

Editorial: On Reimagining

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Departures

It's more than a year ago now, but I'll never forget my journey to Fayetteville, Arkansas. If at all, Fayetteville is known to be a lonely liberal corner in an otherwise conservative locale in Northwest Arkansas. Liberal due in part to hosting the University of Arkansas. But it is also home to the international headquarters of Walmart. And as can happen in the center of the United States, it is flat, it is sprawling, and often there is nothing but road ahead of you as you travel about. And peppered at every intersection, roughly one mile apart, there stands another Walmart. They have Walmart testing centers where they're figuring out what will be most eye-catching to customers; where should products be placed; what should displays look like. And rest assured, you need a multitude of shopping centers to achieve these goals for the largest retailer in the world (National Retail Foundation, 2023).

That my extended family lives in an area where Walmart is a way of life, I know well what a destination Walmart can be. For many, it serves as the retail hub of a community. Your one-stop-shop for

anything and everything. Amazon.com brought into tactile reality. In Fayetteville, the suburban sprawl can give the impression that there isn't a large enough population to fill all of these Walmarts, but the local population has doubled in the past three decades (US Census, n.d.). So here they are, Walmarts as far as the eye can see.

Curious thing about traveling to Fayetteville is that most people have never heard of it. So when you're looking to book air travel, you run the risk of being routed improperly and that is just what happened to me. My flight to Fayetteville was out of Newark airport and I had a connecting flight in Charlotte, North Carolina. I only had about an hour of transition time, so I was worried I might not make the connecting flight. So you can imagine my relief when I arrived at the gate and boarded the tiny little plane that had only single seats on one side of the aisle and pairs on the other. Puddle jumpers, we used to call them. For a few days prior to my departure, I'd been wondering how it was that this flight was only 45 minutes—but I figured with crossing to another time zone or something, it had to be fine. Obviously a flight from Charlotte to the Mississippi River couldn't possibly be only 45 minutes. *Obviously.*

So I get on the plane and the plane takes off and within about 10 minutes, I was aware that our cruising altitude was surprisingly low. And having flown in a puddle jumper or two in my day, I knew that this meant we weren't traveling very far. And with full certainty, the hard truth came over me like a revelation—we were going to Fayetteville, North Carolina and not Fayetteville, Arkansas.

Most people who know me are aware that I am often unflappable. Calm under pressure is ever my *modus operandi*. So I got my wits together, and went into 'fix it' mode. OK. I need to get to the Mississippi River. The plane lands and I immediately start looking for solutions. OK, what if I rent a car and drive? How far is it to the Mississippi River? Google maps...and...900 miles. OK. I'm not driving. I think I'm going to have to fly. How am I going to fly from Fayetteville to Fayetteville? Expedia...oh...WOW...So I discover that I can get *to* Fayetteville but not *from* Fayetteville. I need to get back to *civilization* because Fayetteville, North Carolina is a-ways-away from anything other than a regional airport—and I need to go national. I don't think there was even a jetway here at Fayetteville. I think we climbed down the rolling stairs to get off the plane, then walked to the terminal—which was just one long room. Expedia tells me I can travel, but in order to get where I

need to be, I have to get myself to Raleigh—roughly 90 miles away. And there’s only one flight to Fayetteville, ARKANSAS (we must be deliberate about these things), so I purchase a ticket that departs in two and half hours. Tick tock. So how do I get to Raleigh?

I *can* get to Raleigh. The replacement ticket is purchased so I *must* get to Raleigh. Back to driving. I will rent a car! Fifteen minutes later, after waiting for someone to emerge at the car rental desk, I learn that in order to rent a car in Fayetteville, North Carolina, you have to book the rental at least 48 hours in advance so someone from somewhere can deliver a car to the airport. A fascinating discovery. Fifteen minutes down and new knowledge and no progress. I can get to Raleigh. I ask one last question to the car rental associate, “How can I get to Raleigh?” “Oh,” they respond, “just go out that door and hail a taxi.” A taxi? Why not? I go outside to the taxi stand and inquire, “So, how much to Raleigh?” “\$200,” the driver responded. And I think, no. I must get to Raleigh, but **not** for \$200.

I check on Uber: \$150. Better. I check on Lyft: \$90. I think, they are not paying these drivers anything—but, OK. \$90. I will pay \$90. I will get to Raleigh and I will get on that plane!

And the Lyft driver—she could not have been a nicer woman. She told me all about her kids. It was the beginning of November so she was just getting ready to have the kids visit for the Thanksgiving holiday. She was giddy telling me about the kids coming home. She was from New Jersey and the kids are still back in New Jersey. She moved to North Carolina because she had gotten remarried. The new husband has a job and he only works a couple of days, but he wanted to live in Fayetteville—so the wife had to come along for the ride. Though she’d only been there for a little more than a year, it had become home to her. And she was driving a Lexus. Here in Fayetteville, North Carolina—a Lexus—and she was a new Lyft driver. Hey, North Carolina, *what is going on?* But she said she loves that she’s getting to know her neighbors. And she said she misses the kids, but they’ll be coming home to visit for the holiday. And the drive couldn’t have been more pleasant.

Looking back on it now, you know—I think, God, when I looked at the ticket confirmation, I was figuring out what time I was gonna fly out—I was focusing on the short connection time and the shorter second leg. When I was researching the travel options a few months prior, I noticed that there was this problem of two cities with the same

name in two different states. And I thought, this must be confusing. And when I sent the flight information to the administrator who is responsible for booking my flight, I was very intentional about getting the correct airport code in order to avoid this kind of mix-up. But I gave them the information. I had done my research so I had done my part. I would get to Arkansas and I trusted them. So I didn't actually look at the details when they booked the ticket. When you know better, you do better. Now, I know better. But I think about that 90-minute ride and I think, you know, it wasn't the trip I planned but it was extraordinary to have that time with someone. I don't even know her name but I gave her a \$90 tip—it was all the cash I had. But I was so incredibly grateful for that time. If I were a different person, I could've been very agitated—very upset—very angry—very reactive. But I thought, I'll get there. And she did—she got me there. In a Lexus. I got to the Raleigh airport in no time and I got to Fayetteville, Arkansas. I saw the Walmart. And the next one. And the one after that.



Figure 1: Departing Raleigh-Durham airport just after sunset; photo by this author

Arrivals

I write this in a moment where I'd thought my destination had been clear for a very long time. But something has shifted in the last year. And with that in mind, imagine my surprise sitting in a movie theatre about a month ago, watching the adaptation of *Wicked*, and given a connection that I can't go into at this time that I have with my family and *The Wizard of Oz* and otherwise (the genesis of which I wrote a little about in an editorial in 2020, Jones, pp. ii-iii), I was an emotional mess in the theater. And though I read the *Wicked* novel twice and had seen the stage show seven times, I was ill-prepared for Dr. Dillamond coming into the lecture hall and pronouncing, "My dear students, this is my last day here at Shiz. You see, Animals—are no longer permitted to teach" (Holzman & Fox, 2024, p. 72). I wanted to jump out of my chair and scream, for I too had recently been told that I was no longer permitted to teach.

What does it mean to be silenced? On one hand, it's just a policy—that Animals can't teach anymore. And on the other hand, it is an intentional silencing of diverse thought. And while I'm not being silenced because of disagreement with what I have to say, I am being silenced at NYU.

Over the past decade and a half, I have taught almost every class the Program in Educational Theatre offers. And in all these years, I had one overriding objective—that all of the work that we did had to be transferable to wherever the students were going to be working professionally—every handout—every activity—every everything. As I was coming to university teaching after a number of years as a public school teacher, I knew how valuable teachers' time was and the universal distaste for professional development workshops with concepts that were not applicable to our classrooms. And so I held myself to a standard that every instructional moment should be worthwhile to the students and their current or future classrooms. And in teaching such a wide variety of classes over the years, I had to push myself—whether I was teaching a course on Shakespeare, world drama, creative drama—whatever the subject matter. When I was teaching an acting class, for example, our orientation was not for people who were looking to develop their own skills as an actor, but instead, I wanted to give them insight into how I developed an acting curriculum—how was it planned, how was it delivered, how did I modify

the curriculum based on the students in the class, how did I assess their learning and growth, etc.

When I was assigned to teach a class on Assessment in the Drama Classroom, I was immediately frustrated that there wasn't a book that explicitly addressed assessment in the drama classroom—what was that absence about? Random chapters on assessment appeared here and there, often written by people who were not classroom teachers—who did not seem to understand what a public school drama teacher needs to know and be able to do in order to be successful in the classroom. These chapters often lacked guidance for how drama teachers could talk about pedagogy in such a way that would be meaningful to their administrators and to their student population. It took 10 years, but I wrote that book because our students needed it (Jones, 2024). And over the last year since the book came out, hearing from professors that they're using the book in classes with pre-service teachers—or hearing from current K-12 teachers that they're reading the book and finding it valuable—receiving invitations to talk to more teachers and to have more conversations about classroom teaching has been invigorating. And yet, I am no longer permitted to teach.

Administrative policy can be fickle. One day, administrators can teach. One day they can't. Nevermind your subject matter expertise. Nevermind your years of service to a program. An administrative policy is handed down from on high that employees with administrative appointments are no longer permitted to teach.

Hard to write that. But it's been much harder living it for the last year knowing this day would come. But in this moment of transition—professional transition—political transition—I am reminded of my graduate course the day after the 2024 US presidential election where I told my students, "I'm not giving up and neither should you." So that's what's on my mind. As 2024 draws to a close, I am mindful that I had a different expectation for where this year would end up. I had a different expectation for where my time at NYU would end up. I had a different expectation for where my flight to Fayetteville would end up. But sometimes, you end up somewhere you didn't expect. You encounter a detour. A re-calculation. And for me, at the end of 2024, destination=unknown. Dr. Dillamond's departing words in *Wicked* are instructive: "Don't worry! They can take away my job, but I shall continue speaking out!" (Holzman & Fox, 2024, p. 75).

I'm not giving up and neither should you.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, our contributors document and reflect on innovative educational theatre practices. **Shavonne Coleman** and **Meriah Sage** examine the pervasive absence of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) narratives in the history of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) and advocate for restorative documentation and inclusion. **Gus Weltsek** and **Alycia Elfreich** apply a Critical Performative Pedagogical (CPP) lens to Weltsek's work with the Living Museum: The Empires Project, a five-year inquiry with a local STEM high school in the Midwest. **Amy Petersen Jensen** explores the potential benefits and complications of utilizing AI in the development of theatre/drama curriculum, emphasizing the critical need for innovative research practices to maximize AI's effectiveness in pedagogy. Six incarcerated artists—in partnership with prison arts scholars and practitioners—**George Chavez**, **Andrew Draper**, **Matthew LaBonte**, **Angel Lopez**, **Terry W. Mosley Jr.**, **Brett Phillips**, **Ashley Hamilton**, **Danielle Littman**, and **Clare Hammoor** present a new model for forging shared humanity in correctional settings: Artistic Justice (AJ). **Tahnee West**, **Peter Wright**, and **Robin Pascoe** explore complexities faced by drama educators striving to cultivate meaningful relationships across diverse cultures. Drawing on decolonization theories and principles of applied drama education, strategies that foster change, decolonization, and community engagement, **Kaitlin Orlena-Kearns Jaskolski** studies how the universal languages of theatre can be reclaimed and decolonized to create more accessible and inclusive theatre, focusing on youth and community programs in Papua New Guinea. Finally, **Donna C. Seage** examines two steps taken by one high school program to address the issue of unintentionally neglecting students and the impacts these interventions had on the program, the culture, and the students.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 12, Issue 1) looks to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current

research and practice. We invite members of the Educational Theatre field to submit works that will share ideas, vocabularies, strategies, and techniques, centering on varying definitions and practices. That issue will publish in mid-2025. Thereafter, look to the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#) for outreach and innovation from the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

[Jonathan P. Jones](#), PhD is a graduate from the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University, where he earned both an M.A. and a Ph.D. He conducted his doctoral field research in fall 2013 and in spring of 2014 he completed his dissertation, *Drama Integration: Training Teachers to Use Process Drama in English Language Arts, Social Studies, and World Languages*. He received an additional M.A. in English at National University and his B.A. in Liberal Arts from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Jonathan is certified to teach English 6-12 in the state of California, where he taught Theatre and

English for five years at North Hollywood High School and was honored with The Inspirational Educator Award by Universal Studios in 2006. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt. He serves on the editorial board for *Applied Theatre Research* and *Youth Theatre Journal*, and on the board of directors as well as chair of Research and Scholarship for the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) where he has been elected Chair-Elect and will serve as Chair from 2025-2027.

Jonathan has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Jonathan's directing credits include *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar*, *Elsewhere in Elsinore*, *Dorothy Rides the Rainbow*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *The Laramie Project*, *Grease*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *West Side Story*. Assistant directing includes *Woyzeck* and *The Crucible*. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, Bord Gáis Energy Theatre in Dublin, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Production credits include co-producing a staged-reading of a new musical, *The Throwbacks*, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival and serving as assistant production manager and occasionally as stage director for the New York City Gay Men's Chorus, most recently directing *Quiet No More: A Celebration of Stonewall* at Carnegie Hall for World Pride, 2019.

At NYU, his courses have included Acting: Scene Study, American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Assessment of Student Work in Drama, Development of Theatre and Drama I, Devising Educational Drama Programs and Curricula, Directing Youth Theatre, Drama across the Curriculum and Beyond, Drama in Education I, Drama in Education II, Dramatic Activities in the Secondary Drama Classroom, Methods of Conducting Creative Drama, Theory of Creative Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Elementary Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Secondary Drama, Shakespeare's Theatre, and World Drama. Early in

his placement at NYU, Jonathan served as teaching assistant for American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Seminar in Elementary Student Teaching, Theatre of Brecht and Beckett, and Theatre of Eugene O'Neill and worked as a course tutor and administrator for the study abroad program in London for three summers. He has supervised over 50 students in their student teaching placements in elementary and secondary schools in the New York City Area. Prior to becoming a teacher, Jonathan was an applicant services representative at NYU in the Graduate School of Arts and Science Enrollment Services Office for five years.

Recent publications include [Discoveries beyond the Lesson Plan: A 'How to'](#) (with David T. Montgomery) in *Education in the North*, 31 (2), ["And So We Write": Reflective Practice in Ethnotheatre and Devised Theatre Projects](#) in *LEARNing Landscapes*, 14 (2), Let Them Speak: Devised Theatre as a Culturally Responsive Methodology for Secondary Students in [Routledge Companion to Theatre and Young People](#) (edited by Selina Busby, Charlene Rajendran, and Kelly Freebody; forthcoming), [Paradigms and Possibilities: A Festschrift in Honor of Philip Taylor](#) (2019), and Education at Roundabout: It's about Turning Classrooms into Theatres and the Theatre into a Classroom (with Jennifer DiBella and Mitch Mattson) in [Education and Theatres: Beyond the Four Walls](#) (edited by Michael Finneran and Michael Anderson; 2019). His book [Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach](#) was published by Routledge in winter 2023/24.

Recent speaking engagements include Establishing Communities of Practice among Pre-Service Drama Teachers: Revisiting Learning to Teach Drama: A Case Narrative Approach, EdTA Teacher Education Conference: Building CommUNITY, Minneapolis, MN (2024), Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach, AATE National Conference: Rooting Change, Chicago, IL (2024); Communing with the Ancestors—a keynote lecture for Amplify & Ignite: A Symposium on Research and Scholarship (AATE/NYU, 2024) and featured guest spots on Fluency with Dr. Durell Cooper Podcast, speaking about [Origins, Inspirations, and Aspirations](#), and Conversations in Social Justice Podcast, York St. John University, speaking about [Activism and Race within University Teaching and Research](#) (2021); panel moderation for AATE Leaders of Color Institute (We Will Not Be Erased: Combating Censorship and

Book Bans in Theatre by, for, and about Youth, 2024 and [Cultivating Spaces for LOC in Educational and 'Professional' Theatre Settings - Opening Keynote with Daphnie Sicre and José Casas](#), 2022), invited workshops for AATE Theatre in Our Schools ([Reimagining Drama Curriculum: The Gradual Release of Responsibility Framework](#), [Locating Order in the Chaos: Revisiting Assessment in the Drama Classroom](#) and [Stage to Page: Reimagining the Teacher/Practitioner Role in Scholarship](#)) and the AATE National Conference ([Classroom Justice: Culturally Responsive, Student-Centered Assessment in the Drama Classroom](#) and [Pandemic Positives: What Do We Keep? Looking Backwards to Move Forward](#)); invited workshops for the 2024 NYC Arts in Education Roundtable ([Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Student-Centered Approach](#)), LondonDrama, 2023 Dorothy Heathcote NOW conference in Aberdeen, Scotland (Assessment in the Drama Classroom; and co-facilitation with David Montgomery: *The Bear That Wasn't*: A Process Drama Investigating Identity and *The Last Book in the Universe*: A Process Drama Unpacking the Consequences of Book-Banning); an invited lecture on Performance as Activism at the Research-Based Theater Seminar, Washington, D.C. Citizen Diplomacy Fund Rapid Response COVID-19 Research-Based Theater Project, The COVID Monologues, part of the Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund for US Alumni Rapid Response made possible by the US Department of State and Partners of the Americas (2020); a keynote lecture on Drama and Education: Why and How for the Drama and Education Conference, Shanghai, China (2020); and an invited lecture, On Creativity, for the University of Anbar, Iraq (2020).

In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, Jonathan teaches Fundamentals of Public Speaking, History of Theatre, and Introduction to Theatre at CUNY: Borough of Manhattan Community College.