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Transitioning: Preparing for the Next Stage

Joel G. Fink
Professor of Theatre
Founding Director of The Theatre Conservatory
Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University

Introduction

What follows is the text of the presentation delivered at the 49th Annual NAST Meeting in Chicago, on Saturday, March 22, 2014. The text reflects the cues put in to help in the oral presentation. All of the *Italics*, **bolding**, underlining, CAPITALIZATIONS, and conjunctions, have been left in to help give a sense of the text as it was spoken. This choice also explains the rather “free-form” and eccentric punctuation and grammar throughout. In addition, this version of the text includes a short paragraph on preparing teachers for careers at the college and university level that was, in the interest of time, cut from the version that was delivered.

Text of the Presentation:

As in so many parts of the country this year, our weather here in Chicago has given us a very long “winter of our discontent,” but it’s my great pleasure to be speaking with you today with the hope that we are now truly *TRANSITIONING* into spring. Spring also marks the time around the country when agents and agencies gird their loins for *SHOWCASE FATIGUE*, as they get invitations to see the work of this year’s many graduating classes of actors, designers, and technicians.

Today’s session is titled: "***Transitioning: Preparing for the Next Stage.***" The questions that were developed in the over-view for today asked: *How can we as administrators and faculty members best advise our students as to what lies ahead? How can we teach them to promote their strengths, to believe in themselves, and to recognize that all experiences hold unique value? How can we do our best to help set them up for success in the profession, in teaching, or in non-theatre work? How can we prepare them for the realities that lie ahead?*

I *reframed* some of those issues for myself by asking: How can we help our students to build on the past so that they can embrace the present, while they are forging the future? How can we nurture our students to be dreamers and visionaries finding voices of their own, while also equipping them to meet the realities of the “business” part of “show business” or of other businesses. How can our programs continually ***regenerate***

themselves to best serve our students personal and professional needs in ways that effectively prepare them for the professional fields around them, reflecting changing technologies, aesthetics, and expectations, and at the same time meet the challenging demands of our economic realities, retrenchments, and the rising demands for accountability and assessment? All of these questions arise within the context of today's disposable culture, reality-show media, and the simplified language communications of Instagrams and Twitter.

One of the things I've been thinking about *a lot* as I see our tuition costs rising...when students graduate with massive amounts of debt, how will that limit the "transitional options" they have and the opportunities they can *afford* to pursue?

Once a student graduates, does that terminate the educational bond with us? What can we do to professionally support our alums, so that in the future, they will be able and willing to help the next generations of our students? All of these are questions that I have been thinking about.

When so much of a professional career in the theatre, or in any other field, is determined by *opportunities*, our students will need to have the knowledge and the skills to take advantage of those opportunities *when* they happen, *or* to *make* them happen. Here in Chicago, the tradition of "starting your own theatre and putting on a show" is still alive and kicking...although it gets more and more difficult all the time. And, with the wide range of *media* in the global marketplace in which our grads might work, how can we help prepare them to embrace the uncertainties ahead as socially conscious artists, and as engaged citizens?

Many schools have *specialized admissions staff* for programs in the arts, do we also need specialized *exit* staff for our programs, At the time when they're graduating and transitioning into the professional world....it's hard to help our students to get "*there*"...if we (*and they*) don't really know where "*there* is" for them. And today, certainly, *there* is no "one size fits all."

Different programs will, of course, have different resources to offer graduating students and alums, and I know that these are not *new* topics or *new* questions for most of you. I look out at a group of experienced administrators and teachers from around the nation, dedicated to standards of excellence in theatre education and training, and I'm sure that most of you have been grappling with many of the issues being discussed today for a long time. And...we all face the limitations of what we **can** and **can't** do—given the missions of our specific programs, as well as the economic and practical realities we have to work with, realities that shape what we can **actually** offer our students.

You might be familiar with the book: "*What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers.*" One of its primary *purposes* is to help people to assess the *professional skills* they have that they don't recognize in terms of being able to *transfer* those skills into other fields. This ***transference*** is related to what is often referred to as "**fluid intelligence**," the ability to successfully tackle new problems and

adapt to new situations, as opposed to just *accumulating knowledge*. I have often seen my students *accumulating knowledge or skills*, but less often seen them *effectively* learn *how* that knowledge or those skills will empower them to later move from being *student-artists* to being *artist-citizens*, or *citizens in other fields*. Today, we are not just talking about **WHAT** we teach our students, but also **HOW** we are teaching it. How can we help our students to recognize and utilize the “**value added**” they’ve received from their education and training. Do they have the ability to successfully **transfer the fundamental concepts** that underlie the **knowledge** and **experiences** they’ve gained with us in order to *transition* into professional careers in the arts or in other fields outside of the arts.

As I thought about what I wanted to share with you today, I reflected on my own experiences as a theatre artist and as an educator over the past 40- some years. My preferences and biases in terms of theatre, theatre education, and theatre training, come from my own development as an actor, stage manager, director, teacher, and administrator, and now....for the final years of this part of my career, as a full-time teacher again.

I realize that in speaking **today** about how to prepare students for transitioning into their professional careers, I speak from my current position in a program in **downtown Chicago**. That means that we have relatively easy access to a wide range of theatre professionals to draw on as adjunct faculty, directors, designers, stage-managers and technical staff. From freshmen intro classes to senior courses in auditioning, picture & resume preparation, and other professional issues, and then to a graduating showcase, being in a theatre center such as Chicago means that we have the resources to integrate working professionals into every stage of the education and training process of our students. For us, *transitioning* our students **out** to the profession, means having working professionals come **in** to our program, to compliment the work of the full-time Teaching-Artists. (Please note that in the category of “Teaching-Artists,” I am including faculty in the areas of performance, design, technology, management, and administration, as well as in the art of scholarship.)

I have taught, however, in a range of programs, in varied geographic locations across the country, and I think that no matter where a program is situated, there are *different* and *effective* ways of addressing the issues of today’s discussion, ways that are appropriate for programs wherever they might be or whatever their particular mission and focus. Again....there is no “*one size fits all*.”

And...we can’t be *everything* to *every* student in terms of transitioning them from academic page to professional stage. *SO*....given the mission of each program, and given it’s particular community, what is it that we can do effectively? For me, the word “*community*” is an important key here. In looking at the issues we’re discussing today, I start with the premise that at the most fundamental level: **ALL theatre is COMMUNITY THEATRE**. Whether the theatre communities in which our students will eventually work are called “Broadway,” “Regional Theatre,” “Academic Theatre,” “Hollywood,” or

wherever they're located, they will inevitably reflect the realities and values of those communities, and of the larger civic communities in which they exist.

Just as John Gielgud said that "***Style is knowing what play you are in,***" I would suggest that an important part of the effectiveness of our academic programs in transitioning students into their professional lives, is helping them to "***know what community they are, or want to be, in.***"

In terms of *communities*, I feel very lucky to have started out in theatre when and where I did. Growing up in Baltimore, Maryland, I was working as a child actor by the time I was in my earliest teens. By the time I could drive I was also hanging out at *Center Stage Theatre* in Baltimore: ushering, working backstage, taking classes, helping with tech, even getting to go on-stage when needed, and hanging out with the actors. I can remember cutting the hair of the actress playing Frankie in "*The Member of The Wedding*." (She wanted a "chopped off look"....and she got it!) It was a wonderful time to be a young hopeful actor during those boom years for *Regional Theatre* in America. At that time, Center Stage maintained a resident company of actors, designers, technicians and management, all there for the season (some returning for multiple seasons), and I had the opportunity to see a team of theatre professionals producing plays from Greek Tragedies to contemporary musicals, in the same somewhat *limited* theatre space. I saw my first professional productions of Shakespeare, Shaw, Chekhov, and Beckett there. While some performances or productions were not as successful as others, it was a *community of artists* who, because they were there for an entire season, were also able to be a part of the *surrounding* community in which the theatre existed. I got to sit in the green room with those older, experienced actors and they would talk about what it was to make a life in the theatre. I got to see their pictures and resumes, and how they went about applying for jobs, and preparing for auditions. I got to see their performances evolve from rehearsals to closing nights. I also got to see how they *behaved*, on-stage and off—both for good and for bad. Of course I didn't know it then, but those experiences were creating a *model* for me of what theatre *could be*, and of what a working actor *could do*—besides the most obvious choice of "going to New York and trying to make it." Almost 50 years later I still have vivid memories of many of the productions I saw then, and of many of the actors and backstage staff I got to meet and work with.

One of those memories is of going up to the roof of the theatre with the cast of "*The Member of the Wedding*" after a performance, and watching areas of downtown Baltimore burn during the riots after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Those kinds of experiences change you. I was already in the process of "*transitioning*" into the adult world of professional theatre—I just didn't know it at the time. The model that formed for me during those years has certainly changed and evolved, but in essence, it still shapes what I dream about when I think of what theatre can be in terms of an *artistic community*, and in the *larger community* as a force for *social justice*.

When I was 17 years old and graduating high school, I went off to the Barter Theatre in Virginia for my first “formal” professional internship. Because there was no short character-actor in the Equity acting company that summer, I got to play a number of substantial roles in that season’s productions. At 17, I was playing middle-aged men in *The Odd Couple*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and even a pre-New York tryout of a new script. As I remember it, it was really quite an awful script that involved a young man having a vision of Jesus while in his jockey-shorts out on a street corner, after an unsuccessful sexual attempt with his girlfriend. I believe it was an autobiographical story for the playwright...who had never written a play before. It did go off-Broadway and received some of the worst reviews I have ever read...right up there with “*Moose Murders*”. At least that’s the way I remember it!

But...at the Barter Theatre I was also doing tech work in every spare moment of the day that I wasn’t rehearsing, *and* I learned to stage-manage from the toughest stage manager I have met to this date. Because there was only one stage-manager for the company that season, I also wound up stage-managing in their second theatre space, and that began to open up the world of *directing* to me in ways that would resonate throughout the rest of my career. I couldn’t help but laugh when I went back to visit The Barter Theatre several years ago, and looked in the booth of their now much-renovated second-stage. When I worked there, in addition to staging-managing “*Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*,” I was also the complete running crew for lights and sound in the booth, and I vividly remembered sitting there, with the huge wheels and levers of the old light board, and having to do the last cues using both arms, both legs, and my nose to hit the tape recorder for the final sound cue.

Robert Porterfield, the founder of The Barter Theatre, was quite a character. He would give a curtain talk each night before the performance, welcoming the audience, talking about the season, and then giving away a pair of “*Lady Grey Nylon Hose*” to the woman who had come the farthest distance to see the show. He would say: “*Is there anyone here from Asia, Africa, or Deuteronomy?*” And he would always end his curtain talk with the same line: “*If you like us, talk about us; if you don’t, just keep your mouth shut.*” He would always break his voice on the same words, and he always got a big laugh from the audience—no matter how many times they’d heard him do it. At the end of that summer, as the interns were getting ready to leave, Mr. Porterfield asked me to stay on for their fall season, and he told me that he would give me my Equity card. I explained to him I was planning to go to school that fall and he cited the “old theatre saw” that you don’t learn acting in school, but “on the boards.” I *had* learned a *lot* that summer about the theatre and about myself, but while the acting work I was doing then was skillful and successful in the shows I was in, it was superficial and imitative; it was *intelligent*, but it was *uninformed*. I couldn’t have put it into those words then, but in my gut I knew there was “more” to being an actor. After long talks with several of the older actors in the company, including the Equity Deputy, I did go to school that fall, and while that might have left a “*road not taken*,” it was a decision that I never regretted. And, when I *did* get my Equity card, it meant all that much more to me.

So.....based on those early experiences, the idea of “transitioning” into the profession *for me*, is not something that happens at the *end* of an education, but one that, at its best, should be rooted in *every* stage of the work we do. My experiences as a young actor were certainly not unique. *Today*, however, those kinds of experiences have, for many reasons, become much more limited. If I was growing up now, even in those same places, I don’t believe the opportunities I had then would still be available to me. *And*, many of our students decide to pursue careers in the theatre **later** in their lives than I did, and for them our programs are sometimes the *first* intensive theatre experiences they’ve had.

Our theatre programs in colleges, universities and conservatories, now provide *vital* education and training experiences that simply aren’t accessible to many of our students *anywhere else*. And so we ask how those programs can most effectively fill the gaps left by **fewer** *PRE- PROFESSIONAL* opportunities “*on the boards*” and “*back stage*,” **in professional settings**, as we prepare our students to transition into those settings.

While graduating students look ahead to “*what comes next*” in their futures, those of us of “*a certain age*” are also deeply involved in other aspects of “*transitioning*,” but with a good deal more “*looking back*” involved. For me, that’s meant *assessing* past decades of work, and *rethinking* various aspects of *what* we do with our students and *how* we do it. Teaching our seniors last fall and talking with them about “*what comes next*,” got me thinking quite a bit about “*Transitioning*”it’s a useful word to give us a sense of moving from one thing to another—in our lives and in our work. But it’s also a tricky word because it implies a transient period of being “betwixt and between”a period to be *gotten through* and left behind to get to something *more significant*.

I would like to suggest that as we are thinking today about how we can help our students “*transition*,” perhaps it would also be useful to think of the **entire** undergraduate or graduate experience as a **transformative** period, from a *childhood* or youthful love of “*putting on plays*,” to an *adult* embrace of the art of the theatre, with all of its demands and disciplines.

Whether a student ultimately remains in the theatre in some area, or in a non-theatre related profession, I believe that the education and training of theatre can help students to prepare for *whatever* comes *next* through the ***transformative*** experiences they’ve had during their years working with us. And I would suggest that today we consider not just the potential of our programs to “*transition*” students **out** into the professional world, but also to “*transform*” them **into** young adults who are *ready* to take on the **personal, artistic & civic responsibilities** of their chosen professions. But...that kind of *transformative education* isn’t easy, and it seems to me that it keeps getting harder and harder to achieve.

Just one example: Think about dealing with **PARENTS** today. The *helicopter* parents many of us have dealt with have now evolved into *kamikaze* parents, and the “*traditional*” expectation of college being a time for young people to *individuate* and to

begin becoming “*who they are*,” looks very different for many of them today than it looked before the invention of the “*smart phone*.” When I went off to school, my parents expected me to call home once a week. Since they still considered long-distance calls an extravagance they couldn’t afford...except in emergencies...I was always to call “*collect*.” My parents wouldn’t accept the call, but it let them know I was ok. *If* it was an *emergency*, I was to yell “**It’s an emergency!**” when the operator was asking them if they would accept the call; if it wasn’t an emergency...I could write a letter. In later years, while my parents still wouldn’t accept collect calls...they *would* then call me back “*direct*,” even if it wasn’t an emergency. But...that was a major concession for them...to admit that the Depression of the 1930s might really be over.

While I’m glad that my students are close to their parents and sharing their experiences with them.....I now hear students talking about texting their parents throughout the day—*every day*—and emails, photos and calls are *continually* being sent and received, to and from parents. The **transition** from high school and home-life, to life *away* from home just isn’t happening the way it used to for many of our students today. Ironically, the edition of *The Atlantic* that came out this week has a cover story entitled “*The Over-Protected Kid*.” While the article looks at a number of different issues, including physical safety and the fear of abduction of smaller children, it also discusses parental involvement with schools. One of the conclusions from the various studies that Hanna Rosin, the author of article cites, is that many children today are growing up to be *less creative*, and that *intense* academic involvement by parents does not positively influence their children’s educational achievement levels.

But.....“for better or worse”.....the students entering our programs are changing. And so we ask how we can best utilize the brief time they spend with us to help them to *transition* from their high school “*imitative*” ideas of , copying models they have seen, to truly creative ways of working. Whether graduates of our programs remain part of the creative team of theatre or move into other aspects of life that still allow them to participate as the vital theatre-force of an “**audience**”.....the education and training that we offer them can, in the “*best of all possible worlds*,” begin from the *first day* they work with us to create a *space* in which our students find their own unique voices and their authentic artistic passions. In that “*best of all possible worlds*,” **graduation** will then mean not an end of the transformative process, but rather, a *transitional landmark* on their life-long journeys of discovering who they are and what their places are in the world.

During the first semester of study, all of our students take a course called “*Introduction to Professional Theatre in Chicago*.” They meet actors, directors, designers, management personnel, and artists from all aspects of theatre, working in various venues of Chicago’s diverse theatre scene, and they go to visit many of the city’s professional theatres. In addition, in terms of our students successfully *transitioning* into professions **after** school, one of the most effective tools for us has been the ability for our students to complete **professional internships** while they’re still *in* school. In significant ways, these professional

internships parallel some of the experiences I was able to have *before* I even began my formal theatre training in school.

From 1996 when I went to Roosevelt to develop a new Theatre and Musical Theatre Conservatory focused on actor training, we established robust internship programs with many of the theatres in Chicago, both large and small. These internships with professional theatres are often difficult to manage for the faculty. They can mean students missing classes during tech weeks and for matinee performances. In *every case*, however, our students have gained so much from these experiences, and have come back so much more prepared for "*what comes next*," that faculty are willing to put in the extra time and effort to make those internships possible for students, *without* jeopardizing their class work, or the work of their classmates.

When the 2008 recession hit, however, most of the professional theatres (both large and small), cut back on the size of productions and casts, and the opportunities to get our students "*working in the field*" while still in school became much more difficult. Fortunately, as the economy has recovered, so have many of those opportunities. For us, professional internships are a vital link in the "*transformative*" process of our students' work. They are the experiences where our students get to work "*on the professional boards*" while still engaged in their studies, and they bring new insights, new perspectives, and new skills, back to our classrooms, studios and rehearsals.

While most of our internships are only available to juniors and seniors and many are (in keeping with the focus of *our* program), in *ACTING*, our students with other interests have often gotten professional internships in PR, education, dramaturgy, casting and management. Unlike the abusive internship conditions in other fields documented in the recent *New York Times* article, we've found that our students are not simply fetching coffee or doing busy work, but are actually getting valuable professional experience and making important professional contacts. In a remarkable number of cases, these *acting* internships have opened up opportunities with professional casting directors, and to later roles at their theatres, and the *non-acting* internships have, in a surprising number of cases, led to permanent, professional positions once students have graduated.

Of course, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, not all programs have the geographic accessibility to such a richness of professional resources "*just down the street*." But, I've seen *effective* programs all over the country, utilizing both the traditional academic year *and summers* to develop opportunities for their students, effectively linking them into the professional world. I hope that during your roundtable discussions you'll have the opportunity to discuss those that have worked in your particular settings.

In addition to the role of the curricular and production programs that we devise for our students, there is also a "personal" and "illusory" aspect to the issue of "*transitioning*," and how we can most effectively "*be there*" for our students during key moments in their transformations. I have found that one of the most important gifts that I can give

to a student (in terms of his or her life outside of and after school), is to be there to give that student “*permission*” to do “*what they need to do.*”

While some of our students might be gifted young artists with potential careers in the theatre ahead of them, many of our students will find *other* callings later in life. Students who “*found*” theatre in high school or earlier were often drawn to it for reasons having little to do with the art of the theatre, and more to do with their own emerging selves and home-lives. At first, a large number of high school students, think that they want to be *performers*; some then discover they do have the talent, the drive, and the discipline to transform their youthful potential into a career. Some discover that their talents are actually more related to other areas of theatre such as technology, or design, or management. When an acting student tells me that she or he really loves math and is thinking about taking an accounting class.....I practically yell with joy and do everything I can to make it possible for the student to take that class. I love the wonderful cartoon from the *New Yorker* of the man saying: “*It’s the old story. I was in the middle of a successful acting career when I was bitten by the accounting bug.*” I wish that more of my students were bitten by the “*accounting bug.*” Theatre business and administration is not, however, something most undergraduates *initially* think about when they enter as Freshmen.....*because* it isn’t a field most even know is there.

Students are often told that unless they are *100%* committed to being in the theatre they shouldn’t pursue it. It’s not surprising then that they are sometimes afraid to “*confess*” that they have other interests as well. This is of particular concern for me in the area of developing the next generations of theatre *teachers*. When I look back on my career, I realize how lucky I was to have been mentored and embraced *because* I wanted to teach, as well as act and direct. As I reflect back on my career, one of the things that I am happiest about is that as a teacher and an administrator I have been able to “*gather*” and mentor *gifted young teachers* when I could. It’s in that accomplishment that I feel I have paid off my “*pass it along*” debt to the many teaching-artists I was lucky enough to work over the years.

If students begin to realize that they don’t really want to pursue careers as actors, or to be in the theatre at all....they often come up against powerful internal and external obstacles to “*transitioning*” into “*what comes next.*” For some, there’s no problem, but for others: They might be disappointed in themselves, or fear disappointing their parents or their peers....or *us*. And we’re often the ones who can be there to help them know “*it’s ok,*” and that, indeed, “*There is a world elsewhere.*” We’re often the ones who are there at the right time, in the right place, to help them to transition into other areas of theatre that might not have been their original focus, or even to leave the theatre and to do other things with their lives.

And, we should never underestimate how closely our students are *watching* us, and how much they will *model* their behavior on ours, no matter how different their behavior in our classes might seem. Teachers’ prejudices (about teaching, about various kinds of stage work, or work in other media, about what it means to “*make it*” after school), can

so easily transfer to young students who look up to them. I remember Jerzy Grotowski chastising a group of us with whom he was working, and telling us that it was better to wait-tables than to work in a dinner-theatre or to do a commercial, or a television show—those were “abuses of our art,” he told us. He, however, wasn’t trying to build a career in the world of commercial theatre. While certainly bringing my own vision and passion to the work I do with my students, I try to be very careful not to *close* doors to the **future** for them—doors that might lead to **THEIR** vision and passion. In some ways I suppose I’m suggesting that we must all be like Auntie Mame, and “*open doors that our students never even dreamed existed,*” rather than closing doors that might be right for them...if not for us. Hopefully our students will be more courageous and more empowered to go through the doors *they* choose, for having done the work they do with us.

And they’ll need to be. I agree with the psychologist Rollo May that **CREATIVE COURAGE** is as significant and as difficult to achieve as physical or moral courage. Today’s students are faced with perhaps the toughest set of challenges of any theatre artists in history. They will be expected to have the skills to tackle the entire range of dramatic literature, from the classics to contemporary cutting edge work. They will be expected to handle scripted text, devised productions, and all types of media including film, television, and new media forms that call for enormously varied types of skills and expertise. We ask a great deal of our students, and we ask a great deal of ourselves, serving as teachers, mentors, and models for them on their journeys. But...I believe that our field offers students opportunities to discover “*Ways of Worldmaking,*” to quote the aesthetician Nelson Goodman. This is inherent in the nature of the work we do.

As a child-actor at Children’s Theatre Association in Baltimore, I worked with its founder Isabel Berger. “Dearie” as she was called wrote that the company was dedicated “to furthering the growth of mind, body, and spirit through creative drama,” based on the belief that “*ACTING IS THE CHILD’S REHEARSAL FOR HIS ROLE AS A GROWN-UP.*” She said: “as young people ‘try on’ characters, they gain insight, deepen understanding of themselves and others, develop sensitivity, emotional balance, and resourcefulness. Imaginative, creative powers, essential in facing the problems of today’s world, are released.” More than 50 years later those words still resonate strongly for me, and seem just as true for my students at the university level as they transition into their professional worlds, as they were for young children.

It is my hope that the years our students spend working with us, are from the very first day that they walk through our doors, “*a rehearsal for their roles as grown ups.*” That the “*world-making*” that we do with our students in our programs, will empower those student-artists to become artist-citizens or audience-citizens, as they transition into the *communities* in which they will live.

We have a great story to tell our students: *THE STORY OF THEATRE*. How can we better help our students to hear that story and to understand the meaning and significance of that story in terms of their *own* lives, both now and for their professional futures?

But.... as we tell that story....we can't assume that our students will know or value the artistic and cultural history we do. I can never forget the student who, when she first saw clips from the movie "*Some Like It Hot*," thought that Marilyn Monroe was imitating, or in her words: "ripping off," Madonna! I tried very hard to keep a straight face, and to use it as a teaching-moment. And yes.....I know that my undergraduate sophomores, taking their year's sequence of theatre history and literature classes with me will be maturing into a very different world from the one in which I grew up. And yet.....watching their eyes get wide when they "*get*" the power of a Greek Tragedy, the thrilling life in even a few lines of Shakespeare, the intricate relationship between architecture and performance, the *shape* of a *concept* relating *theory* to *practice*, the texture and power of a sound-score, or even the sheer beauty of a "well-called" show.....when they realize that the tools of *script analysis* might actually help them not just with a specific role *now*, but also as they transition out into the field to get a job in the *future*....when they "*get it*," they move beyond their "*everyday language*" which for most of them has become "texting language," and find the language of *ART* which can bring them into the flow of civilization from Homer to Homer Simpson, and hopefully, well beyond.

That flow brings *us* briefly into the lives of ours students in the context of their education and training, a TRANSITIONAL period during which our students spend only several years with us, beginning to find their own places in their art and in their adult lives. How can we best nurture and prepare them during this period that seems to fly past? How can we facilitate their *transformations* into the unique adults they are becoming? How do we make the concept of "*diversity*" the reality of each and every student's sense of "*place*" in his or her *community*?

During the years I lived in NY and taught at NYU, I walked down East 7th Street every day to work. The East Village was a true melting pot in those days...1960s-style diversity.....cheap housing, cheap drugs, and new age culture lived along-side immigrant communities with strong ethnic identifies. McSorley's Ale House, The Ukrainian Restaurant, Ratner's Kosher Dairy Restaurant, as well as numerous used bookstores and head-shops lined the streets. Walking to work every day I passed the shuttered building of the *Hebrew Actors' Union*. One of my favorite theatre stories comes from there:

Once upon a time....there were two young theatre majors who were graduating from Drama School...transitioning into the professional theatre....and they decided to do a production of *Hamlet*. They were determined to do the *definitive* production of Shakespeare's play and began to audition actors, looking for the ideal *Hamlet*. They saw hundreds of actors but not one was exactly what they were looking for. Late one night as they were finishing another day of unsuccessful auditions, an old man stumbled into the back of the theatre and announced in a fragile voice that he wanted to audition for Hamlet. The young producers told him that the role of Polonius was already cast, and they attempted to dismiss the old man. He, however, would not leave, and furthermore, he insisted that he was there to audition for the *role* of Hamlet. He

shuffled down the aisle of the theatre and tottered up the steps onto the stage. He stepped into a spotlight and began “*To be or not to be...*” and an amazing thing occurred. Suddenly the two young producers saw their ideal Hamlet. The actor’s voice rang out through the theatre and in front of their eyes was the young and tormented prince of Denmark. Finally, having performed all of Hamlet’s soliloquies, the actor stopped, stepped out of the spotlight, tottered the steps and off the stage. The two young producers were astounded. How could such a thing happen? They ran up to the old actor and said: “That was incredible...please, tell us...how did you do that?” The old actor looked at the two youngsters, shrugged his shoulders, and said: “That’s *ACTING.*”

In whatever area of theatre in which we work on-stage or back-stage, or in which we teach, there are the components of logic, reason, hard work, discipline, and skill, that can help our students to *transition* from the academy into their professional worlds. There is also that component in our work of creative “*mystery,*” the *magic of transformation* that’s at the heart of our art form, and how we teach it. “That’s *THEATRE.*”

And so.....as we breakdown today into the roundtables for the various specialty areas, I hope that we will engage in a vigorous, honest discussion of what *is* working, as well as what *isn’t* working, and what you might like to try in the future, as we move forward in our ongoing efforts to establish and maintain standards of excellence, keeping our programs vibrant and essential to our students, exploring how we can forge stronger and stronger connections to the many fields in which the graduates of our programs might one day work, and to the communities in which they might one day live.

Thank you.