



Blueprint Arts

For Teaching and Learning in the



Theater ■ Grades PreK - 12



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Letter From the Chancellor

Joel I. Klein, *Chancellor, New York City Department of Education*

The publication of the *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts* defines a course of excellence in arts education that begins in early childhood and follows students up through the grades to a commencement level of achievement in art, music, dance and theater.

The *Blueprint* provides a standards-based rigorous approach to teaching the arts. It gives New York City's public school students the opportunity to delve deeply into these subjects, while giving their teachers the latitude to create an instructional program that demonstrates student learning over time and in varied dimensions.

More importantly, the sequential study of art, music, dance and theater will help students achieve both a vocation and an avocation. Their ongoing work will enable them to apply for advanced study or for jobs in the arts-related industries that are so important to the economy of New York City. It will also provide them with a source of lifelong enjoyment as they become the future audience for the arts.

The *Blueprint* is a result of an exceptional collaboration between educators from the school system and representatives from the arts and cultural community of New York City. It motivates students to go beyond the walls of the classroom and encourages them to take advantage of the rich resources available across New York City in museums, concert venues, galleries, performance spaces and theaters.

We are delighted to introduce the New York City public schools to this powerful way of teaching and learning in the arts, and look forward to a future filled with artists, designers, musicians, dancers, actors, directors and more—all New York City public school graduates.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joel I. Klein". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'J'.

Acknowledgments

The publication of the *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts: Theater ■ PreK-12* is truly a milestone for the New York City Department of Education. For the first time, schools at all levels can implement theater education programs that are both sequential and comprehensive. Teachers have been provided with guidelines for implementing rich and creative instruction, and supervisors have been given a template by which to structure and evaluate programs. Our partners in the cultural and university communities have worked with us to establish the *Blueprint* as a common frame of reference to advance our mutual goal: an excellent education for all New York City public school students.

Many people contributed to the development of the *Blueprint* for Theater, and therefore many people must be thanked. First, we wish to express our gratitude to Chancellor Joel I. Klein for his recognition that arts education can only be effective if we provide teachers and students with a coherent plan for achieving it. The support of Chancellor Klein and Deputy Chancellor Carmen Fariña has made the achievement of this goal possible. No progress could have been made without the leadership of the school system firmly behind this effort. Further, we have continued to enjoy unprecedented collaboration with the Department of Cultural Affairs under the leadership of Commissioner Kate D. Levin, to whom we are most grateful.

Credit for the creation and completion of this document must be given to our extraordinarily gifted Director of Theater Programs, Paul King. Immediately upon joining the Department of Education, Paul sought out partners in the cultural community and began the *Blueprint* development process. We thank Co-chair Marianna Houston, Education Director of the Theatre Development Fund, for her exceptional commitment of time and expertise, and Associate Chair Stephen Di Menna for his incisive guidance. We are extremely fortunate that these partners have been stalwart and generous friends of public education and the arts. They have worked diligently and diplomatically to involve and include multiple perspectives and multiple opportunities for theater educa-

tion. In one year, the team pulled together a committee of experts representing all the constituents involved in theater education in New York City. They welcomed practitioners, philosophers, professors and scholars of theater education into their broad circle, and spearheaded a stimulating and productive collaboration resulting in this *Blueprint*. We acknowledge their immense contribution to the future of arts education in New York City.

We wish to particularly acknowledge the contribution of Jane Remer, who has been enormously helpful in making sure that the *Blueprint* for Theater would be both challenging and stimulating for the students and teachers who will make use of it.

We must thank Pam Pollack, whose amazing talent has turned this document into a beautiful and useful work of art. We also extend deepest thanks to Leslie Koch, Anne Deutsch and Jenn Pass of the Office of Strategic Partnerships for their ongoing help and support.

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Table of Contents

Letter From the Chancellor iii

Acknowledgments iv

Table of Contents. v

Introduction: The Purpose of Theater Arts in Public Schools 1

The Five Strands of Teaching and Learning in Theater 2

Student Development and Theater 3

A Guide to Schools for Implementing a Theater Program 4

A Guide to the Theater Blueprint. 5

Special thanks to the following organizations and schools for capturing the energy and beauty of our students as they are engaged in theater learning:

- Arts Connection
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- The William A. Morris School, Intermediate School 61, Region 7
- Costume renderings on page 42 courtesy of D. Polly Kendrick, Parrott Designs.

Grade 2

Theater Making: Acting 7

Theater Making: Playwriting/Play Making . . . 9

Theater Making: Designing and Technical Theater 10

Theater Making: Directing 11

Developing Theater Literacy 12

Making Connections Through Theater 15

Working With Community & Cultural Resources 18

Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning . . . 20

Grade 5

Theater Making: Acting 21

Theater Making: Playwriting/Play Making . . . 23

Theater Making: Designing and Technical Theater 25

Theater Making: Directing 26

Developing Theater Literacy 27

Making Connections Through Theater 30

Working With Community & Cultural Resources 33

Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning . . . 35

Grade 8

Theater Making. 37

Theater Making: Playwriting/Play Making . . . 39

Theater Making: Designing and Technical Theater 42

Theater Making: Directing 45

Developing Theater Literacy 47

Making Connections Through Theater 50

Working With Community & Cultural Resources 53

Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning . . . 56

Grade 12

Theater Making: Acting 58

Theater Making: Playwriting/Play Making . . . 61

Theater Making: Designing 64

Theater Making: Technical Theater. 66

Theater Making: Directing 68

Developing Theater Literacy 70

Making Connections Through Theater 73

Working With Community & Cultural Resources 76

Exploring Careers and Lifelong Learning . . . 78

Appendices 81

Appendix A. Selected Theater Glossary 82

Appendix B. Suggested Reading and Repertoire. 86

Appendix C. Resources and Bibliography . . . 90

Appendix D. Assessment and Portfolio Tools 103

Sample Rubric: Theater Making Strand/Acting 2nd Grade 105

Appendix E. What the Blueprint Means for School Leaders 106

Appendix F. What the Blueprint Means for Classroom Teachers 107

Appendix G. What the Blueprint Means for Special Education Practitioners. 108

Appendix H. What the Blueprint Means for Parents. 109

Appendix I. What the Blueprint Means for the Arts Community. 110

Appendix J. What the Blueprint Means for the University Community 111

Introduction: The Purpose of Theater Arts in Public Schools

Every New York City public school is capable of supporting an excellent arts program in which arts specialists are key players, the school community is actively involved, and the resources of the city’s cultural community are maximized. The recent changes in the New York City public schools have afforded an opportunity to make the arts central to the education that all children receive, regardless of the school they attend. This *Blueprint* points the way.

As the term “blueprint” suggests, this document is a map, which sets a course for the Department of Education’s strategic plan to provide an excellent arts education for every child in New York City. The standards contained in this *Blueprint* are grounded in the National and New York State Learning Standards for the Arts, and are addressed in every facet of the document. This *Blueprint* is distinguished from the *New York State Learning Standards* by the way teaching and learning are extended into the specific circumstances of New York City schools—most notably, the unique collaboration between the schools and the New York cultural community to forge this plan.

New York City arts organizations and their funders play an ongoing role in making the arts available to schools. The schools have always depended on the values and commitment of these organizations, and it is only with the collaborative spirit of the entire arts community that this plan for arts education can succeed.

Traditionally, arts curricula have been developed either as subject-based or as outcome-based models. Subject-based curricula define the goals for the content to be learned. Outcome-based curricula define what the goals are for the learners—what they should know and what skills they should possess. The new plan includes both approaches, and will, as it evolves, provide clear and rigorous forms of assessment, based on the best practices offered in the field. It contains strong “studio” strands—in which students act, draw, write, dance, paint, sing, and play—as well as aesthetic education experiences that include learning about the art form in its context and in the world. Instead of an exclusive ideology, an inclusive plan allows arts teachers to select the approaches and the content that works best for them.

The Purpose of Theater Arts in Public Schools

Through theater activities that foster creative expression, discipline, collaboration, self-awareness and personal transformation, students of diverse backgrounds and abilities channel their energies into inspiring artistic endeavors. Students engaged in Theater Making learn to value the literary, oral and cultural traditions of societies. They learn to express themselves and develop empathy for their own and other’s situations. They begin to understand universal themes and ways of looking at the world, and they develop the means to express their own vision and ideas. Teaching and learning in theater develops confident learners who are better prepared to participate actively in their education, community and social lives.

The Five Strands of Teaching and Learning in Theater

Theater Making : Acting, Playwriting/Play Making, Designing and Technical Theater, and Directing

Theater Making provides multiple avenues for active learning. Through the interpretation of dramatic literature and the creation of their own works, students engage as writers, actors, designers, directors and technicians. Students learn to use their minds, bodies, voices, emotions and sense of artistry to examine the world and its meaning.

Developing Theater Literacy

Theater Literacy provides the skills and knowledge to deepen a student's understanding of the many forms and genres of theater. Students explore theater history and the multiple roles that theater plays in society. They use theater vocabulary when making and responding to performance, and develop critical, analytical and writing skills through observing, discussing and responding to live theater and dramatic literature. In this strand, dramatic literature is also viewed as a catalyst for production and performance. Therefore, the associated activities are experiential in nature and support Theater Making as well as a deeper understanding of text.

Making Connections

Students make connections to theater by developing an understanding of self and others. They respond to theater by identifying personal issues and universal themes in performance and in dramatic text. They investigate theater by examining the integration of other arts into a complex multi-media art form. Additionally, students connect and apply learning in other disciplines to their inclusive understanding of theater.

Working With Community and Cultural Resources

Community resources that support Theater Making, theater literacy, theater connections and career exploration, expand students' opportunities for learning. Active partnerships that combine school, professional and community resources create rich avenues for student and teacher innovation in the classroom and in production. Additionally, students validate their learning by sharing and performing outside of the classroom and in partnership with artists and organizations in support of community efforts.

Exploring Careers and Life long Learning

Students develop audience skills and a connection to theater that allows them to value theater throughout their lives. They explore the scope and variety of theater careers in teaching, production, performance, criticism, design, technical theater and related occupations, and they investigate how these careers align with their personal goals and aspirations.

Student Development and Theater

Early Childhood and the Grade 2 Benchmark:

Young children respond with joy and energy to creative play, drama and storytelling. They like to imitate adult roles and play dress-up. On their own, they generate make-believe scenarios entering an imaginative world of their own creation. These interactions not only engage the imagination, they provide group opportunities to develop social and language skills. Structured theater games and activities provide a safe environment in which learning may occur and in which all five senses are engaged. As emergent readers, theater activities also provide a venue for children to demonstrate physically and vocally their understanding of character, conflict and action. Theater experiences help them develop basic physical skills in self-control, and understanding of the relationship between their body and the space around them, and appropriate and imaginative use of voices. Structured theater activities develop the following skills and understandings:

- Social/affective: Listening, responding, taking turns and working cooperatively in a group.
- Cognitive: Recognizing, re-creating, identifying, differentiating, and sequencing dramatic elements.
- Aesthetic: Choosing, expressing and creating elements of theater and design for theater.
- Metacognitive: Reflecting on their own and their classmates' Theater Making and in response to performances.

Elementary Students and the Grade 5 Benchmark:

In upper elementary school, children become increasingly keen observers of their world. Capable of complex patterns of logic, they like to analyze and define people, activities, situations and events. They enjoy inventing games, working cooperatively on group projects, and creating secret codes and personal languages. At this stage they have developed a more detailed sense of their bodies, voices, abilities and interests. They are interested in real world applications to learning and will challenge themselves to achieve new and diverse skills in Theater Making. Ensemble theater experiences culminating in products and performances and incorporating independent and group rehearsals give students a chance to express themselves in a unique and self-affirming way. They also become skilled in memorization, which allows them to use scripted materials in activities and performances. Learning in theater develops physical skills and vocal skills, and facilitates understanding of character and motivation. Ongoing participation in theater classes develops the following skills and understandings:

- Social/affective: Initiating, cooperating, co-planning, and respecting others' opinions.
- Cognitive: Classifying, interpreting, comparing, and analyzing works of theater and dramatic literature.
- Aesthetic: Personal and artistic choices in creating theater and responding to performance.
- Metacognitive: Reflecting on their own Theater Making, while connecting personal experience to universal themes.

Middle School Students and the Grade 8 Benchmark:

Students at this stage of their lives are testing their relationship to the world, both in terms of challenging the status quo and developing a self-identity with which they feel comfortable. They are increasingly concerned with meaning and truth, both personal and social, and are beginning to think in more abstract ways and to speculate about origins and outcomes. The turbulent emotions and rapid physical changes of this age group present both challenges and opportunities for the growth of skills and expression in theater. Students are capable of focused work in various techniques and styles of theater, and enjoy the "safe space" that a structured and defined challenge provides. They can investigate and apply complex and varied processes to inventing and executing theater activities. Sharing their original theater work in small groups can be a productive solution for providing formative assessment from peers and teachers. Theater study refines physical and vocal skills, and allows students to differentiate and make personal choices. Through continued theater study, students access skills in the following:

- Social/affective: Building confidence and a defined sense of self, trust among peers, working independently, and taking risks.
- Cognitive: Distinguishing, adapting, synthesizing, analyzing, evaluating and creating theater.
- Aesthetic: Accurately executing different styles of theater, considering multiple factors leading to aesthetic effect.
- Metacognitive: Reflecting on their own qualities as actors, designers, playwrights, technicians and directors in relation to their training and study.

High School Students and the Grade 12 Benchmark:

For those high school students studying theater as an elective course, theater classes provide an enjoyable outlet for self-expression, group interaction, and an opportunity to explore personal meaning and identity. High school students who are majoring in theater are ready to use their capacity for sustained, detailed work and critical inquiry to advance their skills in all areas of theater learning. Students at this age gain confidence as actors, designers, technicians, playwrights and directors through consistent study and practice. They develop an awareness of the standards and requirements of the university and professional theater arenas, and identify personal goals regarding future study and work in theater. Deep experiences in creating theater, and understanding theater history, the cultural context of theater and aesthetic concerns, lead to the emergence of their personal artistic voice. Sustained theater training builds skills in the following:

- Social/affective: Understanding and empathizing with others; initiating, planning and producing projects independently in coordination with others.
- Cognitive: Explaining, comparing, implementing, decoding, and critiquing theater; executing activities in various styles with expressive subtlety.
- Aesthetic: Defining and articulating a personal aesthetic in theater.
- Metacognitive: Reflecting upon their strengths and weaknesses in theater and their personal approach to theater study.

A Guide to Schools for Implementing a Theater Program

The following recommendations represent goals towards which schools should move in support of the optimal functioning of their theater program.

These measures will provide the best environment in which to achieve the student learning set forth in this *Blueprint*.

Physical Resources

The Studio or Classroom

Theater is a process of experimentation, exploration and physical activity. The physical space in which theater teaching takes place affects the quality of the experience for students. Ideally, the theater studio should be spacious, clean, clear of objects and, when possible, dedicated to theater use only. There should be a designated playing area within the studio that will comfortably accommodate the students gathering in a full circle with an arms length between each person. Portable seating, folding chairs or benches are needed for student sharing and performances. Additionally, one wall or corner should be dedicated to a theater resource center with scripts, videos and other theater artifacts. Bins or other storage is needed for costume and prop pieces that are used in studio theater games. Teachers should have unrestricted use of a CD/tape player and access to a video monitor/DVD player.

The Theater

School theaters should be adequately equipped and maintained. Resources should include appropriate sound and lighting equipment, either rented or permanent, and may vary from production to production. Stage curtains and drapery should be in good shape, clean, and meet fire code requirements. Flooring should be wooden and may be covered with Masonite or another wood fiber product. If wooden floors are exposed, they should not have a high-gloss finish in order to reduce the reflection of light. Any fly-system and curtain rigging in the theater should be well maintained and meet all safety requirements. Off stage areas and wings should be clean and provide unobstructed access to the stage. Adequate storage for costumes, scenery, props and lighting equipment should be secure and adjacent to the theater space, if possible. Schools with technical theater programs and multiple productions during the school year will need a well-equipped, well-maintained and spacious carpentry shop.

Instructional Time

Elementary

Children in K-5 should take theater class one period per week throughout the school year. Some schools have chosen to fold the equivalent amount of instructional time into a concentrated cycle. For the purposes of a sequential curriculum, however, the consistency of full-year work is preferable. The theater teacher can be an excellent resource for professional development of all early childhood teachers, as young children may be engaged in imaginative play every day in their classes.

Middle School

Students who choose a theater elective in middle school should take an equivalent of three to five theater classes per week. Theater learning is multi-faceted and complex and requires a schedule that will support the scope and sequence of learning. Theater Making, which may include rehearsing for performances, is most effectively realized in double periods or as part of an extended day program. Single periods may be reserved for the theater literacy, connections and career explorations.

High School

Students taking a general theater elective in high school may follow the guidelines for middle school. Students taking a theater commencement program should have a minimum of one period of theater training daily. A serious program that seeks to prepare students for the option of continued university study will go further, extending to double periods for two to three days a week. Making creative use of zero period and extended day can ease the burden on programming.

A Guide to the Theater Blueprint

Organization of the Blueprint for Theater

The *Blueprint for Theater* is organized by benchmark years, moving through the five strands of theater learning for each benchmark. Embedded in each strand are indicators of student learning, suggested activities and recommended resources. Thus, each benchmark section provides a complete view of theater learning for children in that age group. Scanning through the *Blueprint* and reading the pages in each benchmark year associated with any one strand gives a sense of the developmental learning PreK-12 in that strand.

The curriculum is both subject-based—defining the goals for content—and outcome-based—defining the goals for student achievement. The *Blueprint for Theater* is meant to provide a framework for teachers, suggesting strategies that spur individual creativity, depth, and breadth in theater teaching.

Theater Making Is the Starting Point

Each benchmark section of the *Blueprint for Theater* begins with Theater Making, which encompasses all of the activities in which students make theater, including acting, playwrighting/making, designing and technical theater, and directing. Theater is a live, temporal art form, and all Theater Making learning should be realized through participation and active engagement. The learning inherent in the four other strands of the *Blueprint* stems from the Theater Making activities, and the activities in those strands are inextricably bound with those in the Theater Making strand.

The four other strands deepen theater learning by providing students with the means to:

- become literate in theater, developing critical insights and the means to express them with the language of theater practice.
- make social, cultural, historical and personal connections through theater.
- connect creatively to the other arts and disciplines through theater.
- engage in theater learning with both school staff and other sectors of the New York City theater cultural community.
- become lifelong learners and advocates for theater.

This *Blueprint* is a scaffold on which a sequential, cohesive PreK-12 theater curriculum may be built, encompassing the body of knowledge of theater as an art form and in conjunction with all other aspects of children's lives and learning.