Directing a Theatrical Scene
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My action plan was something I had never imagined I would be doing junior year, and so far has been wholly new to me. The plan has changed and its focus has shifted since leaving the Leadership Institute last summer. Originally I had hoped to write and direct a scene advocating environmental awareness and economic sustainability. I had also hoped to try to get my school to dedicate a “jeans day”, where students pay one dollar to a charity for the privilege of wearing jeans to a charity working to promote environmental awareness. There were two major setbacks that right away made me need to rethink exactly what I was doing. The first was the inconvenient fact that “jeans days” had already been reserved by charities well into 2011, making getting a spot for a first-time community service volunteer near impossible. The second setback was realizing that while I had read scenes from plays and seen directors working firsthand, I had never actually tried to do either. My preconception that experience with acting and writing in general would allow me to do either easily was dead wrong.

Not to mention the fact that I had never been involved in community service before in my life. The idea of working with a charity was good, but beyond handing in my dollar every Friday I knew almost nothing about how my school’s community service system worked. All of my ideas were good, but I hadn’t realized how hard it would actually be to accomplish them. As a result, I decided to forgo the “jeans day” portion of my action plan, simply because not only did I not have any experience with community service in my school, but I felt bad coming out of nowhere and telling a well-established organization how to spend its “jeans days”.

That said, I started dedicating my time to the part of my action plan of which I could say that I had some prior experience with: writing and directing a scene. For practice, I started with the later, just directing a scene. As a member of my school’s drama club, I have the ability to pick and direct a scene to perform during my school’s morning meeting. The scenes are called “RATS” or, “Random Acts of Theater”. Over the course of the winter, for the first time, I chose a short, simple scene from a movie I loved to direct. I tried to see how to adapt what the actors did in the movies to what I could actually do on the stage of my school. Though the scene was less than five minutes, the work that went into it was far greater. Suddenly things like planning auditions, holding rehearsals, getting time and a date during morning meeting, and finding props all became my job. Most of them I simply found I needed to do as I went along. For example:

“You’ll come on from stage left hobbling on a cane and—”

“Do you have a cane?”

“Uh..oh…I think I can find one”
It was certainly a new experience. However, we managed to perform the scene in early February as a huge success. Even if it only lasts five minutes, the RAT holds the vital role in my school community of helping wake everyone up during the 8 AM morning meeting. At the same time I was directing the scene, I was also starting to write my own scene about environmental awareness. It was my first time writing in the format of a play, and I largely learned how to do it by copying the format of whatever play I had on hand at the time. Written narrative was replaced by a name, what that person said, and occasional stage directions in parenthesis in between the actor’s words. It wasn’t just new, but fun as well. It was a new branch of writing to test my skills.

As of right now, the final draft of my scene has been written, and is included as an attachment to this email. Over my spring break I have been busy trying to make a rehearsal schedule and sending out emails asking for volunteers in the drama club to audition and for time during morning meeting. (Unfortunately late March-April is the period in my school where candidates running for community government positions make their speeches during morning meeting. As a result the date for the scene will likely be pushed back far past April 22nd, or Earth Day.) I was sad when I originally placed the charity part of my action plan on hiatus, but it made me realize more about myself than I expected. Firstly, it exposed a serious lack of community service experience on my part. While I intend to get more involved in it in my school next year, I also realized that it simply is not an extracurricular I feel particularly passionate about, though I certainly want to find a way to support my school’s community service program. What the action plan did reveal to me, however, was how well I can combine two things that really are my passions, writing and acting, with my drive to help my community. Organizing donations and bake sales is not something I’m particularly interested in, but writing and acting/directing is something that I can do and use to help.

Not only have I realized my potential to still help my community through writing and acting, but I’ve discovered the profession of directing as well. I doubt that I would ever have started directing if it wasn’t for this action plan, and now I’m not only looking forward to and proud of directing my own scene, and not somebody else’s, but attempting to assistant-direct my school’s one-act play in the spring, as well. My action plan certainly hasn’t turned out as I expected it would, but it’s helped me to learn on my own and grow in my drive and abilities in leaps and strides, for which I’m extremely thankful to the entire program. Perhaps in future written scenes and street performances on campus I look forward to spreading awareness on other global issues as well.