Issues With Young Actors

**Issue: Actors can’t be heard, are unclear in their speech, or they are speaking too fast!**
The lack of ability to be heard is due to tension. They are scared. They are not using their natural voices or language—speaking scripted lines instead.

**Try**
- Playing with characters they know from TV or stories.
- Have them improv scenes, and then they can begin to memorize lines.
- Encourage them to fill the space with sound.
- Have them use their “playground” voices in an improvised scene about a situation on the playground.
- Encourage “belly breathing”—that is breathing deeply where the abdomen is “pushed out” while inhaling, and “sucked in” while exhaling. Practice this lying down. Belly breathing allows for the diaphragm to drop and the lungs to expand to a greater capacity.
- Play with tongue twisters. This not only helps with articulation, but in order to speak the tongue twister clearly, one must slow down. Choose a variety of phrases that will "work the whole mouth”—lips, tongue, teeth, broad sounds, closed sounds.

**Issue: Actors don’t know where to go or just stand there.**
This situation can be due to the actors either not given enough direction (“Just go up stage for now”) or being "overdirected" (“Stand here, put your hand on your hip, and turn your head this way”).

**Try**
- Coaching the actors—working collaboratively with what they should do when they have no lines. Ask them what they feel their character should be doing (stage business). With younger actors, you may need to be on the verge of "overdirecting", but do it by offering some choices—“Stand here and do something with your hands. Either put them in your pocket, or on your hip, whatever feels right for your character.”
- When they are reciting their lines, discuss how the character is feeling at that moment. Remind them that we use our whole bodies to show emotions.

**Issue: Actors keep forgetting their lines!**
Scripted speech is not the spontaneous speech we use everyday. Ask yourself—if they are able to get the “gist” of the line, is that okay? Or do certain lines need to be spoken as written. Remember, memorization is not an easy thing for young students.

**Try**
- A rehearsal completely in whispers.
- Look for ways to memorize using patterns and rhythms.
- A “speed reading/rehearsal” where the actors say their lines as quickly and clearly as possible. If there are mistakes in the words spoken, continue on. Don’t stop! Then debrief and discuss if there were any problems or if the play “made sense”.

**Issue: Actors are just saying their lines—they don’t seem to be working together.**
Again, the students are in an unnatural situation. They are perhaps being asked to become a character they may not identify with and therefore have difficulty relating to the other characters.

**Try**
- Creating character profiles (age, traits, wishes/goals, fears) to help them become more in tune with their character. Have them introduce their character to the rest of the cast so that there is a familiarity with all the characters.
- Encourage actors to react to what the other actors are saying. Begin with improv and then move into scripted lines. Explore how the lines offer the reaction of the character.

**Issue: Actors won’t stay facing the audience when they speak their lines.**
Once again, we are asking actors to behave in a manner that is not typical. When we have conversations, we tend to close other people out and concentrate on the people involved in the conversation.

**Try**
- LOTS of improv! Have actors continue to be in front of an “audience” (their classmates/castmates) to increase their awareness.
- Rehearsing scenes/running lines in a “readers’ theatre” mode where the actors are in a line facing the audience at all times. When they don’t have a line to speak, they “turn their faces off” by tucking their chins to their chests and looking down.