Car, House, Pinball Table

- During these first few rounds be encouraging and positive, offering praise to solid work you see and people working together whether they are succeeding or failing.

● Now start throwing the groups different criteria that are bound to make them struggle and it harder to become these things. Bounce between different types of criteria quickly - the pace should border on breakneck. This exercise should feel like a mental and physical workout of successes and failures for these students.

- Shift the group size numbers around so that some are very large groups and some are very small and yet the group must create very detailed and complex objects just as quickly and effectively with luck!

- Spider, Vending Machine, Piano, Frog

- Groups may only use their hands or have their eyes closed for these rounds.

- Playground, Bulldozer, Headphones

- Set a timer for much shorter rounds. The groups only have ____ amount of time to make their noun as a group. (20 Seconds, 10 Seconds, 5 Seconds)

- Umbrella, Tank, Telephone

- Rounds where each student is now in a group all by themselves and they are the only resource they have to become the noun.

- Chair, Octopus, Ball of Yarn

Discussion:

● If you were to teach these games to someone else, what would your tips for success be? What does success look like in these games?

● Did you feel like you had time between rounds to really reflect on what worked well or didn’t? How did it feel? Did you feel as if you were set up to fail in these rounds and exercises?

● “Group [whatever], you were struggling. Your group failed more than a few times. How’s that feel? Will it matter tomorrow *at all*? Or even five minutes from now?”