NYU | STEINHARDT

ARTSPRAXIS

VOLUME 9 ISSUE 1 | 2022

ARTSPRAXIS

Emphasizing critical analysis of the arts in society.

ISSN: 1552-5236

ArtsPraxis Volume 9, Issue 1 looked to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice. We welcomed traditional academic research as well as narratives of practice. The call for papers was released in concert with the publication of ArtsPraxis Volume 8, Issue 2. The submission deadline for Volume 9, Issue 1 was March 1, 2022.

Submissions fell under one of the following categories:

- Drama in Education (i.e., studies in drama/theatre curriculum, special education, integrated arts, assessment and evaluation)
- Applied Theatre (i.e., studies in community-based theatre, theatre of the oppressed, the teaching artist, diversity and inclusion)
- Theatre for Young Audiences and Play Production (i.e., studies in acting, directing, dramaturgy, playwriting, dramatic literature, theatre technology, arts-based research methodologies)

Key questions the Issue was to address included:

Drama in Education

- How and why do we teach drama and theatre in schools and community settings?
- How do the roles and responsibilities of the teaching artist differ from those of the classroom teacher (primary, secondary or higher education)?
- What is the contemporary role of drama and theatre in arts education?
- How do we prepare future theatre artists and educators in the 21st century?
- What are innovative ways of devising original works and/or teaching theatre using various aesthetic forms, media, and/or technology?
- To what extent can the study of global theatre forms impact students' learning?
- To what extent should we distinguish theatre-making from drama as a learning medium?

- How can integrated-arts curricula facilitate teaching, learning and presenting the craft of theatre?
- How do we assess students' aesthetic understanding and awareness?
- What research supports the potential of drama as a learning medium?
- How do drama and theatre make connections across curricular content areas and beyond schools?
- How do drama and theatre education contribute to lifelong learning?
- What role do drama and theatre play in community agencies?

Applied Theatre

- How can drama provide a forum to explore ideas?
- What are innovative strategies for using drama to stimulate dialogue, interaction and change?
- How is theatre being used to rehabilitate people in prisons, health facilities, and elsewhere?
- How do we prepare future artists/educators for work in applied theatre?
- What ethical questions should the artist/educator consider in their work?
- In what ways are aesthetics important in applied theatre? How do we negotiate a commitment to both the process and product of applied theatre work?
- How do artist/educators assess participants' understandings in an applied theatre project?
- What are the major tensions in the field and how are these being addressed?
- To what extent has recent research on affect influenced community-based praxis?

Theatre for Young Audiences/Youth Theatre

- Theatre for young audiences is an international movement and the borders are breaking down so how do we present and respond to work from other countries?
- Who exactly are our new audiences—who are we talking to?
- Are we as brave as we think we are? How does what we think we should do relate to what we want to do as artists?
- Is the writer at the heart of future theatre creation? What has happened to dramaturgy in the brave new world of immersive, experiential, visual/physical theatre?
- Theatre for Young Audiences has always been in the forefront of theatrical innovation. So what is next?
- What have we learned about nurturing the artist of the future-- playwriting, theatre-making, performance?
- How do artists establish rigorous, intentional new works development processes that are innovative and sustainable?
- How does accountability serve the stakeholders in a new works development process?
- How do we define and measure success in theatre for young audiences?

We encouraged article submissions from interdisciplinary artists, educators, and scholars. Our goal was to motivate a dialogue among a wide variety of practitioners and researchers that will enrich the development of educational theatre in the coming years.

Call for Papers

Papers were to be no longer than 4,000 words, had to be accompanied by a 200 word abstract and 100 word biographies for the author(s), and conformed to APA style manual. For this issue, articles could include traditional academic scholarship and narratives of practice.

Reviewing Procedures
Each article was sent to two peer reviewers. They provided advice on the following:

- Whether the article should be published with no revisions/with revisions.
- The contribution the article makes to the arts community.
- Specific recommendations to the author about improving the article.
- Other publishing outlets if the article is considered unacceptable.

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to Jonathan P. Jones, New York University, Program in Educational Theatre, Pless Hall, 82 Washington Square East, Rm 223, New York, NY 10003, USA. Email: jonathan.jones@nyu.edu

Cover image from NYU's Program in Educational Theatre Looking for Shakespeare production of *The Winter's Tale* directed in 2020 by Dr. Amy Cordileone; Shadows & Puppetry Designed by Deborah Hunt.

ARTSPRAXIS

Volume 9 Issue 1 June 2022

ArtsPraxis
Volume 9 Issue 1

Editorial: Look for the Helpers

JONATHAN P. JONES
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

I had a student… a young Black girl in my honors and my AP (Advanced Placement English) class. So I had an AP class that particular year—it was like sixth or seventh period—it was late in the day. So, she walks in and she's got a black eye. So I said to her, "Excuse me. Did you… How did you get the black eye? Like, are you okay?"

"Yeah," she says. "Well, my father punched me last night."

'Punched me.'

Okay.

So I said to her, "Well did you just come to school now?"

She goes, "No, no. I was….I was here at the normal time."

*"You…you went to **all** your classes?"*

She said, "Yeah."

"And none of the other teachers asked you about the black eye?"

She said, "No."

*I went crazy. I went **ballistic**. Okay? Not that I'm such a great*

guy. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is, you have a girl…she was, I guess, 17—maybe 18 at the time. She was a senior. She comes in with a black eye and you don't even ask her how she got it? She could have said, 'I ran into a door'—you know, whatever. 'I tripped down the stairs'—but what she said about her father, okay, because she wanted somebody to know.

Now, I think she may have even been 18 because a lot of times I had students who would be 18 and they said, "Well, you can't call child protective services or the police because I'm an adult and I don't want you to do that." And I would say—but I was always ***crazed*** *when they would say that to me—but I said, "Look, you are an adult. As long as you say to me you're safe"—and I said, "Well, you think he'll hurt you any more than what he just did?"*

"No. I don't think so. He gets drunk and blib-blib-blib and that's when he hit me."

Okay. So I said, "Okay, look. You're gonna have to go to the nurse's office, but you know what?" And I've learned too. I said, "Okay. Wait 'til after class. I'm going to take you down there myself." I escorted her there, but you know why? Because some kids would say, 'Well, I'm not… I don't want to do this' and they'll run off. They won't go to them.

And I met the father, by the way, afterwards. He came to an open school night, or…some reason. I met him and he gave me the fisheye, you know? Because he knew… he probably… he must have gotten some trouble. But the girl was grateful.

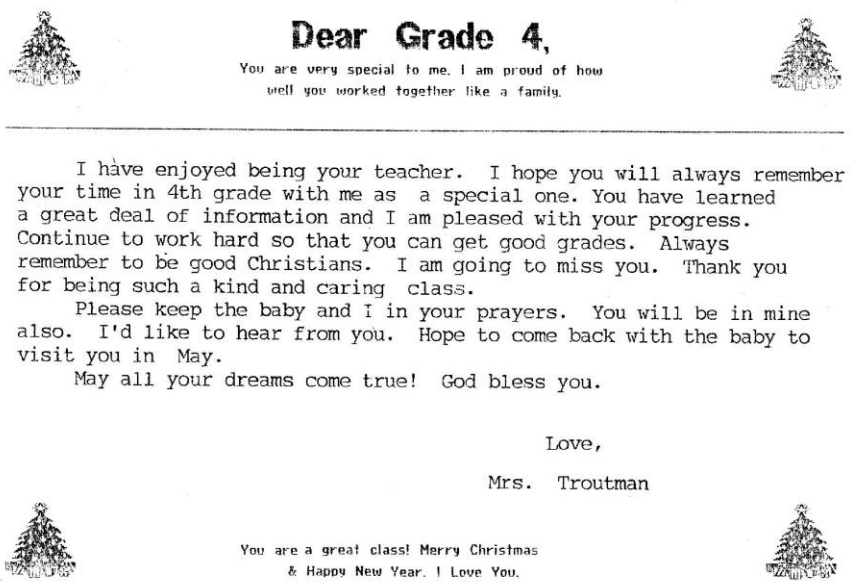
And she also had a younger sister who I was worried about. You know, when I knew they had siblings in the building, I wanted to make sure—'Well, okay… Yeah, well I'll keep an eye out for them,' you know? So it was… it's one of those things where… but, but a lot of teachers don't want to get involved, you see? They didn't question it. (Cheung, 2022)

February 17 will remain a tricky day for me. It was my mother's birthday—a day which had been celebratory for most of my life and has turned bittersweet since her passing. But it was on that day that I saw a notice that Bill Schiavo had appeared as a guest on a podcast called *Art and Hustle Gallery of Conversations*. Captain Schiavo, as he is known in my family, was English teacher and mentor to my two eldest sisters during their respective senior year in high school. I changed schools

before I had the pleasure of sitting in Captain Schiavo's class, but I knew for many years the important role he played in their adolescent lives. How he, for them, was the first teacher to really shape their world view.

I had a similar teacher, but mine came much earlier than high school. In the fall of 1989, Janet Brown was 21 years old. Fresh out of college, this was her first year of teaching. Fifth grade. I went to a small Catholic elementary school. When I enrolled in 1984, there were two classes per grade; each class with about 30 students. Over the years, the school enrollment declined—most prominently in my particular class which had been whittled down to about 20 students in the whole grade by the time Miss Brown came along. And we were just off a tough year. Our fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Troutman, had a difficult pregnancy and was on bedrest after the Christmas holiday. And we'd loved her and were so excited about the baby.

Image 1: December 1988 - Mrs. Troutman's last day



Dear Grade 4,

You are very special to me. I am proud of how well you worked together like a family.

I have enjoyed being your teacher. I hope you will always remember your time in 4th grade with me as a special one. You have learned a great deal of information and I am pleased with your progress. Continue to work hard so that you can get good grades. Always remember to be good Christians. I am going to miss you. Thank you for being such a kind and caring class.

Please keep the baby and I in your prayers. You will be in mine also. I'd like to hear from you. Hope to come back with the baby to visit you in May.

May all your dreams come true! God bless you.

Love,

Mrs. Troutman

You are a great class! Merry Christmas & Happy New Year. I Love You.

Image 2: Mrs. Troutman's farewell letter to the class.

But then came her replacement, Mrs. X, stepping right from the pages of a Roald Dahl novel. Whereas Mrs. Troutman was warm and welcoming, Mrs. X was cold and abrasive. We were at war from the start. And within four months of her arrival, though I was one of the highest achieving students in the class, I was exiled to sit in the back of a third grade classroom to school myself for the remainder of the year.

But then came Miss Brown. She was every bit a breath of fresh air that both my classmates and I desperately needed. She was young and hip. She talked to us about our interests. At our Halloween party, she let us bring in tapes to class so we could listen to our music. Her copy of the Ghostbusters Soundtrack got stuck in the tape player and I *insisted* I would fix it—as I had done at home so many times before. Unfortunately, Miss Brown's tape did not survive my intervention.

Image 3: Miss Brown welcomed us to her classroom on the first day of the year with our names written on apples.

I remember well when we returned from the Thanksgiving holiday weekend and Miss Brown told us that her boyfriend (now husband) had taken her to see Disney's *The Little Mermaid.* I knew the fairy tale from Shelley Duvall's television series *Faerie Tale Theatre*,

so I asked, “Did she turn into sea foam at the end?” When I explained further that in ‘the real story’ the mermaid didn’t get her prince, Miss Brown burst into tears. She was real. Authentic. Radically welcoming. And so we shared our lives.

Image 4: 5th Grade class picture with Miss Brown; this author pictured second row, third from left

1989-1990. That year with Miss Brown was the very same school year in which the inciting incident detailed in this editorial took place. Whereas my sister had Captain Schiavo, I had Miss Brown. And when I heard Captain Schiavo speak in that podcast recording—as he recounted this harrowing tale about the day one of his students turned up with a black eye, I was taken back to that very dark year.

Yes, my father was drunk that day. He was drunk many days. But it’s in what the Captain described as the *blib-blib-blib* that I knew there was much more to tell. The black eye was more akin to a burst blood vessel than a black-and-blue shiner, but it was a black eye just the same. And on a day not unlike that 1990-black-eye day, I’d gotten a black eye of my own. Yes, he was drunk then too. And yes, I too took my black eye to school. And yes, my teacher—my captain, Miss Brown—she too went ballistic. I would have many conversations with her about my life

with an alcoholic and abusive father—many hushed conversations. But those conversations only commenced after that January black-eye-day that Captain Schiavo recalled. It marked a turning point in my family as my sister was in fact 17 years old at that time. And while I don't think teachers were trained then as mandatory reporters like they are now,[1] the school nurse did report the incident to child protective services.

January 12, 1990 – 139

…pulled in driveway and man from Social Services was on porch. Asked him in. Went to kitchen. He asked John what happened. John told him Danette was saying things disrespectful to mother and he said to stop and not say another word. And he said she mumbled under her breath and he slapped her. He said he just lost his patience because he told her to stop it and she mumbled something.

Man asked if he saw her eye. He said, 'Yes, that night'—but he didn't think he hit her in her eye. 'That was an accident.'

He (the man) said he understood that, but that the law says you can hit your children but you can't leave a bruise or an injury on them. 'It's neglect and abuse.'

Man asked if we would leave him and Danette alone. We went into living room. Man asked if we'd be willing to go for counseling. I said yes. No answer from John.

In living room, John said he would not go for counseling.

The man finished with Danette and asked me to return. He told me this charge was just against the father, because Danette said I did stop him so nothing was against me—but if it happened again, I would then also be brought up on charges of neglect because I didn't protect the children.

He also said Danette said father hasn't been home but maybe once a week since September and you don't know where he's living—'Is this right?' I said yes. He said, 'Do you want to try to save the marriage or do you want us to give you help with getting your husband out?' I said no. We had talked and I wanted to give it another try. He said okay, 'But if you change your mind, let us help

[1] New York State's child protective system has been in place since 1973 and the NYS education law identified teachers as mandatory reporters of suspected child abuse at that time, though teachers have only been required to present evidence of required training in the identification and reporting of child abuse in order to obtain teacher certification since January 1, 1989 (Glick, 1977; Coughlin and Gerhart, LLP, n.d.).

you because you don't have to live like this and don't be afraid or think you don't have a way out because there's 5 kids—because there's agencies to help you.'

He then said, 'Danette says father has a drinking problem—that there's not too many days he comes home that he hasn't had a few already or has a bottle hidden in his pocket and sneaks to drink it when you're not there. Is this true?' I said yes. He said, 'Well, this is a problem then too because he shouldn't be hitting the children if he's been drinking because he's not in full control of his actions and may seriously hurt one of them without realizing it.'

He then called John in and said that yes, action would be taken on this matter because Danette had an injury and what this means is that this case would remain on file until Jason[2] *turned 28. So if there were any further occurrences this would be on record. He said a field worker would be in contact with us in the next week to come see us.*

Labelled '139', this entry was from the third of many journals that my mother began writing the previous summer, and this was the 139th day. She began counting those days with the first entry—the first night that my father didn't come home from work as he was supposed to. Years later, we would know that he met a woman in a bar on Broadway in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn on August 20, 1989 and started having an affair with her that would last for approximately six years. He was in that bar seven days before my mother started writing those journals. We were out of town visiting my mother's family and he'd stayed back home to work. We blew the head gasket in the family car on August 19th so we extended our stay—and he took advantage of our absence.

August 27, 1989 – day 1

Came home from Dad's. John called at 7AM asking where was I. I told him we decided to stay Saturday night after going out to eat. He called twice during the week telling me to stay until Sunday—like he had plans for Saturday and didn't want us home.

838 Monroe Street was the location of the affair. It is all seared into my

[2] My youngest brother.

memory. 139 days—in retrospect, things were just getting started. But then—in that tumultuous year—we were *drowning*—and who else but the helpers could throw us a lifeline?

When Danette told Captain Schiavo that her father punched her, he smartly picked up on the significance of that unbridled truth. There could be no more covering up—no more pretend. The dam was breached and the truth would flow forth. From that January day in 1990, it would be six years until it was clear that 'giving it another try' was no longer an option. Years of visits with case officers from child protective services, AA meetings, Al-Anon meetings, Alateen meetings, frantic calls to police, handcuffs, nights in the drunk tank, loss of numerous jobs, numerous drunken vehicle accidents, foreclosure—abandonment. But light only began to creep into that house of secret hidden trauma when Captain Schiavo insisted he would walk Danette to the nurse's office.

Perhaps this was only the act one finale—preceded a few years earlier by one of my aunts noticing the grapefruit-sized bruises on the thighs of my siblings and remarking to my mother, "Oh, you better cover those up. If police see that, they'll take the kids away." It had all been noticed—but never acted upon until that winter day. And those bruises were the physical evidence of the trauma. But what of the emotional and behavioral evidence? Reading through those journals—there is one anecdote after another detailing all the ways my brother and I were habitually acting out at school. My sister Nicole breaking down in tears in play rehearsals. My sister Tanya running out of the house time and again. All of us running out to a neighbor at one time or another. We were just screaming into the wind, desperate for anyone to do *something*.

In the two years since the murder of George Floyd—two years of this racial reckoning, I've invested a great deal of time in my teacher education courses to culturally responsive pedagogy, reading Christopher Emdin's *For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood (…and the rest of y'all too)* and Milner, Cunningham, Delale-O'Connor, and Kestenberg's *"The Kids Are out of Control": Why We Must Reimagine "Classroom Management" for Equity*, among others. While discussing these texts with students, I have recounted again and again the consistency with which I enter drama classrooms throughout New York City and immediately identify the 'problem child.' Often the classroom teacher prepares me for so-and-so or such-and-such—the little one who

is always a challenge. And without fail, that is a Black child. Sometimes, a student teacher lets me know that the classroom teacher has advised them to disregard that child's misbehavior—that they are 'just seeking attention.' And they are—they are literally calling out to be seen. And what is behind that misbehavior? If we relegate every outburst to a child calling out for unwarranted attention, what might we be missing? Black Lives Matter activist and Missouri Congresswoman Cory Bush tells us, "A closed mouth will not get fed" (Pod Save America, 2022) and here you are, desperate to silence that child and keep them malnourished. And given the regularity with which Black children are so relegated, what traumas might this response from teachers be masking?

Beyond the trauma that these behaviors might indicate, this orientation of teachers might be trauma *inducing* in and of itself. Maya Angelou used to ask, "Do your eyes light up when a child walks into the room?" She asked because each time they don't light up, you may well be scarring that child—providing them with yet another obstacle that they must overcome every day that follows—a feeling that they are unwanted, undeserving, unloved. And I know that feeling well. And that little Black child in those classrooms—I recognize them in an instant, because that little Black child **is me**. And Miss Brown—just a child herself in that first year that she was teaching—she took the time to notice me, just as Captain Schiavo took the time to notice my sister. And we really needed to be noticed then—just as so many desperate young people need.

Why this story? Why now? Mister Rogers famously implored young people to look for the helpers. He said,

> When I was a little boy and something bad happened in the news, my mother would tell me to look for the helpers. 'You'll always find people helping,' she'd say. And I've found that that's true. In fact it's one of the best things about our wonderful world. (Rogers, 2001)

A platitude not without critics. Writing for *The Atlantic* following the mass shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburg, PA in October of 2018, Ian Bogost described this statement as, "a consolation meme for tragedy" when this advice is transposed from Rogers' preschool audience to adults. Bogost concludes,

> As an adult, it feels good to remember how Mr. Rogers made you feel good as a child. But celebrating that feeling *as* adults takes away the wrong lesson. A selfish one. We were entrusted with these insights to make children's lives better, not to comfort ourselves for having failed to fashion the adult world in which they must live. (2018)

But we—drama educators and practitioners—we either *are* the helpers or are charged with *identifying* the helpers and providing our students and participants with access to those resources.

To you, I implore—just as I do to my graduate and undergraduate students—I implore you to *be* the helpers. And it's not too much to ask. In practice, I know well that being the helper is what brought you to this field. And yet, when I come to call at your classroom door, will I be forewarned of the problem child? Will I again lay eyes upon my younger self reflected in the eyes of your Black child who is calling out to be heard? Pioneering educational leader Dr. Maxine Mimm's advises, "A Black child cannot learn unless the teacher loves her or him" (Evergreen Sankofa Media, 2020). There was much to be excavated beneath my need to be seen. My very safety was shielded therein—and were it not for the *love*—the *dignity*—the *respect* of Captain Schiavo and Miss Brown, how much worse might things have gotten had my father not been put on notice?

Be the helpers. We need you.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, most of our contributors have reflected on their educational theatre practices with a range of communities. **Amanda Dawson** interrogates her experience as a white cis-gendered woman developing the course Contemporary BIPOC Plays and Playwrights at a majority-white university in a majority-white city. **Evi Stamatiou**, **Eric Kildow**, **Freya Spearing, Georgia Nodding**, and **John-Paul Price** analyze the rationale, application, and evaluation of an educational verbatim theater case study that involved British theater students and American nursing students, from the University of Chichester and Kent State University respectively. **Lucy Kania** sheds light on larger-bodied adolescent girls' experiences of fatphobia in educational theatre. Finally, **Jason P. Lotz**

proposes ways in which teachers might employ reaction videos as intervention, in service of decentering the theater audience and the theater classroom.

LOOKING AHEAD

Having recently concluded another thought-provoking dialogue at the 2022 NYU Forum on Radical Imagining: Exploring Equity in Educational Theatre, our next issue (Volume 9, Issue 2) will focus on articles under that same heading. We invite you to join us in an exploration of the concepts of equity, diversity, inclusion, access, and justice (EDIAJ), investigating how these notions intersect, inform, and collide with theatre in community and educational spaces. 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 late 2022. Thereafter, look to the Verbatim Performance Lab for outreach and innovation from the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jones, J. P. (2022). Editorial: Look for the helpers. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (1), pp. i-xiv.

REFERENCES

Bogost, I. (2018, October 29). The Fetishization of Mr. Rogers's 'Look for the Helpers.' *The Atlantic*.

Cheung, L. (2022, February 17). Mr. Schiavo AKA Professor Captain Willy. *Art and Hustle Gallery of Conversations*. Season 1, episode 8.

Coughlin and Gerhart, LLP. (n.d.). NY extension to mandatory reporting in schools. Retrieved 2022, June 2.

Evergreen Sankofa Media. (2020, September 15). Virtual lecture series: Dr. Maxine Mimms. The Evergreen State College-Tacoma Virtual Lecture Series, Session V. Retrieved 2022, June 6.

Glick, B. (1977). The New York State Child Protective Services Act: Its impact on school systems and children's education. Retrieved

2022, June 2.
Pod Save America. (2022, May 9). Running the ultra MAGAthon (Live from St. Louis!). Episode #633. Retrieved 2022, June 6.
Rogers, F. (2001). Look for the helpers. *MisterRogers.org.*

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* as well as on the board of directors for the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE).

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. He co-produced a staged-reading of a new musical, *The Throwbacks*, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival in 2013.

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.

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 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).

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 Theatre in Our Schools (Stage to Page: Reimagining the

Teacher/Practitioner Role in Scholarship) and the AATE National Conference (Pandemic Positives: What Do We Keep? Looking Backwards to Move Forward); 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.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 9 Issue 1

White Professor/(Mostly) White Students: Teaching Contemporary BIPOC Plays

AMANDA DAWSON

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

Teaching about race in a majority-white city at a majority-white university as a white cis-gendered woman is challenging. In this case study, I share an introduction to how and why I developed a course—Contemporary BIPOC Plays and Playwrights—at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, an overview of what the course covered, the experience (successes and failures) of teaching it, what I have learned from that experience, and some next steps. The goal is for other white teachers who teach mostly white students to learn from my mistakes and to pick up the mantle of teaching BIPOC plays/playwrights and anti-racism practices in their courses. As a dramaturg by trade, I approach the development and teaching of classes with a dramaturgical sensibility. As a white teacher, entering a majority white space tasked with teaching a new (and only) course in the department focused on race, here is what I would do differently and better in the future and hope others can learn from it. As a starting point: do more research (and more training), be even more

intentional with the course design and play selection, invite more non-white voices into the room, and create a community agreement with the students in the course at the start of the semester.

Teaching about race in a majority-white city at a majority-white university as a white cis-gendered woman is challenging. In spring 2021, at Utah State University in Logan, Utah, I developed and taught a course entitled Contemporary BIPOC Plays and Playwrights.[1] In this article, I share an introduction to who I am (more explicitly: who I am as a white cis-gendered woman), why and how I developed the course (including an overview of the course design), and what I have learned from the experience of teaching it (both the successes and failures). Presented in this way, it appears to have been a linear process, but I can assure you, it was not. From the short timeline to build the course, to tough decisions about content and materials, to difficult discussions in class (which at times led to tears), developing and teaching it was challenging. To other teachers who identity as white, especially those who teach mostly white students, and who have an interest in teaching BIPOC plays, this is for you. I hope white teachers can learn from my mistakes and pick up the mantle of teaching BIPOC plays/playwrights and anti-racism practices in their courses.

As a dramaturg by trade, I approach the development and teaching of courses with a dramaturgical sensibility. While I am still learning about teaching about race, what I know is dramaturgy—how to ask questions and how to search for answers. Maya Angelou said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” This quote has shaped my pedagogical practice throughout my career and it is the plan going forward: do better. I plan to **do more research** (and get more training), be more intentional with the **course design** and play selection, invite more **BIPOC voices** into the room, and create a **community agreement** with the students at the start of the semester. As a white teacher, entering a majority white space tasked with teaching

[1] Utah State University resides on the lands on of the Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Indians, Navajo Nation, Ute Indian Tribe, Northwestern Band of Shoshone, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, San Juan Southern Paiute, Skull Valley Band of Goshute, and White Mesa Band of the Ute Mountain Ute.

a new (and the only) course in the department focused on race, what follows is what I would do differently and better in the future in hopes that others can learn from it.

bell hooks tells us, “Teaching is a performative act” (p. 11). The performative act of teaching is one in which the identity of the performer matters greatly. hooks emphasizes the need for vulnerability in the classroom to create a progressive space and she does that in her work by pointing to where and how she is situated regarding her race, gender, and more (p. 21). More recently, scholars such as Gustave J. Weltsek (“The racialized roles we play: Owning the self through an emergent theatre project”) and Samuel Jaye Tanner (“Accounting for whiteness through collaborative fiction”) have provided various templates on how to speak to my whiteness. I am a white woman who grew up in a suburb of Louisville, KY (on the Indiana side), and who later moved to St. Louis, MO, where I graduated high school. This location change began to shape my understanding of race as I moved from a school with very little diversity to a school that bussed in students of color from all parts of the city. For the first time, I was aware of the implications of race in the classroom. While my classrooms in St. Louis were more racially diverse, the co-curricular activities such as choir, yearbook, and theatre, were not. It was in high school that I decided to be an educator and I eventually went on to teach high school theatre in Arizona and Missouri before returning to graduate school to become a college professor. I have moved through the world with privilege—the privilege of a strong family bond, the financial security of two-working parents with well-paying jobs, the expectation of, and support toward, a college education, and the privilege of whiteness. Those privileges have shaped my pedagogy and have asked me to teach topics related to race with an approach of continual learning and decolonization.

The move to Utah in summer 2020 created another shift in my racial awareness. It is not that Utah lacks all diversity, but it is a much less diverse place than other places I have lived and worked. The town where USU is located, Logan, is 86.6% white (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts).[2] The student population at USU is 84.3% white (“Office of Analysis, Assessment and Accreditation”). Additionally, the Department

[2] According to the United States census data (from 2019), the population of Logan, Utah is 86.6% white, 1.4% Black or African American alone, .5% American (*continued*) Indian or Alaska Native alone, 3.3% Asian alone, .5% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander alone, 15.3% Hispanic or Latino, and 2.9% Two or More Races.

of Theatre Arts is majority white: undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

I was hired to fill a gap in the department. The department needed someone who could head the BA Theatre Arts program, teach courses in theatre history, and pick up courses in the BFA Theatre Education program. I occasionally teach a special topics course related to theatre history and literature, which was part of my role assignment for spring 2021. The development of this course came during the aftermath of George Floyd's death and the racial tension during the summer of 2020. It came after the We See You White American Theatre (WSYWAT) statement in June 2020, which was a call to theatres and theatre programs to do better. The demands of WSYWAT are listed in a 31-page living document, which includes demands in academic and professional training programs. This section of the WSYWAT demands calls for the "decentering of whiteness in curricula and pedagogies." It demands we, as theatre educators, make anti-racism an "explicit core value" that goes beyond performative statements and goals, but "this must become central to your [our] mission as your [our] standards of excellence." Beyond missions, it specifically demands the "immediate decentralization of whiteness and the white/Western aesthetic as the default" and "an audit of your [our] pedagogy to ensure the inclusion of BIPOC writers in the canon" beyond simply adding "August Wilson to your syllabus and calling it a day" (We See You White American Theatre). For me, this work meant analyzing the courses and texts I teach. After reviewing my course reading lists, and the course lists of several other Utah State University theatre faculty, it was clear the special topics class should be focused on contemporary plays written by Black, Indigenous, and playwrights of color. At the time I named the course, "Contemporary BIPOC Plays and Playwrights," I knew of the complicated uses and feelings surrounding the acronym "BIPOC." NPR's *Code Switch* podcast investigates language and specifically POC and BIPOC in several episodes including "Is It Time to Say R.I.P. to 'POC'?" The hosts shared responses from listeners regarding the use of POC and BIPOC. The consensus in that episode is there is no consensus; that identifying terms are just as individual as the people who use them. "Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC)" was the language of the WSYWAT call when the group of theatre artists introduced the statement and the demands, that were "culled from years of discussion between members of the Black, Indigenous and People of

Color (BIPOC) theatre communities immersed in the dynamics of which they speak, and bears the contradictions of our many concerns, approaches, and needs" (We See You White American Theatre). The acronym "BIPOC" is utilized over 300 times in the WSYWAT demands, so that was the language I chose to use.

Due to the tight timeline from when I began at USU to when the course would be taught, I immediately began to research, which leads to the first piece of advice: **do more research**. Pedagogy often builds on the work of others; therefore I researched how others taught similar courses, what plays they used, and what scholarly articles and books they assigned. I was frustrated, though not surprised, to find a lack of publicly available syllabi for courses similar to the one I proposed to teach. While the syllabi search was a starting point, I also researched what it means to be a white teacher teaching mostly white students about race and employing anti-racist pedagogy. In 2020 and 2021, there was a flood of articles on these topics on blogs, forums, and news websites including *The Atlantic, Edutopia,* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* I employed lessons from many of these sources. One article spoke of the need to go beyond the well-known, "iconic" names of a movement to provide students with a broader look at history (Roth). From this, I ensured that my reading list not only included "iconic" BIPOC playwrights such as David Henry Hwang (which I did include), but also playwrights my students may be less aware of such as Sylvia Khoury. Another article, similar to the WSYWAT statement, argues for challenging the canon, going beyond the text for research, and asking questions (Simmons). These suggestions helped shape the course with a dramaturgical approach by framing discussions with questions asked not only by me but also by the students. There was a thread through much of the scholarship that articulated the need for white professors to push past their discomfort and uncertainty to learn, research, and implement anti-racism practices (Akamine Phillips). The literature of this course fell within my comfort zone as a scholar and dramaturg, but the teaching of it did not. I am still learning and unlearning knowledge and histories related to communities of color, anti-racist practices, and the history of race in theatre. This journey is ongoing but includes research, training, and conversations. I encourage others to do the same and to identify gaps of knowledge and seek to fill them.

The **course design** was based on my research and the creation of the reading list. My booklist was due mid-October 2020, therefore I had

less than six weeks to choose texts.[3] The parameters I created included contemporary published plays (or at least accessible plays via playwrights, New Play Exchange, playwright agents), diversity among the playwrights, and diversity of genre.[4] Additionally, with the thousands of plays that fit within these parameters, I also chose plays that do something interesting with structure or storytelling, that address various issues related to race, and that came from playwrights whose work I admire. The structure of the course emerged as I started to design the reading schedule.

It was important to cover a wide range of topics related to race, ethnicity, culture, and religion. Beginning with some introductory days and discussion of terms (race, ethnicity, BIPOC), we would then read one play a week. The final structure: introduce a topic (i.e. race and current events) and read a play on that topic (i.e. Tearrance Arvelle Chisholm's *Hooded, or Being Black for Dummies,* a play that references Trayvon Martin and the murders of unarmed Black and brown men by police). This structure, topic + sample play, has worked well in other courses. This framework allows for a broad introduction to a topic with scholarship, news articles, podcasts, videos, and more. Then we would discuss and analyze a play, which addressed each topic. In the future, I would adjust the topics and plays for the course, as broad topics such as "Latinx Theatre" were too large for the amount of time I scheduled to discuss it. In addition to the content, I would change the approach. By centering the topic, the course became less about the plays and playwrights and more about debates related to each topic. For example, after reading *Yellow Face* by David Henry Hwang, the discussion went awry with opinions, sometimes shocking ones, about race and casting. One student shared that they have been told they are "ethnicity ambiguous" and can "go for" non-white roles, despite identifying as white. This led to re-centering the discussion around ourselves and our experiences, which was not the goal. And while I have experience with classroom management, at times I was so taken aback that it would take time to refocus the discussion. If each day began with the play, then hopefully the conversations would focus on the history, dramaturgy, and

[3] The course will not be listed in the catalog until books are posted (or until it is noted that no books are required). Additionally, it is *strongly* discouraged to add additional costs to the class, such as the need to purchase additional texts, after registration begins.

[4] For purposes of this class, I defined "contemporary" as the last twenty years.

topics within the context of the play. My limited knowledge of the students, my passion for the material, and my optimism about how students *might* engage with the material, informed my pedagogical approach (structure and content) for the course but also became a challenge in teaching the course. I was not prepared for students to argue against notions such as "actors should only perform in roles of their own race," as some did in the discussion of *Yellow Face.*

A safe assumption in building this course was that most of the students would be white. The courses I taught in fall 2020 were filled with almost entirely white students. Nineteen students (fourteen undergraduate students, five graduate students) enrolled in the course, which had an enrollment cap of twenty. The high enrollment in the course fed my optimism for teaching the course and reinforced the need for it. All nineteen students visually read as white, though two students shared that they had more diverse cultural backgrounds from their grandparents (i.e. "I am a quarter _____.") or in earlier generations in their families (i.e. "My great-grandfather was half _____.") as the course unfolded. These revelations caused tension in the classroom as some students viewed that information as a claim to diversity that was not part of the way those students moved through the world. Both students who shared this information generally identify as white. From the start of the class, I used language such as "in a mostly white classroom" or "in our primarily white department" to not assume everyone's identity.

The one exception to the mostly white space was the Undergrad Teaching Fellow (UTF, essentially an undergraduate TA) who is a person of color. In our department, the role of UTF is often not competitive. In my four semesters, I have had at least one UTF each semester and generally, it has been a student who has previously taken the course, was successful in the course, and requested to be my UTF. The student of color who became the UTF was a student who was interested in taking the class, but was already enrolled in several classes and asked if they could be the UTF for the class instead of enrolling in it. I agreed and was grateful to have assistance with the course and hopeful that this student would have insights, beyond mine, as a person of color. It is standard practice in our department that UTFs assist with attendance, technology, feedback on assignments, and some teaching. In this class, more so than any other class I have taught with a UTF, it was difficult to balance the relationship of the UTF as a peer of the

students enrolled, while also in a position of authority. Students often looked to the UTF for opinions and answers (which the UTF articulated their discomfort with) and at other times their presence as a person of color was ignored. I will be forever grateful for this student, their presence, and their contributions to the course, but, in the future, I would not put the weight of the class on one undergraduate student of color and I would advise other professors against it as well. Alternative options would be to co-teach the class with a BIPOC faculty member, hire a BIPOC graduate teaching assistant, and/or secure funding for BIPOC guest speakers.

From the start, I planned to bring in **BIPOC voices**, in addition to the UTF. I received funding to invite three guest artists to join the class via Zoom. The guest speakers included Andi Meyer, an Asian American theatre maker, activist, and arts educator from Kansas City, MO; Sylvia Khoury a New York-born writer of French and Lebanese descent who wrote *Against the Hillside,* which we read; and Joe Ngo a LA-based Asian American actor/writer/musician who originated and developed the role of Chum in Lauren Yee's *Cambodian Rock Band,* which we also read. Students wrote questions to ask our guests and the speakers shared their experiences, insights, and advice. The days of the guest lectures were arguably the best; the bright spots of the course indicating the need for more diverse voices.[5]

In addition to inviting more experts into the space, with the class I would create a **community agreement** to define our values, guidelines, and boundaries for classroom discussion. I prefaced the class with a statement about the difficulty of participating in conversations about race, but did not create a community agreement. On the first day of class, we did introductions, I went over the syllabus, and assigned homework, which asked students to write a short response to questions about the need for equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racist practices in theatre and what they hope to learn in the course. The students shared troubling, compelling, and honest responses. When we returned the next day, I shared their anonymous responses, which included comments such as: "I want to unlearn some of what was taught and drilled into me as someone from a small, white, religious town," "Sometimes these topics feel a little uncomfortable and I don't love being

[5] I have been offered continued funding to bring in guests in future iterations of the course.

uncomfortable, but I am willing to take this one for the sake of education," and "I am both excited and afraid to learn of the unintentional ignorance I have allowed myself to live in." This allowed the students and I to be vulnerable, but also to find a starting point for the class. Some were excited to build on previous knowledge, others were anxious about having conversations about race. It was helpful to glimpse how students were feeling and thinking about the course.

On that same day, we talked about the We See You White American Theatre statement and demands. It was during this discussion where the division between students began and where a community agreement would have been especially helpful. Some students fully supported the movement, others pushed back, while a few simply did not understand it. In an interview, Jennifer Patrice Sims, an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Alabama at Huntsville, offers suggestions on how to handle resistance such as centering facts and stats and turning questions from students as probes back to them (Supiano). I attempted these techniques, but tensions remained high. What I quickly realized, through the first two weeks of the semester, was their desire for concrete answers. The "gray" area—the lack of a widely accepted definition of a term, the lack of a monolithic representation—was challenging for students. My UTF also noted there seemed to be more talking—and often debating in search of the one right answer—than listening. They wanted me to tell them what they could and could not say; what terms they could and could not use. For example, the students understood the varying opinions about the acronym BIPOC, but then what? "What are we supposed to say?!?" This never got easier throughout the semester. I tried to teach them to approach these topics with a dramaturgical sensibility—to ask questions, to research, to talk to individuals—and to live in the discomfort of not having an answer or sometimes having an answer, but still getting it wrong. They did not like this. There was a sense of, "Well you're the teacher, you tell us." And in my head, I was screaming, "This is the work. It's hard! It's gray!"

After a few tough days of high tensions, frustrations, and interruptions, I was panicked. The discussions, which were how the class was mostly structured, were not going well. Together with my UTF, we created what we called our "Rules of Engagement;" our attempt at a variation of a community agreement that I should have set up from the start. It read:

Before speaking…
- Slow down, pause
- Think, ask yourself…
  - Will this cause harm?
  - Am I just playing the Devil's advocate? Does the Devil need an advocate?
  - Does it need to be shared?
  - Is it on-topic?
  - Does it advance the conversation?
  - Is it a comment, a question, or a provocation?
  - If I have already spoken, are there others who might want to speak?
- Formulate thoughts (maybe even write them down)

Then...
Raise your hand

Did it help? I like to believe so, but according to the students' weekly journal responses, not entirely. That was how the semester began, which was one of the tougher starts in my fifteen years as a teacher (four years as a high school teacher, six years as a graduate student teacher, and five years as a college professor). My advice: do not wait for things to go south before creating guidelines. My optimism and excitement for the course overshadowed my need for a community agreement. I always entered that class excited, nervous, and well-prepared. I left that class occasionally inspired, often disheartened, and always emotionally and mentally exhausted. I was asking a group of almost all white students—most with senioritis, who had not fully engaged with their craft in over a year, going to school in person during a pandemic, being introduced to concepts, terms, plays, and people they did not know—to not jump to the defensive, to recognize their privilege, and to go with me on this process of learning and growing.

Was it worth it? Of course. We had some lows and highs throughout the semester. There were lows such as the time, when discussing feminist plays, several students made an argument that *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams is a great example of a feminist work. And there was no shortage of frustration and sometimes hurt expressed in the weekly journals. But there were highs too, which included getting to share these incredible plays with my students, most of which they were unfamiliar with. We also had a lively (though

stressful) discussion about Jackie Sibblies Drury's *Fairview* as several students in the class were able to see the New York production. The guest lectures, as I noted, brought in welcomed perspectives. And one joy of mine was watching a group of students fall in love with Lauren Yee's *Cambodian Rock Band.*

I, we, survived the semester. "Survived" may sound hyperbolic, but it is also how it felt. There were days in which I was sure the class would implode. There were days when I barely made it to my office before the tears came. I believed in what I was teaching and the importance of it and when I made identified failures in my teaching, I was affected by it. Student evaluations are a small marker of the success or failure of a course and I received several critical comments related to workload (amount of reading, assignments) and understanding (empathy, care of students). However, these few comments were in contrast with the overwhelmingly positive feedback related to the expanse of knowledge gained in the course, the suggestion that it should be a mandatory course for all theatre students, and a desire for a second semester of this course to cover the content more deeply.

So, what's next? Do better. I plan to take my own advice offered here. I plan to do more research and attend more trainings, continue to develop the course structure and content, find more BIPOC collaborators and artist to invite in, and implement a community agreement with the students.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Dawson, A. (2022). White professor/(mostly) white students: Teaching contemporary BIPOC plays. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (1), pp. 1-12.

REFERENCES

Akamine Phillips, J., Risdon, N., Lamsma, M., Hambrick, A., Jun, A. (2019). Barriers and strategies by white faculty who incorporate anti-racist pedagogy. *Race and Pedagogy Journal: Teaching and Learning for Justice, 3* (2).

DATA USA: Logan, UT. (2021, August 12). Deloitte, Datawheel. .

Gustave J. Weltsek (2018) The racialized roles we play: Owning the self through an emergent theatre project. *Youth Theatre Journal,*

32 (1), 16-29.
Harbin, M. B., Thurber, A., Bandy, J. (2019). Teaching race, racism, and racial Justice: Pedagogical principles and classroom strategies for course instructors. *Race and Pedagogy Journal: Teaching and Learning for Justice*. 4 (1).
hooks, b. (1994). Teaching to transgress. Taylor & Francis Group.
Jean-Philippe, M. (2019, August 26). So, What's the difference between race and ethnicity? *Oprah Daily*.
Meraji, S.M., Escobar, N., Devarajan, K. (2020, September 30). Is it time to say R.I.P. to 'POC'? *Code Switch from NPR*.
Office of Analysis, Assessment and Accreditation. Utah State University. Utah State University.
Rizga, K. (2020, October 28). Working for racial justice as a white teacher. *The Atlantic.*
Simmons, A. (2020, July 21) Engaging white students in conversations about race. *Edutopia*.
Smith, L., Kashubeck-West, S., Payton, G., Adams, E. (2017). White professors teaching about racism: Challenges and rewards. *The Counseling Psychologist, 45* (5), pp.651-668.
Supiano, B. (2020, July 23). Teaching: When students resist learning about racism. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.
Tanner, Samuel Jaye (2016) Accounting for whiteness through collaborative fiction. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 21* (2), 183-195.
U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Logan City, Utah. (2019) U.S. Census Bureau.
We See You White American Theatre. *We See You White American Theatre*.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Dawson (she/her), Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor and Head of the BA Theatre Arts program in the Caine College of the Arts at Utah State University. Amanda teaches courses in script analysis, theatre history, contemporary theatre, and theatre education. In practice, Amanda is a dramaturg and director. Her scholarship is interdisciplinary and mostly focuses on theatre education, dramaturgy, and representations of the United States military and veterans on stage. She has published in the *Popular Culture Studies Journal* and Howlround.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 9 Issue 1

Developing the Critical Verbatim Theater Artist during the Pandemic: A Transatlantic Collaboration

EVI STAMATIOU
UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER
ERIC KILDOW
KENT STATE UNIVERSITY
FREYA SPEARING
GEORGIA NODDING
JOHN-PAUL PRICE
UNIVERSITY OF CHICHESTER

ABSTRACT

Following recent social upheavals and an unprecedented pandemic, the development of theater students to work with stories from the community has become more urgent. Because verbatim theater brings to focus real voices and often involves sensitive topics, artists/educators consider key ethical questions before their engagement with educational or community contexts. Artists/educators are developed within the fieldwork of applied theater, during their study at university, through

supervision to engage communities. The pandemic made such fieldwork difficult due to online learning and teaching, so university educators tested alternative ways of simulating the experience of working with participants. This article analyzes the rationale, application and evaluation of an educational verbatim theater case study that involved British theater students and American nursing students, from the University of Chichester and Kent State University respectively. It identifies how international collaborations might offer an alternative environment to fieldwork by inviting students to consider key ethical questions before their engagement with communities. The narrative of practice reveals how it was rooted in Paulo Freire's pedagogy. The artist/educator's reflection highlights how such collaborations invite students to explore dialectics and the ethics of representation in verbatim theater, and to develop accountability and empathy when working with participants, which hopefully, they bring to their future fieldwork.

INTRODUCTION

The necessity to teach online during the last two years posed a great challenge for universities that prepare artists to collaborate in community settings. At the same time, the pandemic, and events related to the recent resurgence of the #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter movements, highlighted further the persistent social injustices. So, it was crucial to adapt university learning environments for theater that addresses social injustice, such as verbatim. Using various processes, verbatim theater practitioners create scripts by 'interviewing individuals, usually from a particular group or community and often about a matter of political and social interest' (Summerskill, 2021, p. 3). The key practitioner Anna Deavere Smith exposed racial violence (Martin & Smith, 1993), and inspired performances about homophobic violence (Kaufman & Tectonic Theater, 2011) and violence against women (Blythe, 2014). Verbatim theater also celebrates communities, such as in Alecky Blythe's latest play *Our Generation* for which she interviewed a group of teenagers from different parts of the UK about contemporary British youth culture (John, 2022). But even with light topics, the artists engage with real human beings in conversations that might involve sensitive topics. For example, in *Our Generation,* children of various genders and ethnicities

were interviewed on various occasions for five years, and their testimonies were performed by actors. Sensitive issues such as racial discrimination and abuse in the family are part of the script (Blythe, 2022), and perhaps more have been cut from the final version. The interviewers included Blythe, but also five 'collectors' (2022, p. 9), some of whom had just graduated from university drama departments (Blythe, A., Dougill I., Gaffey, L., Murphy, D., Tebby, R., & Wilkes, O., 2022). When university students are invited to create verbatim theater works during their studies, they reach out to community settings to resource interviewees for their chosen topics.

This article reflects on a case study of a group of teachers and students who used a collaboration between two universities—one in the UK and the other in the US—as a simulation of working with communities for verbatim theater. The first section discusses how the use of verbatim theater to teach university students and as part of obtaining degrees problematizes the artist/educator. It also presents the project and how it resonated with Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, which considers that critical consciousness in adult education and active engagement with their political, social and economic frustrations can help participants to improve their reality (2000). The second section provides the written accounts and reflections of three undergraduate students from the UK institution who accepted the invitation to collaborate with their American peers and were also willing and available to attend a follow-up session after the end of the project and contribute to this essay with their reflections. The third section draws findings from the perspective of the teacher and identifies areas that can be further researched. It evaluates whether the process met its expectations and identifies how unexpected findings can be taken forward. Throughout, university teachers gain substantial insights into how international collaborations can be exploited for verbatim theater skills and the development of the students' social representations.

BACKGROUND OF THE CASE STUDY

The experiment was initiated by Evi—a Greek-born artist/educator who teaches theater at the University of Chichester in the UK—and embraced by Eric—an American artist/educator who teaches theater at Kent State University, both white and middle-class teachers. As artists/educators who work in higher education contexts that promote

and explore the positive impact of theatre in society, Evi and Eric teach varying techniques of the 'theater of the real'. Verbatim theater, documentary theater, tribunal theater and autobiographical theater are all considered 'theater of the real' (Martin, 2010, p. 120). The students apply verbatim techniques that practitioners such as Smith and Blythe have established in the US and the UK respectively: they interview participants on social or political topics and use these real testimonies to create a text and performance. The performances can be more epic or more naturalistic, depending on the chosen techniques (Wake, 2013). In her book *Beyond Documentary Realism* Cyrielle Garson articulates how the varying techniques are means towards a common purpose: 'it is my contention that most verbatim theatre works are about something that is already there whilst nobody is paying attention and wanting it to be more significant' (2021, p. 6). But in the effort to balance social with entertaining aims in performing untold stories from the community that often involve sensitive issues, the genre might problematize representation (Kent in National Theatre, 2014, sec. 00:00:04-00:00:08; Stamatiou, 2019) and also how artists follow-up with interviewed participants about the final script and casting (Saldaña, 1998), or the staging of their testimonies (Duggan, 2013). The concerns become more uneasy and perplexed in actor training settings in higher education, in which verbatim theater becomes means for assessing students and ultimately producing degrees. The following sections present and evaluate the verbatim theater teaching and learning process and generate insights that can be applied by artists/educators.

THE PROJECT

Evi teaches the undergraduate module Text and Performance at the University of Chichester since 2017 using a flexible devised theater frame. She facilitates the students to create short performances in small groups, drawing on various forms of theater of the real, such as autobiography, documentary, tribunal and verbatim. Evi's artistic experience involves primarily autobiography and playback theater, but since she moved to the UK in 2010 and watched Blythe's *London Road* in 2011 she embraced verbatim theater. She has used every opportunity to attend workshops with verbatim theater artists/ educators, such as Alecky Blythe and the Verbatim Performance Lab at NYU Steinhardt, and gradually adopted relevant techniques in her theater-making and

teaching. She designed the module Text and Performance across 12x3h sessions, with 2 sessions per week, and independent learning tasks that the students explore outside of class time. She invites the students to develop and, at the end of the module, perform a 15' devised piece in groups of 4-6. This is the indicative content of how the module is regularly taught:

> **Session 1:** Introduction to Theater of the Real; Workshop on scenes from *London Road,* and *The Laramie Project* by Tectonic Theater. **Independent task for session 2:** Record, transcribe, edit and prepare to perform in class a 2-minute interview of one of your peers on the question 'Why create verbatim theater?'
>
> **Session 2:** Verbatim Text and Performance: Screening from *Fires in the Mirror* by Anna Deavere Smith to discuss text choices and how Smith's body, voice and imagination perform the real testimonies; Workshop on epic and realistic performance techniques. **Independent task for session 3:** Prepare a 3-minute idea presentation on a story or recent event to recruit your peers to a group, using PowerPoint, video, or other visual materials.
>
> **Session 3:** Theater of the Real and ethics: Presentation of project pitches and formation of groups; Reflective discussion on ethical issues and options concerning the engagement of participants from outside the university. Activities about 1) resourcing, engaging, and interviewing participants and 2) recording and transcribing testimonies; Familiarization with the university's relevant Consent Form**. Independent task for session 4:** Watch the screen versions of *London Road* and *The Laramie Project* and also read a play of your choice that draws on theater of the real.
>
> **Session 4**: Theater of the Real Dramaturgies: Workshop on testing linear and episodic options for the selected themes and how to include postdramatic techniques. **Independent task for session 5:** Research chosen themes, find relevant interviews and bring them to class.
>
> **Session 5**: Theater of the Real and Characterisation: Verbatim workshop using contemporary or historical figures. Reflection on the authenticity and verisimilitude within choices. Group work to assign interviews/roles to individuals. **Independent task for Session 6:**

Work individually on a short 1-minute interview from your archive and perform with your group in an order that shows dialogue and multiple perspectives.

Session 6: Narrowing the focus and production planning: Performance of interviews and reflection on how to further develop the piece. Group work on narrowing the focus and making final choices about content and style. **Independent task for session 7:** In your group prepare a 10-15 minute project presentation using PowerPoint, video, or other materials. The presentation should demonstrate a compelling idea/narrative (why would audiences see it), a rehearsal plan (how are you going to create this), a timeline for the project (is your schedule realistically planned?) and a staging plan (what is the style, aesthetics and technical requirements?).

Session 7: Project Pitches and Building Blocks: Presentation of pitches and reflection on ethical concerns. Workshop on story building. **Independent task for session 8:** Each group will agree on relevant verbatim texts (or other if a different method is used) and incorporate them in a 5-part plot outline. Then they will rehearse their 5-part plot outline and present it in class in a 'storytelling manner'.

Session 8: Scripting: Presentation of storytelling performances and reflective discussion on choices; Workshop on turning the story into a script. **Independent task for session 9**: Each group creates a theater of the real script and brings it to class.

Session 9: Script Surgery: Stage reading of first draft and feedback. **Independent task for session 10:** Each group considers the feedback from the previous session to rework their script and prepare for a staged reading of the new draft (using earphones, if verbatim).

Session 10: Stage reading (using earphones, if verbatim) of final draft and feedback. **Independent task for session 11:** Each group liaises with the technicians to discuss requirements for the final performance.

Session 11: Rehearsal. Each group has 45 minutes with the tutor to use as they wish. They can show the performance and get feedback or discuss other concerns.

Session 12: Final performance shared with all groups, which is

assessed.

Even though the above session descriptions give indicative information of the students' experience and theatre-making process, it is important to give more insight concerning performance and scripting techniques and how these are taught. With Smith's work as the starting point, the class invites the students to study and engage with various projects that had different priorities, such as qualitative research in drama (Saldaña, 1998), the education of researchers-practitioners (Salvatore, 2020), or the development of new works (Kent, Blythe, Hare, & Fall, National Theatre, 2014). Accordingly, the various sessions focus on different performance and scripting techniques that the students are invited to practice, explore, and mix and match for their final shows. Not as part of a coherent theater-making practice, but as performance and scripting stimuli, the exercises invite the students to develop individualised approaches to scripting and performing real events. The two following paragraphs give more details about the exercises-stimuli, including illustrative examples.

Towards the end of the first session, the students participate in an exercise that invites a first engagement with interviewing participants, and recording and performing an interview. The exercise simulates Smith's aims for an accurate representation of speech patterns and cadences, and Blythe's process of using headphones until the text is mastered.[1] Using my mobile phone on speaker and a pre-recorded introduction of myself, I demonstrate the tempo and focus that is required in repeating the recording until the text and voice patterns are learned accurately, and the actor is confident to address the audience. Then the students pair up and record a short introduction of each other which they practice individually and present to the class before they prepare a longer interview in their own time to be presented in the next class. This exercise fulfils the purpose of first-hand experience concerning being represented in verbatim theater before engaging with participants, which has been previously appreciated in the field

[1] During the 'Our Generation Verbatim Workshop' (2020, https://www.cft.org.uk/whats-on/event/our-generation-verbatim-workshop), Evi asked Blythe about the use of headphones in performance. Blythe clarified that since *London Road* at the National Theatre (2011), she began considering the headphones as rehearsal tools that help the actors reach high levels of accuracy until they could abandon them before the performance to audiences.

(Salvatore, 2020, p. 1048). It provides a basic understanding of technique, and triggers challenging observations that resonate with practitioners who find such performance accuracy unnecessary and have even described the process as 'mimicking' (Fall in National Theatre, 2014, secs 00:05:10-00:05:23; 00:06:23-00:06:40). During the second session, a similar exercise invites the students to record group discussions and explore the performance of multiple interviewees, irrespective of verisimilitude. In the following sessions, more exercises introduce different techniques, such as the performance of interviews and speeches of contemporary and historical figures from video archives. The students are encouraged to follow the techniques of the exercises in their theatre-making, but also develop variations.

Similarly to how various performance techniques are introduced during the course of the class, the students engage with various scripting methods. For example, during the first session, they familiarise themselves with the scripts of *London Road* and *The Laramie Project* and observe the similarities and differences in noting utterances, such as 'ums', accents and speech patterns, such as unfinished sentences, and interruptions. Even though the original recordings of the interviews are not available, the recording extract of the sex workers that is played at the end of the film version of *London Road* (Norris, Blythe & Cork, 2015) provides insight from recording to script, alongside the insight from script to the actor's performances that can be accessed in the film's spoken sections. The students' understanding of how verbatim scripts provide signals to the performer in terms of vocal pattern and gestural cues, climaxes in the fifth session when they explore the performance of historical and contemporary figures. They are introduced to the scripting method of Joe Salvatore, whose work I became familiar with after a workshop with the Verbatim Performance Lab in 2018. During the watching of the original interview between Kellyanne Conway and Matt Lauer and their verbatim representation by actors at the Verbatim Performance Lab (n.d.), the students follow the transcript that the performers developed for the purposes of that project.[2] The script structure reminds the reader more of poetry or verse. Salvatore's words '[a]s I transcribe a recorded interview, each time the speaker takes a noticeable pause while speaking, I begin a new line of text by hitting "return" on the keyboard' describe the creation of what he coins as a

[2] The transcript is used in my teaching with the kind permission of Salvatore.

scored transcript (2020, p. 1047). The accessibility of the video provided the opportunity to note in detail gestures and mannerisms.[3] At the bottom of the transcript, a list indicates that the different colours that underline certain words or sentences signal certain gestures, such as 'head flips', 'smiles', 'head shakes' and 'shrugs' (Salvatore, 2017, p. 1). The students are invited to use such a detailed scripting process to practice and perform a one-minute interview or speech of a contemporary or historical figure that has been captured speaking on video archive. Then they are welcome to use any transcribing method for the scripts that they develop in class, with a recommendation to be consistent in using a specific methodology.

Other exercises that concern scripting include workshopping an episodic and a linear version of their scripts and extracts from the screenplay of the series *The Crown* which combines archival material with fictional scenes. Even though the students are also encouraged to use postdramatic techniques for their final performances, these should be indicated in the developing script that will be performed. The script is also crucially used in returning to the interviewee after the first draft is completed to confirm that they felt accurately represented in the work and agreed to have a specific student represent them and still give their permission to have their interview used for the purpose of the class. Such ethical considerations are clearly stated in the Consent Form that the interviewees read, discuss and return signed to the student-interviewer before an interview is agreed.

During the pandemic, the above exercises and scheme of work had to be adapted for online learning. Certain obstacles to performance outcomes were addressed using drama-doc techniques. But the expectations from students to engage and interview participants were problematic. In previous years, and depending on their topics, students had interviewed hospital and theater staff, and school children. Because such contexts were closed or operating with minimum staff during the pandemic, Evi looked to resource an alternative setting. Eric was also working on a devised theater module for nursing students at Kent State University and his students agreed to take on the role of the interviewees for verbatim theater projects, which the British students also offered in exchange. During an initial online meeting with the twenty-seven British students, the three American students and the two tutors, the students

[3] Note this formatting in the script excerpt that appears on the following page.

were invited to collaborate in any way they wanted, to create devised performances based on true events. When the British students had decided on their topics, a group that chose gun violence interviewed their American peers, who in exchange interviewed the British students to inform their project on the use of ketamine. All students involved were white and they used the international collaboration to inform their projects with an equivalent British or American perspective on the use of ketamine or gun violence, respectively. The British students performed first and after their American peers watched the online performance, a final reflective online discussion took place. The final discussion invited reflections on the learning side to side on how to employ verbatim theater techniques in their devising and, whether, in the process, they considered the ethics of representation.

Here is an extract of the British students' script, *Gun Violence UK vs US*:

AMERICAN NURSING STUDENT 1

I grew up in California (nods head)

in a huge gang population (shakes head)

I would say so (eyes twitching)

it was a daily occurrence

everyone I knew was affected by gun violence in one way or another. (shakes head)

AMERICAN PROFESSOR

I've been mugged a couple of times (holding hands in front of stomach)

not recently (hands move forward and back to hold)

but

you know (left hand circular movement and back to hold)

a guy comes up

flashes

flashes his weapon (both arms open)

and demanded my wallet. (hands back to hold)

AMERICAN NURSING STUDENT 2

My father

when he was still working at Papa John's (short shrugging shoulders)

uhh

he got robbed at gunpoint and he almost got shot. (long shrugging shoulders) (Cumber, Nodding, Price & Westwood, 2020, p. 7)

AIMING FOR CRITICAL DISTANCE

The main pedagogical aim of the project resonated with what Freire discusses as ‘student conscientizacao’ which ‘refers to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality’ (2010, p. 3). Through the theatricalization of social and political topics and the engagement with multiple perspectives, the students should develop a critical relationship with their topics. In the absence of experts and communities during the pandemic, the transatlantic peers were expected to offer diverse and challenging perspectives on the chosen topics. To explain the critical development of the student Freire wrote that ‘the objects which surround me are simply accessible to my consciousness, not located within it. I am aware of them, but they are not inside me’ (ibid). In this case study, the students should become aware that the issues with gun violence or the use of ketamine are not part of them, but outside to be observed, and perhaps changed, through a critical process that supports the students identify the need for action. But because theater of the real is primarily performance, we often neglect the critical processes that interviewees go through within such relationships with university students.

The students’ ethical responsibilities towards their interviewees are an integral part of the learning process. There are identified needs beyond typical university ethical clearing processes, such as the invitation to the performance when applicable and follow-up meetings to invite thoughts and feelings. Our project’s outline established a mutual exchange between interviewers and interviewees, as each group interviewed the other for their assessment, and confirmed with the interviewees that the text and casting decisions were appropriate. The

follow-up meeting was designed to provide a space for teachers and students to learn and grow in dialogue, in a manner of becoming 'co-investigators' in the Freirian sense (2010, p. 5) with a focus on what we all learned from this international engagement through our communications and exchanges, and particularly on verbatim theater ethics, that can be applied in future works.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The following section offers extracts from reflective accounts of three British students—two women (Students A and B) and a man (Student C)—about their role as interviewers. Students A and B interviewed one individual each during one-to-one online meetings, whereas Student C collaborated with two of his peers to interview three people simultaneously during a recorded online discussion. The reflections focus on how the process invited the students/interviewers to develop as ethical verbatim theater artists through engaging interviewees beyond the standard ethical clearing processes of the university.

Student A

We decided to pick the topic of gun violence linking specifically with shootings. As someone who lives in the UK, we don't experience a lot of gun violence. We have only ever had one school shooting in the UK, which occurred in 1996. My interviewee mentioned she had experienced gun violence first-hand. None of us could even start to imagine how it would feel to witness an event like this.

One of the main challenges within interviewing is making sure to not overstep boundaries. You do not want to make the interviewee uncomfortable during the interview or when they are watching the performance. They should not regret opening up about themselves. So my initial interview made me very anxious as talking to people about a personal experience that changed their life can be difficult. My aim of the interview was to make sure she knew the purpose of the interview and didn't disclose information that she didn't want to. I decided to keep my questions very open and vague, which allowed the person I was interviewing to say as much or as little as they liked. During the interview, I voice recorded the whole testimony for myself to listen back to, with permission.

I think this verbatim module has helped me improve as an individual. It helped me understand that you will never experience anything the same way as someone else. Hearing a story like this surprised me. Her nationality caused her to experience something I would have never imagined. This made me realize that listening to other people's stories and understanding how different everyone is, is one of the most important things that every individual should be able to experience.

Student B

With this subject, I needed to keep aware of what we were asking and that making these boundaries beforehand, so the interviewee felt comfortable to talk freely, and any information that needed to be kept confidential, did so, therefore the conversations before the interview were extremely key. To make sure I didn't drift off-topic in the interviewing process, I set various questions that would limit any unnecessary information that would take up time. The questions varied from asking the interviewee where they grew up; what was the initial opinions and knowledge of the specific cases; what did they think of these outcomes; what they thought the general statistics were of gun violence and how this affected their day-to-day life. After going through the recordings and using the text as verbatim, I decided to portray this character as a college student hearing about the case for the first time as it connected well with the detachment of the interviewee and the case study.

My final thoughts from collaborating on this project, is that modules like this can be explored in a wider range of ways when you open those doors with people from different backgrounds, culturally and socially. Having the access to speak and learn from fellow students was extremely helpful and made a significant impact on my development and the project.

Student C

To ensure that we were getting the information that we needed, we created a questionnaire that we used to steer the conversation in a direction that would give us content for our verbatim project. We made sure that the participants knew we were recording them and that we had consent to use their stories respectably, ensuring them that we wouldn't take anything out of context. It was difficult having so many clips of

different people to search through to find a structure for our script. Once that was completed, we took some time to read through the script and made any amendments that were needed, then we went on to record our scenes individually. Because of Covid-19, we had to make decisions on camera angles and sets ourselves. After watching the video, my interviewee told me that he felt that we handled his stories with maturity.

Growing up in Wales, I have had very little to no interaction with guns at all and this is why I found it so shocking to hear how the Americans had become desensitized to the thought of gun violence. Most of the people around me that I would have been able to interview are in similar situations to me regarding gun violence, so without the help of the Americans, we would have very little substance to our performance. All of the characters would have been similar.

This project made me think about any negative stereotypes associated with the people that I was representing. I am originally from a small town in Wales and when you see Welsh people represented on stage and screen, you don't tend to see a real representation of what Wales is like or how Welsh people carry themselves. A great example of this would be the comedy 'Twin Town' (1997), where Welsh people are represented as unhygienic and unintelligent. This, of course, is not a true representation of life in Wales. Naturally, it's rather difficult to represent a whole country honestly as there are so many different groups of people in each community, but this project enabled me to consider a true reflection of the people that kindly volunteered to help us create our performance. As an actor, I've played many American characters, but it was very different to hear how Americans have such varying accents. I had to explore, what is the Californian accent or a Southern twang? What are the shades of being American?

FINDINGS

In this section, the artists/educators consider the reflections of Students A, B and C against the set pedagogical aims. In particular, they identify what they learned and can be taken forward for the facilitation of university students in their ethical engagement with participants. The key observations that will be discussed highlight that similar international student collaborations can minimize the ethical complications of engaging with community participants, but still maintain some of the benefits. This section finishes with a consideration of how the students'

testimonies suggest a social change in the Freirean sense.

From a materialistic perspective, the particular context of an international collaboration that facilitated the sharing of stories between individuals from two dominant cultures worked as an exchange of gifts that were used for similar, and equally beneficial, purposes. The involved students accumulated verbatim theater techniques, assessment credits for university degrees, and grades/feedback that supports the accumulation of further training and academic capital in the future. When artists or students interview participants from the community to create performances for ticket sales or degrees that will result in monetary profits, the material benefits of the interviewees are difficult to quantify. The clear mutual benefits of this case study sustained positivity throughout the process and, most importantly, avoided a hurtful ending. The students who did not attend the closing session did not need for closure, perhaps because these interactions and communications were framed as educational ones, and the students are used to navigating the beginnings and endings of educational relationships. Therefore, from a materialistic perspective, such international collaborations present fewer ethical implications.

A non-materialistic perspective is more complex, so it is useful to draw on the three students' reflections to discuss how the project encouraged *student conscientizacao*, which implies both critical distance and social action. All three reflective accounts suggest the development of critical distance at specific moments/surprises during the interviews that caused them particularly to examine their position in society. Student A's testimony that '[m]y interviewee mentioned she had experienced gun violence first-hand. None of us could even start to imagine how it would feel to witness an event like this', implies such a moment of surprise in the form of an exaggerated awareness of how different two white Western women who study theater are. Similarly, Student C writes: 'Growing up in Wales, I have had very little to no interaction with guns at all and this is why I found it so shocking to hear how the Americans had become desensitized to the thought of gun violence.' The critical distance gained from such moments/surprises urged action, such as to examine issues within their own culture that they may have taken for granted before. They became acutely aware, for example, of the debates surrounding the legal possession of firearms in the UK. Though they knew about such debates before, they noted that hearing first-hand accounts from a similar situation in another culture

made them more aware of the nuances and complications of a major issue within their own culture. The moments/surprises lead to a better-informed verbatim piece. In the words of Student B: 'Having the access to speak and learn from fellow students was extremely helpful and made a significant impact on my development and the project.' This renewed cultural knowledge was a result of the critical distance that was triggered from the key moments/surprises. It impacted their performance practices by encouraging additional reflection and even empathy when faced with news stories from their own culture.

Considering aforementioned concerns about the representation of individuals in verbatim performances, the critical distance of the students developed the ability to override one's automatic, and often stereotypical, conceptions when preparing for a role that is unlike oneself. Nina Bandelj, writing for *Sociological Forum*, points to the development of this ability as an important aspect of actor training in that it encourages the deliberate selection of character elements following reflection (Bandelj, 2003, p. 400). Our project challenged student tendencies to perform stereotypes, which is articulated by Student C: 'I've played many American characters, but it was very different to hear how Americans have such varying accents. I had to explore, what is the Californian accent or a Southern twang? What are the shades of being American?' In having students from two different cultures work with one another on verbatim practices, students are encouraged to focus on the specific individual as opposed to the character 'type' which they may be faced with. This suggests a newfound sense of responsibility that the students had not felt before when it came to issues of representation onstage.

In a Freirean sense of social change, the project's impact on the students can be also discussed around the development of empathy, which is crucial in developing artists that will engage in fieldwork. Salvatore identifies the development of empathy as a result of putting oneself in the role of the interviewee (2020, p. 1048). The students' testimonies suggest that the process of preparing to interview, interviewing, and following up with the participants also invites the development of empathy. Student A's testimony that '[t]hey [interviewees] should not regret opening up about themselves. So my initial interview made me very anxious as talking to people about a personal experience that changed their life can be difficult' suggests an exaggerated awareness about the interviewee's feelings and an

emotional reaction that triggers a meticulous consideration of the interviewee's feelings as part of the process. Student B's testimony that '[w]ith this subject, I needed to keep aware of what we were asking and that making these boundaries beforehand, so the interviewee felt comfortable to talk freely, and any information that needed to be kept confidential, did so' suggests that the interviewee's consent as part of the process was understood and applied to aim at comfort and trust, both of which imply awareness and consideration of the interviewee's emotions. Student C's words '[a]fter watching the video, my interviewee told me that he felt that we handled his stories with maturity', illustrates the student's focus on the interviewee's emotions during the follow-up discussion. Even though the ethical stakes of this project were lower than what one expects in fieldwork, for the reasons discussed before, the students' reflections indicate development of empathy for the interviewees as part of the ethical consideration processes. The development of empathy and an understanding of ethics and empathy as interlinked indicates a positive social change that the students can take forward in their lives and fieldwork.

Concerning theater-making outside of fieldwork, the students indicate a renewed awareness and appreciation of dialectical processes in contemporary theater. Dialectical theater is 'associated most closely with the theories and practices of Bertolt Brecht' and particularly in using theater as 'ways of understanding reality that resist naturalizing and universalizing human activity and thought' (Barnett, 2017, p. 245). On contemporary stages, dialectical dramaturgies can achieve 'a complex analysis of society, unafraid of leaving important questions open for further consideration by the audience' (ibid, p. 262). Student A's reflection that '[n]one of us [British students] could even start to imagine how it would feel to witness an event like this [being held at gunpoint, which was the interviewee's experience]', implies an appreciation of including to the dramaturgy different, perhaps oppositional, perspectives on gun violence. Student C's observation that without the American interviewees '[a]ll of the characters would have been similar', shows a renewed awareness of considering multiple perspectives in theater dramaturgies. This renewed understanding indicates a changed theater-maker. The concluding words of Student B '[h]aving the access to speak and learn from fellow students was extremely helpful and made a significant impact on my development and the project', and of Student C '[t]his project made me think about any negative stereotypes associated

with the people that I was representing', indicate that the dialectical element changed the students positively, primarily as artists. The concluding words of Student A suggest a social change that is beyond theater-making:

> I think this verbatim module has helped me improve as an individual. It helped me understand that you will never experience anything the same way as someone else. Hearing a story like this surprised me. Her nationality caused her to experience something I would have never imagined. This made me realize that listening to other people's stories and understanding how different everyone is, is one of the most important things that every individual should be able to experience.

The above reflection suggests that the consideration of the other's perspective, as understood in dialectical theatre, triggered an openness to and appreciation of diversity not in a binary sense but with an understanding and appreciation of multiplicity. This realisation can be taken forward to the artist's fieldwork and life beyond theater, impacting an attitude of eagerness to engage with people from multiple backgrounds and ideologies and pursue deeper levels of understanding and communication. Such a development of the individual is a form of social change.

CONCLUSION

The discussed case study highlighted the complexities and opportunities of teaching verbatim theater at universities. It illuminated the particularities of developing ethical theater-making skills, with a focus on ethical interviewer-interviewee relationships and a critical ability about the ethics of representation. The international collaboration brought together British and American students and teachers, which helped to form mutually beneficial relationships between interviewers and interviewees, in both material and immaterial ways. The pedagogical aim to develop student critical distance was facilitated by moments/surprises during these mutually beneficial interviews. These key moments evoked social change in the sense of developing the student as a social being with a renewed cultural awareness and an understanding of how empathy and ethics can work together in

fieldwork. It also strengthened reflexivity within performance choices, through awareness of the automatic tendency to perform character 'types' and an appreciation of dialectical dramaturgies in the theater and multiplicities of experience and understanding in the world.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Stamatiou, E., Kildow, E., Spearing, F., Nodding, G., and Price, J. P. (2022). Developing the critical verbatim theater artist during the pandemic: A transatlantic collaboration. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (1), pp. 13-33.

REFERENCES

Bandelj, N. (2003). How method actors create character roles. *Sociological Forum*, *18* (3), 387-416.

David Barnett (2017) The possibilities of contemporary dialectical theatre: The example of representing neonazism in Germany, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *27* (2), 245-262. DOI: 10.1080/10486801.2016.1216407.

Blythe, A. (2014). *London Road*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Blythe, A. (2022). *Our Generation.* London: Nick Hern Books.

Blythe, A., Dougill I., Gaffey, L., Murphy, D., Tebby, R., & Wilkes, O. (2022). Finding their voices. Interview transcript in the program of *Our Generation.* Chichester Festival Theatre.

Cumber, A., Nodding, G., Price, J.P., & Westwood, M. (2020). *Gun Violence UK vs US*, a verbatim docudrama, created in part fulfilment for the degree of BA (Hons) Acting at the University of Chichester. Unpublished.

Duggan, P. (2013). Others, spectatorship, and the ethics of verbatim performance. *New Theatre Quarterly, 29* (2),146–58. DOI:10.1017/S0266464X13000250.

Freire, P. (2010). The "banking" concept of education. *Ways of reading,* edited by David Bartholomae. Bedford/ St Martin's. Retrieved March 7, 2022.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed). New York: Continuum.

Garson, C. (2021). *Beyond documentary realism*. De Gruyter.

John, E. (2022). Our Generation review – magnificent verbatim account of teenage life will steal your heart. *The Guardian,* Theatre, March 2, 2022. Retrieved March 7, 2022.

Kaufman, M. & Tectonic Theatre. *The Laramie Project*. Vintage.

Martin, C., & Smith, A. D. (1993). Anna Deavere Smith: The word becomes you. An interview. *TDR* (1988-) 37 (4), 45-62.

Martin, C. (2010). Introduction. *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage*, edited by Carol Martin. Palgrave Macmillan, 1–14.

National Theatre (2014). The Ethics of Verbatim Theatre. National Theatre YouTube Channel.

Norris, R., Blythe A. & Cork A. (2015). *London Road*. National Theatre and British Film Institute. London: BBC Films.

Saldaña, J. (1998). Ethical issues in an ethnographic performance text: The 'dramatic impact' of 'juicy stuff.' *Research in Drama Education*, 3:2, 181-196, DOI:10.1080/1356978980030205.

Salvatore, J. (2017). As of August 24, 2017. Interview transcript. Unpublished.

Salvatore, J. (2020). Scripting the ethnodrama. In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Patricia Levy. Oxford University Press, 1045-1083.

Stamatiou, E. (2019). A Brechtian perspective on *London Road*: Class representations, dialectics and the "gestic" character of music from stage to screen. *Studies in Musical Theatre*, *13* (3), 287–98. https://doi.org/10.1386/smt_00007_1.

Stamatiou, E. (2020). Inclusive casting debunked: Towards holistic interventions in staged performance. In Intersections, Institutions and Inequities (special issue*). Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Equality and Diversity*, *6* (2).

Summerskill, C. (2021). *Creating verbatim theatre from oral histories*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Verbatim Performance Lab. (n.d.). Lauer/Conway flip. New York University Steinhardt.

Wake, C. (2013). Headphone verbatim theatre: Methods, histories, genres, theories. *New Theatre Quarterly*, *29* (4), 321–35.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Evi Stamatiou is an artist/educator with 19 years of international experience. She has won international awards and her work has been

funded by the Arts Council of England. She is a Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Course Leader of the BA (Hons) Acting at the University of Chichester. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. She has a PhD from The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London. She researches social representations in actor training and theatre pedagogies. She has published in academic books and journals.

Eric Kildow is a Director, Dramaturg, and Assistant Professor of Theatre at Kent State University. He holds Bachelor's Degrees in Theatre and Political Theory from Michigan State University, a Master of Arts in Theatre from Texas A&M University- Commerce, and an MFA in Performing Arts from the Savannah College of Art and Design. He is a member of the Lincoln Center Theatre Director's Lab (2012).

Freya Spearing is an undergraduate student on the BA (Hons) Acting at the University of Chichester.

Georgia Nodding is an undergraduate student on the BA (Hons) Acting at the University of Chichester.

John-Paul Price is an undergraduate student on the BA (Hons) Acting at the University of Chichester.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 9 Issue 1

"Not the Leading Role of Life": Fatphobia in Educational Theatre & Its Impact on Larger-Bodied Adolescent Girls

LUCY KANIA

EMERSON COLLEGE

ABSTRACT

This article seeks to shed light on larger-bodied adolescent girls' experiences of fatphobia in educational theatre. It investigates the forms that fatphobia can take in educational theatre (in schools, camps, and youth theaters), and the impact of these experiences on larger-bodied girls' body image and self-esteem. The issue is considered in relationship to the role of anti-fat bias in society broadly, the representation of larger-bodied women in theatre, and presence of bias in casting. Methods of data collection consist of a review of existing research and writing, and interviews with seven voluntary participants, all larger-bodied individuals assigned female at birth who participated in educational theatre as adolescents. The study identifies areas of concern, including typecasting and costuming, and areas of impact, including internalized negative messaging and low self-esteem, and suggests a path forward for theatre educators to combat fatphobia in

their own programs. It asks: If fatphobia is present in theatre education, and has a negative impact on the health and wellness of larger-bodied adolescent girls, how can theatre educators do better?

When I was thirteen, my pediatrician diagnosed me as "morbidly obese." This diagnosis was based on no information about my health, lifestyle, or even body size, other than my Body Mass Index (the ratio of height and weight), and was my first point of contact with a force that would shape my life: fatphobia. Ever since I started puberty, I had cultivated an uneasy relationship with my prematurely curvy figure, but I was a healthy, active child, and the diagnosis rattled me. After all, there must be something very wrong with my body for it to have earned such a label. As I entered adolescence, I began seeing more and more proof of my body's failure. Since early childhood, theatre had been my favorite activity and my happiest place—yet even my experiences there seemed to confirm this new fear. I spent my teenage years playing mothers, maids, and matrons, but I never seemed to be considered for the romantic lead. The message felt clear: no amount of talent or hard work or paying my dues could make up for the fact that I did not look like someone you could fall in love with.

Today, over ten years later, I identify as a fat woman. It has taken me years of self-reflection and research to reclaim that word, but I think it describes me and that is okay. Even so, it is hard for me to comprehend how warped my body image became as a teenager, and although I have worked hard to reclaim the word "fat," I still struggle with my sense of self-worth on a daily basis. The messages I internalized about myself during my time in educational theatre, aided of course by the medical fatphobia I experienced, haunt me in very real ways, ways I am still trying to untangle and unlearn. In the years since, I have taught theatre at high schools and summer camps, and observed these same patterns unfold, unacknowledged and unchallenged, again and again.

In this study, I sought to identify the role of fatphobia in educational theatre and its emotional and psychological impact on larger-bodied girls. I undertook this research in large part because I have had these conversations with other fat and plus size women in casual settings, but could find no formal research addressing fatphobia in educational theatre spaces. I aimed to create a piece of research that could address

this hole in the field, to bring awareness to the experiences of fat or larger-bodied girls in educational theatre, and to identify ways in which theatre educators can combat fatphobia in their own programs.

A Note on Language

Throughout my research, I use the intentionally broad term of "educational theatre" to refer to any theatre experience that takes place in schools, youth theaters, summer camps, or other educational programs, in order to get the most comprehensive picture of how this bias manifests in similar ways across different settings. I use the word "fatphobia" to describe the bias toward fat and/or larger bodies, because it is the term I hear most within fat spaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW: FATPHOBIA AND ITS IMPACT ON ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Although no preexisting academic research can be found on fatphobia in educational theatre, an understanding of its impact in society at large, and of the way casting replicates societal patterns and biases, supports the conclusion that fatphobia exists in educational theatre and can harm larger-bodied adolescent girls.

Although the majority of American women now fall into "overweight" or "obese" medical categories, and ample evidence suggests that such categorizations are based on faulty science and bear little relation to actual health outcomes, hatred and disgust for fat women remains a pillar of American society (Donovan, 2019; Gordon, 2021; Bacon, 2010). A foundational 2008 study identified weight discrimination as the third most prevalent cause of perceived discrimination among women, after gender and age but before race, sexual orientation, religion, or ability (Puhl et al., 2008). In spite of the "body positivity" movement of the past ten to fifteen years, research shows that anti-fat bias is as prevalent today as it was then (Gordon, 2021). A study out of Harvard University's Project Implicit, collecting data on a variety of implicit and explicit biases from 2007-2016, found that while other biases, including racism and homophobia, declined across those years, fatphobia is the only bias that has in fact gotten *worse* (Charlesworth et al., 2019). Recent research also shows that the growing ubiquity of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram—another factor that has increased

substantially in the last decade—has led to greater body image issues among adolescents, especially girls (Fardouly, et al., 2016).

On top of social media, weight-based bias from peers and teachers leads to increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation, social isolation, and eating disorder in adolescent girls (Puhl et al., 2001). Importantly, multiple studies have found that these negative effects are associated more with the experience of weight discrimination—or even the fear that one *might* experience weight discrimination—than they are with actual weight (Eaton et al., 2005; Puhl, 2011). Some studies even indicate that the negative physical health affects often associated with "excess" weight, from high blood pressure to hypertension to insulin resistance, can actually be attributed to the stress of living in a body that is continually stigmatized (Schafer et al., 2011; Hunger et. al., 2015). This suggests that the way educators treat larger-bodied adolescent girls, most of whom already deal with external and internalized fatphobia, has a very real and substantive impact on their mental and physical health.

While there has been less formal research done on bias in casting, theatre scholars and practitioners agree that casting choices reflect the biases of the director or casting agent. Coming from a cognitive science perspective, scholar Amy Cook writes that the mental categories we create to "cast" the people around us on a daily basis rely on our past knowledge and experiences, meaning they reflect our biases and the biases of the society in which we live (Cook, 2018). Looking at the issue from a social justice perspective, theatre practitioner Brian Eugenio Herrera observes that the act of casting for the theatre, inherently an act of both inclusion and exclusion, too often leads to the replication of familiar patterns and biases (Herrera, 2015).

When the overwhelming bias against fat women in our society is replicated rather than challenged through casting, we see fat girls and women only in certain types of roles—patterns that, in turn, reinforce negative stereotypes and their harmful impact on larger-bodied girls. The theatre relegates larger women to roles deemed "undesirable" by the male gaze, and the few roles written specifically for fat women often reflect problematic stereotypes (Jester, 2009). Although little has been written about this phenomenon in educational theatre specifically, one voluntary survey by *OnStage Blog* found that larger-bodied girls who participated in youth theater had been repeatedly cast in matronly or sexualized roles, some even told by educators that they looked too old

to play roles their own age or older, or that they would not be believable as a romantic lead (Gaffney, 2021). Matrons, sidekicks, and whores have one thing in common: no one has to fall in love with them. They do not have to appeal to the male gaze—except for the whore, who must be sexual but not necessarily beautiful, and never innocent. More often than not, these are the roles that are available to larger-bodied girls, regardless of age, talent, or personality (Gaffney, 2021; Jester, 2009). This is not to say these roles are all terrible, but when these are the only roles attainable for larger-bodied girls, they paint a clear picture of the way theatre educators view those girls and, in turn, how those girls may start to view themselves.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In an effort to learn more about how these dynamics play out in the real world of educational theater, I conducted seven semi-structured Zoom interviews. As a form of qualitative data collection, interviews allow the researcher to learn about feelings, beliefs, and experiences that would be impossible to observe—in this case, the patterns of treatment experienced by participants across years and different settings, and the impact these experiences had on their development (Patton, 2002). All participants identified themselves as larger-bodied, and participated in educational theatre as adolescents—six are women, while one is a non-binary individual who presented as a girl throughout their education. Although they are all in their twenties or thirties, and all but one are white, they represent educational theatre experiences from across the United States: both the East and West Coasts, the Midwest, and the South. They also represent a range of larger body sizes and shapes, and identify as fat, plus size, curvy, and stocky, among other terms. From these interviews, I was able to identify areas of concern where fatphobia is most present in educational theatre, a sense of its impact on larger-bodied girls, and an idea of how educators can begin do better.

I acknowledge that the age of these individuals means they are all at least a few years removed from their education, but as the research demonstrates, anti-fat bias has not gone away in the intervening years. I also recognize that this a small and relatively homogenous sample, but I hope that the honesty and insight of these seven individuals can inspire others to share their own diverse experiences and continue the conversation. Participants' names have been changed to preserve

anonymity, except by request. Some responses have been minorly edited for length and clarity.

FINDINGS

The largest area of concern that emerged from this study was casting—more specifically, typecasting. Although typecasting is a relatively common practice in theatre, and in entertainment broadly, we must recall from Amy Cook and Brian Eugenio Herrera's writing on casting that the "types" of roles that we sort people into stem as much from our own biases as they do any personal qualities of the actor. For the individuals that I interviewed, typecasting was a consistent and limiting pattern. The most common example, experienced to some extent by all seven, was being typecast as mothers, grandmothers, and other matronly roles. Krista, a fat, white woman from suburban Massachusetts, said:

> Most of the time I was cast as the old woman… There was [sic] a lot of roles that I wanted to play… that I wasn't even considered for, because of the way that I—my 'type' *[using air quotes]*… Like, I'm a sixteen-year-old with literally my life ahead of me, and you're saying that's a role I'll never play, because I don't look like an ingénue… that was a huge message that I came out with. It was very limiting.

Miranda, who is white and non-binary and grew up in Georgia, mentioned the fat-coded category of comic relief, or sidekick, as one into which they were typecast based on their body size: "The comic relief roles, I was not comfortable with, because I didn't felt [sic] like I had comedy acting skills… And I feel like those were roles I more got because again, I was… bigger or whatever."

Becca referred to her "racialized body" as a larger, mixed-race Latina girl in a predominantly white New Jersey school as a major factor in her typecasting. She shared her experience of being "set apart" from her white peers in her life outside of theatre, and how the combination of her body size and racial identity informed how she was cast. Like many of the others, she reported playing mainly matronly and comedic roles, but added:

> I was cast as any role that had traditionally been a person of color.

> Often they were Black roles. And it would sort of be like, well, you have the body type… of a sassy Black woman. And so that was a role that I definitely got a lot. I *never* got any sort of love interest role, no ingénue roles.

Anti-Black racism and fatphobia have a deeply intertwined history in the United States (Strings, 2019). Fatness, as a negative quality connoting excess and lack of control, has long been associated with Black women, and fatphobia used as a tool of white supremacy to villainize and dehumanize them (Strings, 2019). As Becca articulates, her identity, not only as a person of color but also as a fat person, increased her proximity to, and ability to stand in for, Blackness, in the eyes of her white educators.

Renae, a fat, white woman from Ohio, spoke to the way her experiences of being typecast in the fat-coded categories of matron and whore compounded upon the negative messages from society and the media about fatness, age, and sexuality:

> When you're young, and you're being told that you're 'mature'… because we're inundated with all of this messaging that young and youthful is attractive… That really felt bad as a kid. And then when I would get cast as hypersexualized roles, I feel like I—I was proud… I was like, 'Oh, I'm desirable, that's a good thing.' And it took until graduating college to look back on that and be like, 'that kind of fucked me up a little'… Feeling fetishized is not the same as feeling desired.

As Renae articulates, the experience of being typecast into "hypersexualized" roles can be just as damaging as any other. When larger women and girls are repeatedly cast as whores but never as ingénues, it reinforces the idea that there is something perverse about their sexuality—an idea supported by a society that considers any attraction to fat bodies fetishistic (Gordon, 2021).

When asked which body types they felt had the most value in educational theatre, the words most often repeated by participants were "skinny," "thin," and "pretty," with multiple people referencing the idea of the "dancer body," i.e. a body that appears thin, athletic, and graceful. Participants felt educators valued girls whose body types adhered to conventional white European standards of "beauty," especially when it

came to the leading ingénue roles. These educators sent the message that larger-bodied girls do not have the innocence or beauty to embody an ingénue, and that they do not deserve to take center stage.

A secondary area of concern that arose in these interviews was costuming. Although I had no questions that specifically addressed costumes, this issue came up in the majority of my interviews. Carolyn (a fat, white woman from Southern California) called the process of being costumed “very anxiety inducing,” sharing the disappointment she felt in never being given a costume that fit her correctly, let alone looked good on her. Becca recalled a costume designer as “a terror in my life,” who commented frequently on the difficulty of costuming her, and made her cry on multiple occasions. Krista and Miranda also spoke at length about experiences with costuming, all of which communicated negative ideas about larger bodies: that they pose an inconvenience, that they should be covered up or hidden, and that they do not deserve well-fitting, flattering costumes. The fact that all four of them brought up costuming unprompted speaks to the strength of these memories and the harmful messages that they sent.

For adolescent girls, whose body image and sense of self is still in flux, internalizing these negative ideas about larger bodies can have a major impact on their self-esteem (Voelker et al., 2015). When I asked my participants to describe their relationships to their bodies as adolescents, many of them laughed out loud. This laughter was followed by assessments ranging from “tortured,” (Becca) to “intensely uncomfortable” (Miranda) to “negative as can be” (Amy). Carolyn reported “hating” her body, Krista being “ashamed” of hers, and even Maggie, a midsize white woman from Minnesota who remained largely positive throughout our interview, remembered “feeling bad about being bigger.” Four women referenced developing unhealthy relationships with food in their adolescence, from extreme dieting to anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating disorder. Renae put it into strikingly simple words: “I wanted my body to be a different body.”

Many of my participants reflected on the relationship between their negative body image and their experiences in educational theatre, and how these experiences impacted their overall self-worth. As Carolyn said: “It probably reinforced the feelings of, like, I'm not the pretty girl. I'm not the leading role of life girl.”

Amy, a plus size, white woman from Massachusetts, spoke about the way being typecast in “undesirable” roles affected her personal life,

especially when it came to romance and dating, and the way she envisioned her future:

> I felt all along, theatre or no theatre, that I was not worthy of… the things that I wanted, my dreams… I wanted theatre, but I also wanted love very, very badly, right? The family, and the husband, and that whole thing. And to be told from educators, who I respected… that I'm also not worthy of love, that I can't be that leading character, because no one's gonna want me that way, really did damage.

Becca noted that her repeated typecasting discouraged her from wanting to try new things or push herself as a performer. Reflecting on how comments made about her body by directors and costumers made her self-conscious, she said:

> It becomes perpetuating, because then I didn't want to go for any roles that would involve sexuality or intimacy, that you would have to… be more vulnerable in that way onstage.

Carolyn, Krista, Becca, and Renae all recounted feeling that they had to work exponentially harder than their thin peers to prove their worth, both in educational theatre and in other areas of their lives, and, in Renae's words: "That that was fair, that that made sense, that I had to try harder. Because there was something wrong with me that I had to overcome."

Across the spectrum of body size represented by these individuals, the impact of fatphobia on their body image and self-esteem was clear. The negative messages that they internalized from their experiences with typecasting, costuming, and more, told them that they weren't worthy of the parts that they wanted—both on and offstage.

WHAT EDUCATORS CAN DO

When I asked my participants how they would like to see theatre educators approach casting larger-bodied girls, the resounding answer was that body size should not play a role in casting for educational theatre. Each of them spoke about the way biases towards larger bodies and fat-coded typecasting limit the learning opportunities that should be

at the core of any educational theatre experience. As Becca put it:

> The whole point of theatre is to be someone else, and to be imaginative, and to put yourself in different perspectives. And if you keep being put in the perspectives that are just true to you, or to how other people perceive you, you're going to be really stuck.

Miranda acknowledged that a bias toward larger bodies may not be conscious for many people, but suggested that educators confront and challenge their unconscious biases during the casting process:

> Examining that bias of 'Why do I automatically put these people in these categories in my head?' And then, and then maybe being like, 'Well, what if I just did the opposite of that?' Right? 'What if I just put people, or considered people, for roles I might not have considered them for?' And sometimes it's not a good fit, but sometimes maybe it might be.

Many participants spoke about the pedagogic nature of educational theatre in particular, and the responsibility theatre educators have to the learning experiences of their students. Amy shared:

> I think people need to start casting, especially in educational environments, based on talent, and merit, and also what people need to learn... It's about molding actors… and helping them get the opportunities that they need to succeed.

The participants themselves serve as proof of the effectiveness of such an approach, as evidenced by their experiences when cast based on qualities other than their body size. Amy remembered being cast as a romantic lead for the first time as a senior in college:

> We had a senior showcase where… it was between me and someone else for the lead. And I ended up getting the lead, it was a romantic lead, it was very exciting. I finally got to act that thing, and it was great. And I did a really great job, and it was really empowering.

Unfortunately, Amy later overheard two theatre professors discussing how her casting made the whole production hard to believe,

even referring to her with a derogatory epithet for a fat woman that I will not repeat here. The pain and shame of that overhearing cast a pall on her recollection of an otherwise affirming experience, and the fact that multiple professors felt comfortable speaking this way serves as further proof of the insidious nature of fatphobia in educational theatre spaces.

In a more wholly positive light, Krista recounted being cast as popular girl Rizzo in *Grease* (a role Becca also recalled playing with fondness) when she expected to play her fat sidekick Jan:

> There is a character within that same show that they could have easily just put me there because of my type, right?... One time, I felt like I actually may have gotten a role based on my talent, and based on my work ethic, and based on my ability to work well with others, [rather] than on what I looked like on stage… It definitely gave me a lot more confidence.

These experiences, as well an account from Miranda about being cast based on their powerful personality, or from Carolyn about playing Tracy in *Hairspray* (a rare empowered fat leading character), were moments when these young performers were *seen*—for their range, their personality, their talent, their star quality—for anything other than the size of their body and its failure to conform to conventional standards of beauty.

CONCLUSION

So what can theatre educators do? From camp counselors, to classroom teachers, to college professors, it starts with acknowledging our implicit biases toward larger bodies (even if we may be living in one), and challenging them. We must prioritize talent and opportunities for growth over body type when casting students. We must ensure that larger-bodied actors are provided with well-fitting costumes, and that they are not made to feel that costuming them is difficult or burdensome compared with their smaller peers. We must also remember that some larger students may experience trauma from living in a stigmatized body, and seek to create a safe and affirming space for them. Larger-bodied women still face many difficulties in the entertainment industry, but theatre educators should seek to create opportunities for marginalized performers, rather than replicating the patterns of discrimination we see

in the professional world.

I want to once again acknowledge that all of the people interviewed for this study are able-bodied adults, and the majority are cisgender and white. Further research into how fatness intersects with other marginalized identities, including more women of color, as well as transgender and disabled participants, could provide a much more comprehensive and inclusive picture of how fatphobia affects larger-bodied girls and gender minorities. A truly comprehensive study of the role of fatphobia in educational theatre would of course also include larger-bodied cisgender boys, who are not exempt from the damaging effects of this bias. Additionally, I chose to interview adult subjects due to both ease of access and the distance they have from painful adolescent experiences. Including teenagers in the conversation, in a way that does not cause further harm or marginalization, would create the most accurate picture of the state of fatphobia in theatre education today.

Negative messages about fatness and larger bodies are everywhere. Many of my interviewees pointed out that theatre alone did not convince them that their body was wrong, that they had to overcompensate for their appearance, or that they were unworthy of romantic love—but nearly all of them spoke to the way their experiences in educational theatre reinforced these messages. Fatphobic messages become more concrete and personal when reinforced through educational theatre, because, as participant Amy put it, “[her] personal body was also [her] actor body.” It is one thing to see a fat person made fun of on TV, or see someone your size portrayed as the unattractive “before” in a weight loss ad. It is another to be told that your own body—the one you live in every day and must inhabit for the rest of your life—is not a body someone could fall in love with onstage. That the way you look at eighteen, or fifteen, or twelve, is more believable as an old woman, a sight gag, or an adult sex-worker than a girl your own age. Many theatre educators may not realize that the visual shortcuts they rely on to communicate age, comedy, or sexuality are built on bias and capable of causing damage, but they are, and they do. We will never truly create safe creative communities, or produce well-rounded, confident, empathetic actors, until we stop engaging in practices that reflect our implicit biases and replicate social inequities in the classroom and onstage. Larger-bodied girls see fatphobic messages everywhere they go, but we, as theatre educators, can choose not to reinforce those

ideas. Theatre educators alone can never change the way every person thinks about fatness, but if we confront our biases, reexamine our practices, and work to create safe spaces for larger-bodied girls (and all marginalized performers), we can start to change the way people in our programs see larger bodies—and the way larger-bodied girls see themselves.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Kania, L. (2022). “Not the leading role of life”: Fatphobia in educational theatre & its impact on larger-bodied adolescent girls. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (1), pp. 34-47.

REFERENCES

Bacon, L. (2010). The HAES Manifesto. In *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* (pp. 274–281). appendix, BenBella Books. Retrieved November 2, 2021.

Cook, A. (2018). *Building Character: The Art and Science of Casting*. University of Michigan Press.

Donovan, R. (2019). “Must be heavyset”: Casting women, fat stigma, and Broadway bodies. *Journal of American Drama & Theatre*, *31* (3), 1–17.

Eaton, D. K., Lowry, R., Brener, N. D., Galuska, D. A., & Crosby, A. E. (2005). Associations of body mass index and perceived weight with suicide ideation and suicide attempts among US high school students. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 159* (6), 513–519.

Fardouly, J., & Vartanian, L. R. (2016). Social media and body image concerns: Current research and future directions. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *9*, 1–5.

Gaffney, S. (2021). *“Too Fat to Be Loved:” The Dark Truth of Fatphobia in Youth Theatre*. *OnStage Blog*. Retrieved October 12, 2021.

Gordon, A. (2021). *What we don’t talk about when we talk about fat*. Beacon Press.

Herrera, B. E. (2015). There is power in casting. *Youth Theatre Journal*, *29* (2), 146–151.

Hunger, J. M., Major, B., Blodorn, A., & Miller, C. T. (2015). Weighed down by stigma: How weight-based social identity threat contributes to weight gain and poor health. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 9* (6), 255–268.

Jester, J. G. (2009). Placing fat women center stage. In E. D. Rothblum &; S. Solovay (Eds.), *The Fat Studies Reader* (pp. 249–255). Essay, New York University Press.

Puhl, R. M. (2011). Weight stigmatization toward youth: A significant problem in need of societal solutions. *Childhood Obesity*, *7* (5), 359–363.

Puhl, R. M., Andreyeva, T., & Brownell, K. D. (2008). Perceptions of weight discrimination: Prevalence and comparison to race and gender discrimination in America. *International Journal of Obesity, 32* (6), 992–1000.

Puhl, R. M., & Brownell, K. D. (2001). Bias, discrimination, and obesity. *Obesity Research, 9*, 788–805.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage Publications.

Schafer, M. H., & Ferraro, K. F. (2011). The stigma of obesity: Does perceived weight discrimination affect identity and physical health? *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *74* (1), 76–97.

Strings, S. (2019). *Fearing the Black body: The racial origins of fat phobia*. New York University Press.

Voelker, D. K., Reel, J. J., & Greenleaf, C. (2015). Weight status and body image perceptions in adolescents: Current perspectives. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*, *6*, 149–158.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lucy Kania received her MFA in Theatre Education from Emerson College this May. She has an MA in Theatre Education from Emerson College and a BA in Drama from Tufts University, where she was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. She has worked as a teacher, director, and costume designer for schools, camps, and youth theatres in Massachusetts. Her research centers on bringing attention to bias in educational theatre and how we can build better, more affirming educational practices.

ArtsPraxis
Volume 9 Issue 1

Decentering the Theater Audience through Reaction Videos

JASON P. LOTZ
SUNY FARMINGDALE STATE COLLEGE

ABSTRACT

In this essay, I question the pedagogical validity of the class field trip to the theater and suggest ways reaction videos *might intervene to decenter the theater audience and the theater classroom. Building on Basil Bernstein's work on educational codes as well as the strategies of a postmodern education as outlined by Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux, I argue that the traditional theater experience galvanizes an elitist hierarchy antithetical to the purported goals of education. Tracing the popularity of reaction videos online, I then propose an assignment that fits with Jill Bourne's idea of a "radical visible pedagogy" purposed to repopulate the theater audience and expand accessibility to Shakespeare's work.*

In all my literature courses, I stress the need for collaborative interpretation; meaning exists in community, not in isolation. Nowhere is that premise more prominent than with dramatic literature. Theater depends on shared witness to realize its potential, and from an academic perspective, watching together provides normalizing cues that help students follow along with the play even when the language might be otherwise difficult to understand. And so, in the summer of 2020, as I was preparing to teach an undergraduate Shakespeare seminar via remote learning technology, I needed to find an alternative means of guiding student comprehension through collective witness. My search led me to *reaction videos*, a feature on social media that foregrounds critical consumption of various art forms. Students would still be isolated and watching productions on their own, but we would be able to magnify and share our emotional and physical responses to the scenes that moved us. As I devised a reaction video assignment, however, something else occurred to me: by moving outside the conventional theater experience, we were potentially hearing new voices. This was an issue of accessibility. Rather than replicate the theater experience, the reaction video assignment might decenter it.

TOWARDS A CREATIVE RESPONSIBILITY

While we spend a lot of time in classrooms reading Shakespeare's plays, there is no substitute for attending a live production. The difference between reading a play and watching a performance is like the difference between learning a second language from a textbook and living fully immersed in that language's culture. Laughter, tears, signs, gasps, applause take an active role in norming a student's critical reception of a performance. Such a shared emotional and conscious engagement within an audience of peers can be a most effective study guide. Shakespeare's language is difficult to read; it is much easier to follow a performance than bounce back and forth between the text and its footnotes. If our goal as educators is to conform our students' aesthetic sensibilities to our own sophisticated palates, then the typical theater experience is just the thing. To the extent a student learns when to laugh and when to cry based on the spectators around them, their access to the play depends on the discernment of the conventional

theatergoer. If, however, our learning objectives aim beyond simple acculturation towards social or political engagement, we must break up the homogeneity of the conventional theater audience and work towards individual creative responsibility.

What I mean by *creative responsibility* merits some attention. Creative responsibility is active and engaged citizenship, taking one's position in the world as both inheritance and legacy. It is what Basil Bernstein (2000) means when he writes, "The first condition [of an effective democracy] is that people must feel that they have a stake in society" (*Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity* p. xx). Education, then, must allow students to manage their stake in society; to do so, Bernstein argues, students pursue individual enhancement, which increases their access to the community, which in turn, provides the opportunity for participation.

The token field trip to the theater, it can be argued, operates on the second of those three levels—access to the community. As I have already discussed, watching a play alongside an informed audience can greatly enhance a student's understanding of what is happening in the play. That such understanding will be normed to the conditions of the conventional theater audience is perhaps an inevitable—even requisite—step in one's initiation into the group, i.e., mainstream culture. However, that inevitability is precisely what demands our attention as educators, or more specifically, postmodern educators who are interested in tracing the power structures that determine one's position within society. We would like our students to see that acculturation happening so that they can interrogate it and potentially reform it. These goals operate on the levels of individual enhancement and participation, by which, following Bernstein (2000), I mean practice that leads to outcomes (p. xxi).

When we take students to the theater, we reinforce the hierarchy between teacher and student, initiated and uninitiated. This is inevitable due to the power of our position and the power of an audience who can afford, or who knows the value of, going to the theater. Power, as Bernstein (2000) argues, always divides and maintains the lines of division (p. 5-6). He goes on to identify what we may call the two main errors in response to this reality: on one end of the pedagogical spectrum, the conservative or fundamentalist viewpoint holds Shakespeare to be a given standard within a set canon, one of the "Great Books" so to speak. Membership and all its privileges can be

earned by developing the right cognitive faculties, practicing the right linguistic skills, and accumulating the right knowledge. Erring on the other end is the elitist, who also touts a canon and demands a cultivation of taste *in order to be one who knows* Shakespeare or other established ideals of high culture[1] (p. 75-76). Both of these perspectives require the preservation of boundaries to prop up their identities. A third option exists, however; it does not eliminate the boundaries but traces the power that draws them.

For Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux (1991), attention to these structures of power is essential for a pedagogy that aims for radical inclusion as opposed to either a purposeful or passive reinforcement of those boundaries. Without analyzing the class trip to the theater and its role in norming our students' taste for high culture, we perpetuate the totemic social distinctions of class, race, gender, and any othered group. We leave unaltered the myth of essential aesthetic value. Postmodern criticism intervenes here to "[show] that the category of aesthetics presupposes a social hierarchy whose key is the description of exclusions, which are imbedded in the compositional conventions employed in the works, not only in the institutions of artistic dissemination" (*Postmodern Education* p. 17). In other words, the institutions that identify and disseminate what counts as artistic quality (such as academia and the theater) are naming as valuable the works that already include the codes of the very exclusion that grants the authority for that naming. Education, for Aronowitz and Giroux, must challenge those gatekeeping mechanisms in order to pursue "the possibilities of a radical democracy" (p. 59). Rather than teaching students to pass for members of the dominant culture, a postmodern education seeks to "challenge the established culture of power and authority" (p. 98).

Similarly, for Bernstein, enhancement and inclusion must be followed by at least the potential for social or political transformation. A

[1] In his study of taste and class, Pierre Bourdieu notes how the self-perpetuating bubble of "formal refinement" sometimes leaves the "uninitiated" feeling excluded from the higher cultural value (*Distinction*, 1984, p. 33). Rather than share knowledge, experts curate the distance between the ignorant and the knowing. Bourdieu refers to members of academia as "the holders of titles of cultural nobility" and compares them to aristocrats "whose 'being', defined by their fidelity to a lineage, an estate, a race, a past, a fatherland or a tradition, is irreducible to any 'doing', to any know-how or function." Without any practical or distinctive skill, they maintain their authority through membership; they "only have to be what they are" (p. 23).

student must not only be inducted into the group, they must also see that their participation in the group might effect its transformation. (Bernstein, 1996). Jill Bourne's concept of a "radical visible pedagogy" may serve as a launching point for my discussion of reaction videos and how they might fit a postmodern pedagogy. Following Bernstein, she iterates the need for learning in community and defines that type of socialization as "an induction into the wider collective, into historically formed ways of knowing and ideally into an understanding of the individual's positioning within, and potential contribution to transforming, the social and political" (p. 61). Her argument for a visible pedagogy combines both horizontal and vertical discourse (Bernstein's terms for the ways knowledge is organized, substantiated, and shared) as well as the attention to power emphasized by Aronowitz and Giroux. She distinguishes visible and invisible pedagogy as follows: "Visible pedagogy is explicit in acknowledging responsibility for taking up a position of authority; invisible pedagogy […] simply masks the inescapable authority of the teacher" (p. 65). A 'visible radical pedagogy' employs structured, authoritative instruction (vertical discourse) as well as collaborative and communal development (horizontal discourse); students learn in collaboration and through their social interactions, but they also need a directed approach to specialized knowledge or training. What is radical about Bourne's proposed pedagogy is what the vertical discourse purposes. Rather than convert students to "middle-class cultural norms," the goal is "to develop ways of analysing the world and their own position in society, and to 'voice themselves', using—and in the process perhaps transforming—all the discourses available to them" (p. 73). Key to this pedagogy is its visibility, which allows the authority (of teacher or theater audience) to be examined, and its inclusion of student voices, which provides the possibility for participation, in Bernstein's sense of the word.

Reaction videos gives us the opportunity to change the theater audience, to move outside the box of the traditional theatergoer, and highlight the ways our students interact with established voices of authority even as they create their own.

WHAT ARE REACTION VIDEOS?

A reaction video is a performance of conspicuous consumption.[2] Often in picture-in-picture format, these videos record both the original performance and the faces of the persons reacting. On YouTube, these videos range from parasitic attempts to leech popularity from someone else's work to informed taste-making. The best videos know they are curating taste, establishing a relationship between consuming and creating. They are hype with substance, showing us what is good and telling us why.

Early versions of the reaction video genre relied almost exclusively on shock and surprise; they depended on the reveal, the moment of first-time encounter. These reaction videos aimed to capture authentic emotional responses to various stimuli including gross-out videos, epic plot twists in movies or television series, unexpected reunions with distant family members, and the like. Sam Anderson, writing *The New York Times Magazine* in 2011, describes a viral video of a young boy watching the famous moment at the end of *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* when Darth Vader is revealed as Luke Skywalker's father. Part of the interest in watching that young boy's reaction, Anderson argues, comes from a desire to relive the wonder of our own moments of epiphany. "In a culture defined by knowingness and ironic distance, genuine surprise is increasingly rare—a spiritual luxury that brings us close to something ancient," Anderson writes. "Watching a reaction video is a way of vicariously recapturing primary experience." To feel again, sympathetically, what it felt like to learn Luke Skywalker's true parentage is to remember one's innocence—or so goes that particular theory of reaction videos.

In 2013, a new iteration of the reaction video formed around the popularity of HBO's *Game of Thrones*, a show notorious for its tendency to almost sadistically toy with its fanbase by killing off some of the shows most beloved characters. What gave this trend its particular force was the intersection of fans of George R. R. Martin's original fiction and those

[2] A concept theorized by the social economist Thorsten Veblen, whose study of the emerging leisure class in the late 19th and early 20th century draws attention to the ways prestige and power encircle and promote themselves in a capitalist society. Conspicuous consumption of luxury goods implies a prestige beyond the economic rank of one's bank account or assets. Such consumption applies also to art, literature, and other symbols of high culture. To have good taste, as it were, is to substantiate one's superiority over one's neighbors.

who only watched the adapted television series. So, on the evening of June 2, 2013, as screens were lighting up for the ninth episode of season three, other screens were preparing to capture the inevitable horror of those who did not see it—that is, "The Red Wedding"—coming. For nearly a year after the episode aired, social media gave us voyeuristic access to couches and living rooms around the world. Laura Hudson, in an article for *Wired*, weighs in on the popularity of the GOT reaction videos, noting "an element of both hazing and fraternity" in them. In watching the reactions of others, we see ourselves—that it is normal to be moved by the spectacle, that we are not alone. As Anderson writes in his earlier article, somewhat reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche's take on Greek tragedy, the experience of watching people watching things gives us "that ego-dissolving bliss of merging with the ultimate source of everything."[3] In shared witness, we find the bonds of community. Such is the ecstasy of theater that we tap into in watching others react to the same stimuli that move us.

Newer iterations of the reaction video genre show a much clearer production of taste. Whereas early reaction videos aimed to register only the basest emotional reactions, this newer evolution actively engages the politics of conspicuous consumption. Perhaps the most popular of these videos center on listening to songs for the first time. A YouTuber will pull up a music video and film themselves reacting to what they hear and see. Often the videos feature newly released music or songs by less-known artists, but the music-reaction genre gained mainstream publicity in 2020 after twinsthenewtrend, the username for brothers Tim and Fred Williams, racked up millions of views for their reactions to hearing Phil Collins' "In the Air Tonight" for the first time. The aftermath not only ballooned sales of Collins' song but also saw the twins interviewed by Barack Obama and several major media outlets. It was a surprise, mutually beneficial intersection of consumption and creation. *Rolling Stone* writer Jonathan Bernstein describes the phenomenon as follows: "As they've grown in popularity music-reaction channels have become unlikely, profound new arbiters of cultural authority. Much more than feel-good diversions, these videos often draw out foundational connections between seemingly opposed musical styles,

[3] As Nietzsche puts it, we hear in tragedy the music of underlying existence: "the fundamental knowledge of the oneness of everything existent, the conception of individuation as the primal cause of evil, and of art as the joyous hope that the spell of individuation may be broken in augury of a restored oneness" (*Birth of Tragedy* 74).

recontextualize older forms of music within a contemporary cultural framework, and toy with larger, loaded assumptions about genre, generation, and race." Here, in their capacity for revitalizing the rules of taste and their agitation of stereotypes, we begin to see the potential reaction videos might hold for theater and the classroom.

Reaction videos do not simply upend the mainstream audience; in many cases, they reinforce its tastes and values. In her article "The Racial Anxiety Lurking Behind Reaction Videos" (2020), Jody Rosen notes that despite the Williams brothers showing a sophisticated knowledge of music and musicality, a quick scroll through the comments reveals how often the experience of watching their reaction becomes an opportunity for people *in the know* "to cluck their tongues at clueless youths while confirming the supremacy of their own touchstones." Popular opinion rushes to embrace new members so long as they conform to the status quo. However, unlike the traditional theater experience, which hides the role of peer norming, reaction videos make it impossible to miss. If we want to diagnose the ways aesthetic value is positioned within frameworks of power and means, reaction videos are the x-ray we need.

REACTION VIDEOS IN THE CLASSROOM

Bringing reaction videos into the Shakespeare classroom allows us to recover and emphasize the spectator's role in the spectacle. It foregrounds both the emotional gut reaction and critical analysis necessary for *getting* Shakespeare, mixing both vertical and horizontal discourse in a way that challenges students to consider their own credibility in making claims about a performance while also engaging with an audience of their own. I argue that the reaction video assignment fits in with Bourne's concept of a radical visible pedagogy as well as the postmodern interest in assessing the composition and position in society of "electronically mediated popular culture" (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991). At the end of her essay, Bourne calls for pedagogy to "integrate subject knowledge and everyday knowledge" (p. 73), a statement that echoes Aronowitz and Giroux's two requirements for addressing popular culture: "[There] can be no cultural pedagogy without a cultural practice that both explores the possibilities of the form and brings out student's talents" (p. 165). Reaction videos allow students to take formal instruction and practice their developing expertise publicly, engaging the

potential for transforming the way a work of art is received and discussed.

When I first conceived of the reaction video assignment, my purpose was to increase student participation and facilitate some exposure to performances of the plays. At the height of the pandemic, our class met only by video conference, so we had no recourse to live performances or feasible way of watching a film together. Through my research of reaction videos, however, those goals, as well as the justification for the assignment, evolved. Not only would this serve to get my students talking, but it would also toggle the onus of classroom authority between vertical discourse (attention to plot, character, scene, themes, etc.) and horizontal (student responses in their own idiom and with their access to cultural values to their peers' reactions).

Before beginning the assignment, we analyze the form of reaction videos, identify their compositional elements, and consider the authority and credibility of the speakers in relation to the content they are judging. We discuss what counts as credible, authentic, good. We assess the value of entertainment in maintaining an audience, and we weigh in on the purpose of the reaction video—is the viewer listening to this music or watching this performance to see something new, or to see something they're "supposed to see"? Are they hyping or deriding the original work? And finally, how does the performance of the reaction video position the speaker in relation to these works of art and pop culture? Once we have established a critical sense of the form, I give them specific instructions for the assignment.

In my Shakespeare seminar, we typically study six plays. The class size is capped at 30. So, dividing the class into six groups gives us roughly five videos per play. I ask each student to create a reaction video to a scene (5 – 7 minutes long) of a filmed performance of a play. Each video must incorporate critical analysis of the performance's formal features, recontextualize class readings of the play, and show the student's 'gut reaction' to the scene. Each video must include an introduction that establishes the student's relative expertise or credibility and explains where the scene takes place in the play and a conclusion that summarizes their assessment of the performance and states whether they would recommend the rest of the performance.

While reaction videos are almost exclusively about documenting first-time or cold reactions to a video, I require my students to do a little more preparation to make sure they can provide some critical analysis

to go along with their emotional response. At the very least, they need to have read the play before choosing their scene. In this format, students are more likely to react on their own terms than they are when accompanied by the beleaguering gaze of their professor. Some students will still strive for "the reaction my teacher wants," but by encouraging curiosity rather than expectation, the reaction video assignment can open access points to a performance that more traditional discussions limit.

Two additional interventions are key to making this an effective teaching strategy—guided classroom discussion and public-facing distribution. One of the questions I like to include in our guided discussions of student reaction videos gets at two of Bernstein's educational rights, their individual enhancement and their membership in the community: *If I don't feel something when I watch this scene, whose fault is it? Is it the performance, or am I lacking?* By considering this, we are able to trace the situations of power and identify our own positions relative to Shakespeare's position in society. To attend to Bernstein's other condition for learning, participation, students need to know that what they say matters, has weight to affect the constellations of cultural value (Bernstein, 2000, p. xx). Moving towards this, I ask my students to post their reaction videos to YouTube. Most will restrict access to their videos, but the implication of an active role in taste-making is there.

More needs to be studied and written about reaction videos in popular culture, how they reinforce status quo and operate on popular stereotypes. They also, as with any form of electronic media, have enormous subversive potential that may lead to the active voicing of a new, more diverse audience.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Lotz, J. P. (2022). Decentering the theater audience through reaction videos. *ArtsPraxis, 9* (1), pp. 48-58.

REFERENCES

Anderson, S. (2011). Watching people watching people. *The New York Times Magazine.*

Aronowitz, S. A. and H. Giroux. (1991). *Postmodern education: Politics, culture & social criticism*. U of Minnesota P.

Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity*. Rowman & Littlefield. (Original work published 1996).

Bernstein, J. (2020). How YouTube reaction videos are changing the way we listen. *Rolling Stone*.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A cocial critique of the judgment of taste*. (R. Nice, Trans.). Harvard UP. (Original work published 1979)

Bourne, J. (2004). Framing talk: Towards a 'radical visible pedagogy'. In J. Muller, B. Davies and A. Morais (Eds.), *Reading Bernstein, Researching Bernstein* (pp. 61-74). RoutledgeFalmer.

Hudson, L. (2014). What's behind our obsession with *Game of Thrones* reaction videos. Wired.

Nietzsche, F. (1967). *The birth of tragedy*. (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). Vintage Books. (Original work published 1872)

Rosen, J. (2020). The racial anxiety lurking behind reaction videos. *The New York Times Magazine*.

Veblen, T. (2009). *The theory of the leisure class*. Oxford UP. (Original work published 1899)

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jason Lotz is Assistant Professor of English and Humanities at SUNY Farmingdale State College, where he engages the means and motives of global citizenship through courses in world literature, poetry, and composition. His Ph.D. in Comparative Literature is from Purdue University. Dr. Lotz's research interests focus on the intersections of tragedy, narrative, and emotion within early modern and postcolonial literature.