

Get Loud!

How to help your students project
without having to yell.

by Maria McConville



How many times have you asked, begged, screamed, demanded your student actors to be louder? Have you stood in the back of your school's auditorium waving your arm every time you couldn't hear one of the performers? You could, potentially, just mic them. But I don't care how expensive your sound equipment is, if your student isn't projecting, they will not be heard.

During my most recent residency with 5th graders in NYC, we were working on various scenes from the bard. When we finally got down to seriously rehearsing the scenes, all of the text work and creative physical work was lost because they couldn't be heard. It's a lot for professional actors to be seen, heard, and understood. I always have to remind myself of that during the rehearsal process. I am putting the expectation of a professional on a budding student performer.

For fun, I tried having each group visit a different station set up throughout the rehearsal space. Each group had 7 minutes to run through their scene as many times as they could at that station. At the 7-minute mark, the alarm on my phone would sound, and each scene moved to the next station to play. The goal was to have the student performers forget about "being good" or "getting it right." The hope was they would have fun and, hopefully, through the fun, volume would follow. After each group visited each station, they had to select at least two choices that they made when playing that they wanted to keep in their final product. Finally, we watched the scenes anew and discussed what the process was like.

Here are the stations I developed with that particular group...

STATION 1: comedy/cartoon

No matter the context of the scene, the group must run through their scene as silly as humanly possible. How ridiculous can you be?

STATION 2: drama/serious

No matter the context of the scene, how dramatic can you play this scene? Soap opera style? Film noir? Try it all.

STATION 3: over articulation station

Every syllable must be over annunciated here! Warm-up those articulators!

STATION 4: silent film

Now perform the scene with just the blocking. No text. Can you still communicate the scene? Do new gestures or physical choices emerge?

STATION 5: Just. Be. Loud.

That's it. How loud can you say all of your lines? This is hilarious.

This rehearsal or class session is a loud one. I warned the classroom teacher I was collaborating with to prepare for organized chaos.

Were all of the students heard the entire time in their final performance? No.

But at least one line was heard and understood from each of them. Sometimes, that's all you can hope for. For some of our students, that is a major success.

I'LL TAKE IT!

Maria McConville is a native New Yorker who has lived in every borough...yes, even Staten Island. She started out at LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts and received her BA in Performance from Fordham University at Lincoln Center. Maria has performed all over New York City from Shakespeare in the Park-ing Lot to Theatre Row and across the country with Theatreworks USA. She is the playwright of Stage Partners' play *#VIRAL*. She also a member of AEA, Army wife, proud mother, and an inspired teaching artist.



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