

Editorial: Collective Visioning

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2023 marks the twentieth anniversary of the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre's Forum series. The forum was initially envisioned by then-Program Director Philip Taylor as a stand-alone international conference following on from the 4th International Drama in Education Research Institute (IDIERI) in Northampton, UK in July 2003. As I recall, the thinking went: *why not keep the conversation going in New York?* Whereas the scope of drama research presented at IDIERI was broad, Taylor wanted to invite colleagues from across the creative arts education and therapy disciplines to dialogue about assessment in arts education:

The Forum on Assessment in Arts Education will interrogate the pressing issues which educators across all levels experience as they determine human progress and achievement. With the current emphasis on standards in arts education it is timely to revisit the question of whether standards liberate or stifle

excellence in creative arts praxis. The Forum is not meant to deify standards or attainment levels but rather to critique them, explore how useful they can be applied in diverse settings, and equally how problematic they might be. (Taylor, 2003)

The Freirean notion of praxis as action and reflection (1970, p. 87) was instrumental at that first Forum—that participants would engage in practical drama explorations (as participants, facilitators, presenters, and/or audience) and reflective dialogue. The positive response to that first event inspired the faculty in Educational Theatre to convene another Forum two years later, and nearly every year thereafter (but for the pandemic):

2005 NYU Forum on the Teaching Artist
2006 NYU Forum on Ethnotheatre/Theatre for Social Justice
2007 NYU Forum on Drama across the Curriculum and Beyond
2008 NYU Forum on Shakespeare: Page, Stage, Engage
2009 NYU Forum on Theatre Pedagogy: Teaching the ArtForm
2010 NYU Forum on Citizenship and Applied Theatre
2011 NYU Forum on Theatre for Public Health
2012 NYU Forum on Which Way TYA? New Directions for Theatre
for Young Audiences
2013 NYU Forum on Developing New Work for the Theatre
2014 NYU Forum on The Teaching Artist: Navigation, Innovation,
and Sustainability
2015 NYU Forum on Site-Specific Performance
2016 NYU Forum on Educational Theatre
2017 NYU Forum on Ethnodrama
2018 NYU Forum on Performance as Activism
2019 NYU Forum on Theatre and Health
2022 NYU Educational Theatre Forum: Radical Imagining

That first Forum and the events surrounding it proved transformational in my journey from graduate student initially exploring the field to a professional arts educator sharing my experiences and discoveries with the field at large. As a research assistant back in 2003, I conducted the literature review of existing arts education journals—most of which were found to be limited in scope to one particular arts discipline (Jones, 2003). In light of that, this journal

(*ArtsPraxis*) was initially conceived as a space to extend the cross-disciplinary dialogue that started at the Forum on Assessment in the Arts. And in many ways, this journal was meant to be a peer-reviewed repository of ‘best papers’ from the Forum events. However, as you see from the list above, the scope of the Forums quickly shifted to topics within drama education and the scope of *ArtsPraxis* adjusted accordingly—but always maintaining that central ethos of praxis as the convergence of action and reflection.

In spring 2023, the 18th iteration of the Forum series was convened by three NYU Steinhardt graduate students: Allison Brobst, Saya Jenks, and Christine V. Skorupa. They envisioned this gathering as an opportunity for educational theatre practitioners (mostly graduate students or alumni from the various New York City-based educational theatre programs at NYU Steinhardt, CUNY City College, and CUNY Graduate Center) to connect and share insights from their practice and research through workshops and presentations. Topics included teaching stage combat, interview-based theatre, teaching theatre to elementary school students in China during COVID-19, centering justice in Black theatre, developing new plays for young audiences, and care and community in student theatre in the Philippines. They christened this outing, ‘Collective Visioning’—a space where we, gathered together in community, could engage in liberation as a praxis—what Freire described as, “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it” (1970, p. 79).

After so many Forums and nearly as many issues of *ArtsPraxis* (this being the 17th issue); two decades of teaching, learning, reflecting, and transforming; upon the publication of my book *Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach* (Jones, 2024); and with Collective Visioning on my mind, I wonder: Habari gani? *What’s the news?*

“Habari gani?”

"Habari gani?" is the Swahili greeting shared among celebrants of Kwanzaa, “an African American and Pan-African holiday that celebrates history, values, family, community and culture” (National Museum of African American History & Culture, 2003) which lasts from December 26—January 1. In response to this greeting, you are meant to give a Swahili response which corresponds to the principle for

reflection and celebration assigned to that day as follows:

Day one: Umoja (unity)

Day two: Kujichagulia (self-determination)

Day three: Ujima (collective work and responsibility)

Day four: Ujamaa (cooperative economics)

Day five: Nia (purpose)

Day six: Kuumba (creativity)

Day seven: Imani (faith)

Maulana Karenga established this holiday in 1966, “in the midst of the Black Freedom Movement and thus reflects its concern for cultural groundedness in thought and practice, and the unity and self-determination associated with this” (2008, p. 28). As I write this editorial in the midst of the Kwanzaa celebration and contemplate what Collective Visioning means in Educational Theatre at the end of 2023 and the start 2024, I am thinking about Umoja and Nia, and what I experience as a tension between Kujichagulia and Ujima.

“Habari gani?”: Umoja

The news is unity: “to strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation, and race” ([African American Cultural Center](#), 2023d). At the closing of the IDEIRI conference in 2003, David Booth was the guest speaker and, as I recall, he spoke about the Educational Theatre community as an international family with roots in indigenous performance and classical theatre traditions, manifest today through the contributions of drama practitioners in many nations. In many ways, the Forum series has provided an opportunity for the Educational Theatre community to reunite on a regular basis—as occurs at the various conferences throughout the field, albeit each with their own unique character. In 2023, whether at Collective Visioning here at NYU, Illumination: the American Alliance for Theatre & Education’s (AATE) National Conference in Seattle, Dorothy Heathcote: NOW at the University of Aberdeen, or InterPLAY: the AATE Symposium on Engaging Youth Audiences in Theatres, Classrooms and Communities in Northwest Arkansas, I was mindful about how lucky I am to connect with so many incredible artists and educators, students and teachers. We so often feel that we are

isolated in this work—connected to institutions who don’t understand what we do or why we do it—explaining and validating our work—the omnipresent struggle for recognition, funding, and sustenance. And yet, we have these spaces to gather, to commune, to connect—and to feel seen and understood. We ask: how are you? What’s the news? And collectively, we envision what comes next in our artistic partnerships as we go forth.

“Habari gani?”: Nia

The news is purpose: “to make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness” ([African American Cultural Center](#), 2023b). And what of the purpose of Educational Theatre? I’ve been thinking about this question a lot this year—particularly in light of invitations I received to engage in the IDEA World Congress in Beijing—starting as a member of the conference committee when it was initially planned for 2020 and in subsequent discussions since that time. My sense has been that the goal of this gathering is to both acknowledge and promote the growth of the field in China—and somehow, that has left me uneasy. *Why?*

To me, the purpose of Educational Theatre is to promote critical consciousness—what Freire describes as “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (1970, p. 35). And in Augusto Boal’s praxis, “the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution” (1985, p. 122). In a whisper: *I don’t think that’s encouraged in China*. Talk about contradictions. And so, to unpack this idea—is that *the* purpose of Educational Theatre, or is that *my* purpose of Educational Theatre? And if the latter, in the US, we’ve spent the better part of four years examining how we might decolonize curriculum, pedagogy—our own thinking. With that in mind, why would I want to go to another country to colonize their curriculum, pedagogy—thinking? And if the news is indeed Nia, and building and developing our community encompasses not only our local or national community—but the *world* community, how do we reconcile the potentially damaging impacts of intellectual and artistic colonization?

“Habari gani?”: Kujichagulia

The news is self-determination: “to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves” ([African American Cultural Center](#), 2023a). When I think about the unity that I felt at the conferences this year, it has been grounded in the partnership—that we have come together of our own volition to critically engage with one another—to share and problematize our work in service of doing better. I am reminded of that foundational invitation to the NYU Forum in 2003—that we would ‘keep the conversation going’ in New York. That is a different ask than deciding that we need to export this work to others. I don’t know enough about the genesis of the World Congress in Beijing to suggest that this is their intention—but that is how I felt and why I was uneasy about it. And I’m not alone in raising these concerns when thinking about taking Educational Theatre work to another culture. In charting the purpose of her work, theorist and practitioner Selena Busby (editorial board member of this publication) notes that she defines her practice as a “demand for social justice and equity” (2021, p. 2) but is mindful that, “Applied Theatre can also be disempowering, exploitative, manipulating and artist-serving rather than beneficial to the community if that community is not considered an equal partner from a project’s inception” (2021, p. 17). In 2017, I was invited to give a keynote presentation to educators at large in Shanghai and rather than investigate what *they* would like to hear, I went on impulse (and was so encouraged by the folks who invited me) and spoke about the wonders of drama integration. In hindsight, the presentation was fine—but it in no way centered the experience of the conference participants. And with that in mind, I wonder: what is happening in Educational Theatre in China? *Habari gani?* That is far more interesting to me than any perceived notion of what I might *bring* to China—what I might *teach* in China.

“Habari gani?”: Ujima

The news is collective work and responsibility: “to build and maintain our community together and make our brother’s and sister’s problems our problems and to solve them together” ([African American Cultural Center](#), 2023c). And with this principle in mind, I am also uneasy that promoting critical consciousness and rehearsing for the revolution are

not permitted everywhere in this world—and that problem is my problem too. We must be in this together—across borders; no separation. I'm reminded of Oprah Winfrey's response when she faced criticism for opening the Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa in 2007—she was asked why she was opening a school in South Africa when there are so many children living in poverty in the US who need access to better schools, and Winfrey responded:

"If you ask the kids [in the US] what they want or need, they will say an iPod or some sneakers. In South Africa, they don't ask for money or toys. They ask for uniforms so they can go to school" (Samuels, 2007).

What we want in the US is a wonder in and of itself. And as we enter 2024—a presidential election year—while many are confounded by the candidates and what they say and do—for me, I want to grapple with 30% of this country who see and hear all manner of discriminatory language, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, racism, insurrection, and say, "Please, sir. I want some more." That a politics of grievance is prioritized. That fascism is fine provided that the leader will deride the people I deride. That seemingly unlimited arms support will be given in furtherance of a humanitarian disaster. We have some critical consciousness to raise right here. So while I welcome news of Educational Theatre in China, my own garden needs tending.

"Habari gani?" As I've concluded before, let's get to work.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, our contributors were invited to respond to the guiding questions from 2023 Educational Theatre Forum: Collective Visioning. Forum co-chair **Saya Jenks** reflects on the development and implementation of her workshop entitled "Advocating for Your Work through Creative Play," an interactive, collaborative experience that used techniques grounded in improvisational theatre and personal storytelling to help participants practice articulating why they are uniquely qualified to do what it is they do. Inspired by a keynote speech at the 2023 AATE National Conference by Valerie Curtis-Newton, **Sofia Lindgren Galloway** explores the necessity of creating failure-friendly drama classrooms. **Anne Norland** investigates the

compatibility of dyslexia with theatre training and makes a compelling case for theatre as an effective intervention in helping students with dyslexia and related learning differences to overcome their challenges. **David L. Logghe** sheds light on the challenges of teaching theatre to students with anxiety, including specific situations educators have faced, patterns of gaps in training or knowledge, and methods with which educators have handled these situations. Finally, **Elise Connolly** presents a policy paper detailing the New York City schools chancellor's desire to change the reading curriculum, highlighting the latest state test scores as justification for a more transformative education reform: the National A+ Schools Program model.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue ([Volume 11, 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-2024. Thereafter, look to the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#) for outreach and innovation from the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre as well as [Amplify & Ignite: A Symposium on Research and Scholarship](#) (our 19th iteration of the NYU Forum series) to be presented in collaboration with the [American Alliance for Theatre and Education \(AATE\)](#) in April, 2024.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jones, J. P. (2023). Editorial: Collective visioning. *ArtsPraxis*, 10 (2), pp. i-xii.

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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 recently 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 ["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 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 ([Cultivating Spaces for LOC in Educational and 'Professional' Theatre Settings - Opening Keynote with Daphnie Sicre and José Casas](#)), 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 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). Upcoming engagements include an invited workshop on Assessment in the Drama Classroom for London Drama and at the 2024 NYC Arts-in-Education Roundtable Conference.

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.