

Editorial: On Mindfulness

[JONATHAN P. JONES](#)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Of late, mindfulness remains a ubiquitous buzzword, generally having much to do with self-awareness and self-care. It is timely given the uncertainty that pervades our cultural consciousness—whether here in the United States or around the world. With so much instability, we artists and educators find ourselves filling critical roles for our audiences and students: we reflect society; we interrogate the world as it is; and we provide a window into the possible. As such, our mindfulness must extend beyond our personal lives, tasking us with thinking through the import of our work and the impact it has on our constituencies.

In August 2019, I brought a class of graduate students to the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) conference in New York City. The theme of the event was *Activate*. The organization stated that theatre artists and educators are “uniquely poised to be a force for action and empathy building at this pivotal moment when the need for self-expression and dialogue is so palpable” (AATE, 2019). With this mission in mind, I endeavored to scaffold an experience for my graduate students that would allow them to connect with the community, explore opportunities to critically

engage with their own work and the work shared in the diverse slate of presentations, and come away with a plan of action—concrete applications informed by their time at the conference. As a support, I created a scavenger hunt for the students. They were to:

- Connect with an unlikely new acquaintance
- Connect with a leader in the field
- Find someone with whom they fervently disagreed
- Find something aspirational
- Find something inspirational
- Find something worthy of putting in print
- Something to reinforce their work or beliefs
- Something to challenge their work or beliefs

Additionally, they kept a conference journal with entries that tracked each session they attended documenting key takeaways that they could apply to their own work.

While these tasks allowed the students to attend to the conference with a focus on application, I was mindful that they would need an opportunity to process their experience as they went along. To that end, I made myself available to them throughout the conference in a scheduled place so that they could come to me as needed to reflect on their experiences, vent, get some needed encouragement, or otherwise just be there for them should they need it. In addition to these structures that I implemented, the conference planners also instituted a variety of processing opportunities for participants. Chief among those opportunities, Paul Brewster and Jennifer Katona (co-chairs) scheduled breakout discussion groups to follow the keynote presentations. These breakouts were meant to parallel Kayhan Irani and Lizzy Cooper Davis' discussion frame that they developed for Anna Deveare Smith at the American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) as part of the initial run of *Notes from The Field: Doing Time in Education* (2016). At A.R.T., Irani and Cooper Davis served as facilitation trainers for audience discussion groups that played an integral part of each performance. They developed and instituted a similar training module for the keynote discussion facilitators at AATE prior to the breakout sessions. Here too, mindfulness played a key role as the facilitation plan included discussing key takeaways, something we would like to learn more about, and something we could do tomorrow to begin the

process.

As you venture into this issue of *ArtsPraxis*, I would like you to consider employing similar strategies as you read. Let the articles in this issue serve as provocations; allow yourself the space to critically engage both with the work the authors describe as well as with your own praxis. In a moment when the necessity of our work is heightened, this is our call: activate; aspire; be inspired; challenge the writer; challenge yourself; reinforce; reinvigorate; be encouraged. If not now, when? If not here, where?

IN THIS ISSUE

Our contributions in this issue come from artists, educators, and arts therapists focusing on theatre and health.

The first collection of articles highlight reflective practice. **Lawrence Ashford** explores interactions between professional performers and young people in Australian hospitals. **Bianca C. Frazer** looks at the deconstruction of stereotypes about diabetes on stage. **James Webb** reflects on the personal impact of writing, acting, and sharing his autobiographical play, *The Contract*, detailing his struggles as a gay man in the Black Church in the United States. **Faith Busika** and **Zandile Mqwathi** discuss drama processes employed to address mental health and promote wellbeing in South Africa. Finally, **Yi-Chen Wu** unpacks her experience collaborating with a woman with cerebral palsy and the woman's performance of her autobiographical memory.

The second section features a pair of critically reflective articles with recommendations for practitioners and researchers. **Alyssa Digges** advocates for a mental health and wellness curriculum for students in actor training programs. **Teresa A. Fisher** analyzes failures in a theatre for health project, specifically looking at the facilitator's role in such a project.

The final pair of articles look to examine existing practice and repertoire. **William Pinchin** connects Jung's collective unconscious theory and Lecoq's understanding of a universal poetic sense, reevaluating the neutral mask. Finally, **Majeed Mohammed Midhin** and **Samer Abid Rasheed Farhan** interrogate the healing power of theatre through a discussion of contemporary prison theatre praxis and the representations made in Wertenbaker's *Our Country's Good*.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 7, Issue 1) will focus on articles under our general headings (drama in education, applied theatre, and theatre for young audiences) looking to engage members of the Educational Theatre field who may or may not have been present at the Forum yet want to contribute to the ongoing dialogue: where have we been and where are we going? That issue will publish in early 2020. Thereafter, look to the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU for the 2020 Forum on Humanities and the Arts, the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#), and Volume 7, Issue 2 of *ArtsPraxis* which will feature articles on Humanities and the Arts (both from the forum and wider Educational Theatre community).

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jones, J. P. (2019). Editorial: On mindfulness. *ArtsPraxis*, 6 (2), i-v.

REFERENCES

American Alliance for Theatre and Education. (2019). [AATE 2019 Conference: August 1-5, 2019](#).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan P. Jones 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 the NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Jonathan has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. He 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. In 2008, he was awarded a fellowship through the National

Endowment for the Humanities and participated in the Teaching Shakespeare Institute at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt. In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, he teaches Fundamentals of Speech and Introduction to Theatre at The Borough of Manhattan Community College.

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 since 2014, most recently directing *Quiet No More: A Celebration of Stonewall* at Carnegie Hall for World Pride, 2019.

Recent publications include *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 Matteson) in *Education and Theatres: Beyond the Four Walls* (edited by Michael Finneran and Michael Anderson; 2019).