

I have been very excited to collaborate with both the Lexington Children's Theatre and the Kentucky School for the Deaf, in Danville. Having previously worked with the Lexington Children's Theatre during their summer education programs, I had a better idea of what to expect when contacting them. Working with the Kentucky School for the Deaf, however, was something I have no previous experience with, and my not being a member of the Deaf community made the prospect something for which I could never fully prepare myself.

Working with KSD has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have yet had. First of all, I must commend their fantastic team of teachers, who are the most welcoming and cheerful group of people I have ever met. The students are bright, enthusiastic, and eager to learn about theatre, and though my signing is very rudimentary, they are understanding and eager to ease the communication gap.

I had been speaking with the teachers at KSD for a number of weeks before I finally went to Danville for my first visit. I managed to get lost trying to find the school, which I would normally fear foreshadows impending doom, but fortunately a teacher called and gave me better directions than I had been following.

Our first meeting at the school was with just me and the teachers, where we discussed our future plans for the drama unit. The students had already covered dance and music, but the drama portion is to last a lot longer, beginning with lessons about drama theory and culminating in a final performance. The best time frame for the teachers is to have the final performance in April, which means that I will have made my Jury presentation long before the production is completed. However, the drama classes are already underway, and I will have much to present in February, even with the final performance being a few months away.

During that first meeting I was immediately struck by the friendliness of the teachers, most of whom were hearing but who were eager to serve as translators between myself and the non-hearing teachers. The atmosphere in the school was so communal, and I could tell that these teachers work with the students instead of teaching at them.

A few weeks later I went to Danville to watch the first drama class, where the students were learning some of the primary elements of drama—technical elements such as scenery, make-up, and lighting, and performance elements such as acting, speech and movement. I was in the back of the classroom watching the powerpoint presentation, and a teacher whispered to me asking if I wanted them to translate for me.

I had been working on my sign since the last time I visited and it was significantly improved, but I could still only pick out sporadic words. "Drama"—where your two hands in the "a" position face each other and make circles toward your chest. "Rehearsal"—a sweeping motion on the edge of your hand. I could make a few simple sentences: "Hi, my name is Karah. I am Junior UK learning Theatre" (to the best of my understanding, in sign you can leave out articles, and use your body to indicate prepositions). But even with my communication skills lacking a bit, I asked the teacher not to translate so that I could try to pick up words on my own.

The students began an activity to demonstrate what they learned, and again teachers asked me if I wanted someone to translate. I was never uncomfortable about the words I didn't understand, knowing that whenever I wanted something translated teachers were eager to help me.

The students finished the activity sooner than expected, so a teacher asked me if I wanted to teach the students a theatre game. Teach!? Me? As comfortable as I feel with theatre, I have never considered myself a teacher. Fortunately, years of playing theatre games at SCAPA, the Children's Theatre, the Lexington Shakespeare Institute, Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, Kentucky Governor's School for the Arts (you get the idea—I've played a fair amount of theatre games in my time), made me feel much more comfortable about leading this portion of the lesson.

I demonstrated "the Mirror Game," an activity that requires partners to mimic each other's motions. One student came up to me as soon as everyone split into pairs, wanting to partner with me. I was touched. I am not the type of person to approach strangers with ease, and this young man walked right up to me and started playing the game. The students were more creative with it than any group I've seen, one pair creating a Groucho Marx-esque scene around mirroring each other's actions. I was impressed with their enthusiasm, and am intrigued to continue working with the students, as most of them have very little experience with acting and drama.

We'll continue to cover elements of Drama in class, and then begin rehearsing the play once the new semester begins. The Children's Theatre will come to work with the students toward the end of the rehearsal process in April, so we won't be working with LCT intensively for a while yet. But I am excited to see what the Children's Theatre can bring to the classes, being more accustomed to teaching children about drama and acting. I feel that this will be a wonderful opportunity for the students, and I hope they enjoy the coming classes and rehearsals as much as I will.