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The objective of this proposal is to create a blueprint for a theater department for the IB World School of Wrocław.

Pioneering a new theater department.

There are many important lessons that a well executed theater program can teach students of any age. The dramatic arts nurture a spirit which aligns with the learning attitude of the WIS and International High School programs. Theater invites students to practice their commitment, confidence, cooperation, creativity, curiosity, self expression and enthusiasm. But above all, empathy is a muscle best experienced through the theater. Both the theater and civic engagement ask us to contemplate and understand the needs of others. It is no surprise that theater and democracy emerged from the exact same moment in human history over two centuries ago.

Times have changed since ancient Greece and theater's role in our society has changed with it. Throughout the 20th century, artists re-envisioned the methods, approaches, and forms of live performance. Yet when I look back on my early experiences in theater, they are of a similar style developed in the late 18th century! My professional career has opened me up to a much wider range of possibility. Just as the public education system needs rethinking, so does the traditional theater department.

The typical process of making a student performance goes something like this. The director picks a play. Then he chooses which students perform which parts. Over the course of ten weeks he shows the kids how to project both the voice and their emotions. Time is running out and he begins directing the cast to the final product. A performance is then shown in a theater for friends and family. In this process there is an urgency to prepare the students for the final presentation. There is no time to explore the process, to search for new possibilities, or to ask questions without clear answers.

This method of creating theater in schools needs an update. It's no different than teaching to the test. It doesn't account for the interests and abilities of the group. It disguises mimesis as creative expression. As a process, it is on the surface of things and doesn't explore the deeper relationships or complexities of modern life. It doesn't allow for a full investigation (or challenge) of what theater is both as an art practice or its role in society.

I would like to propose something different. My idea is that the practice of theater is a form of research with the potential to teach new topics and create knowledge. I'd approach it like a research laboratory. This concept has its origins right here in Wrocław with Jerzy Grotowski's Laboratory Theater. Students of the Theater Lab would study the body, voice, text, songs,

traditions and technology. They would take part in a collective idea generation and composition process. The Theater Lab would explore different theatrical perspectives. Creating a performance would entail mixing and matching performance styles with material and content. The intention is to integrate this Theater Lab with the student's units of inquiry and to craft a program that reinforces the IB learning profile.

Experiential learning.

This student Theater Lab has at its core the idea of practice as research. This is an emerging field that aims to advance knowledge by means of practice. It fuses a structured inquiry with an artistic process to gain knowledge and understanding.

This framework is important for three key reasons:

- it places the activity more firmly in the area of academic study - considering the arts as an integrated part of education.
- it emphasizes process over product - rooted in a rigorous investigation, the artistic practice is disassociated from a “celebrity obsessed” industry.
- and it places more power in the hands of the student - relying on the students for their knowledge and creativity, leading to deeper engagement.

All fields of knowledge are connected and practice as research provides experiential learners a way into learning that books do not provide.

What it would be?

Like the IB program itself, a student Theater Lab would be internationally-minded in its content. It would reinforce social skills, communication skills, and thinking skills. And it would nurture the physical, intellectual, and emotional balance of each student.

I would organize workshops in three phases of activity.

- Building a foundation - The initial workshops would be based on movement, music, and games. A selection of exercises introduces students to a set of principles. Body awareness, presence, breath, voice, rhythm, musicality, and energy. Students are challenged to explore connection, what it means to be with other people, and how to open their hearts to each other. Towards the end of this first phase we would begin to look at text, songs and dances from different cultures. In this way, communication is not simply about English mastery but embracing all language and seeing performance as poetry and an expression of feelings.
- Devising material - The second part of the training delves deeper into working with traditional source materials. The idea generation would also include material from

academic subjects - literature, history, math, science. As well as any other sources that the student brings to the Lab.

In this phase students begin to look at a variety of performance perspectives including Jerzy Grotowski's physical actions from the 1960s, the commedia dell'arte of 16th century, and neutral masks of Jaques Lecoq from the 20th century. Students are then guided to create small etudes - very short moments or scenes- which blend the selected material with a performance context. This "mash up" may lead to using the material in a variety of ways where the lines that define dance, theater, music, performance art, video and visual art may become less defined.

- Creating a performance - The final part of the training would be dedicated to creating a presentation (or demonstration). The focus will be to work with the material, compose larger structures, edit and arrange it all into a performance.

A fan of many possibilities.

End points for this Theater Lab approach fan out into many possibilities. The final presentation may be a performance on a stage with an audience in chairs. It may be a site specific performance that happens in many locations which asks for audience participation. It may appear more like a visual art exhibition or video art with live components. Book reports could come to life. Classic literature and Shakespeare may be turned into puppet shows. Famous speeches may become dances. Or mythologies could be told through songs.

Our final performance could be presented at schools around Wrocław and serve as a great form of outreach and recruitment for WIS. The work could be presented at other IB World schools in the region or submitted for student art competitions. I have the seedling of an idea to develop a larger project surrounding the Odra River which blends social action, environmental science, history, creative practice and unites parents, students and the community as a participant of the 2016 Capital of Culture.

The Lab could arrange for visits with outside arts groups such as Grotowski Institute, Teatr Arka, Brave Kids or Jubilo Project. Which would open students up to an even wider perspective including the relationship between artistic endeavors and community service. A group of older students could go on a cultural expedition with the intention to conduct field research collecting source material of traditional songs and dances.

There are many possibilities for bringing the work out into the world. I have no shortage of ideas or inspiration but it has to begin with a group. Their passions must be reflected in whatever output we aim create.

How does it fit with the school?

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A Theater Lab could be an extracurricular activity with only a few registered students. It could be an after school bridge between the WIS and the ATUT Bilingual School. Or it could be fully integrated into the WIS Primary and Secondary School, and the International High School Diploma Program.

The Theater Lab would embrace a healthy attitude of engagement and a somatic balance for each student. It would bring physical education in relation to academic topics through the performed arts. This type of work permits students to question everything. Question the form of theater and their own limits of knowledge. It invites them to participate in independent and collective idea generation and carries them through a process of composition and editing. I feel as though my creative practice as an artist shares many aims of the school and I am excited for the opportunity to bring this proposal in even closer alignment with the philosophy and approach of the IB World School programs here in Wrocław.