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ARTSPRAXIS

Emphasizing critical analysis of the arts in society.

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ArtsPraxis Volume 8, Issue 2 looked to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice. This call for papers was released in conjunction with the publication of ArtsPraxis Volume 8, Issue 1. The submission deadline for Volume 8, Issue 2 was September 1, 2021.

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 Youth Theatre (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.

Reviewing Procedures

Each article was sent to two members of the editorial board. 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.

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Cover image from NYU's Program in Educational Theatre production of *Here, All Dwell Free*, a virtually produced and pre-recorded musical adaptation of *The Handless Maiden*, directed in 2021 by Amy Cordileone.

ARTSPRAXIS

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Editorial: Communing with the Ancestors

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In spring 2021, I was invited to speak to undergraduate students in the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU Steinhardt. The event was framed as part of a series of Q/A sessions with individual faculty members, giving the undergraduates an opportunity to get to know us better—focused primarily on our individual journeys from undergraduate students to our current professional roles. Midway through the discussion, a student asked me how I overcame my imposter syndrome. Conceived by Clance and Imes (1978), the imposter syndrome denotes "the psychological experience of phoniness and inability to internalize successful accomplishments despite objective evidence of worthy achievements" (Levesque, 2018). I thought for a moment before responding to the question, as I hadn't necessarily realized until then the degree to which the fog of being an imposter had lifted. For many years, I struggled with this—as I'm sure many of you have as well—and I recall it being a pervasive presence each time I stepped into a classroom as an educator, a workshop space as the facilitator or director, or an auditorium for a professional presentation. And of late, that had fallen away. I told them that it wasn't

any particular action or practice that brought this about; rather, with time and experience, I'd grown to realize that there wasn't an authority for me to turn to—no one was coming to save my curriculum, facilitate my workshop, write my book chapter, or co-direct the show. And no one had to save me—I was already doing all of this without much professional support—and there was no shame in owning my accomplishments.

For the past year, I have been engaged in dialogue with partners at NYU, the Educational Theatre Association (EDTA), and the American Alliance for Theatre & Education (AATE) about how to reimagine scholarship in our field such that the diversity of personal and professional experience is better reflected in our scholarly output. Looking to *ArtsPraxis,* it is notable that we've already been operating in this new paradigm. While most of our authors are associated with colleges and universities, nearly all are practitioners—and the authors who are not from the academy are either affiliated with community arts organizations and schools or they are independent teaching artists. However, a cursory overview of the professional affiliations of authors in our peer publications suggests that there is much work to do in order to reshape the paradigm across the field. Beyond professional diversity, we must also consider the limited racial, ethnic, and economic diversity among our authors—no doubt, reflective of the same lack of diversity across the field.

In this effort towards diversifying the professional affiliations of authors, we must also confront this imposter syndrome. You alone are the expert in your experience as a facilitator, educator, artist, lecturer—or whatever moniker you've adopted for your professional life. I will begin a discussion about the mechanics of how to share your work in professional settings later in this editorial, but before we get to that layer, we must first confront this insidious syndrome head on. Returning to this question some 9-months after the students asked me about it, I am interested in the foundations of this syndrome in my own life. *What about my life and experience would make me susceptible to identifying as an imposter?* As a theatre practitioner and writer, I am deeply invested in narrative—those narratives we tell others and those we tell ourselves. In light of that interest and the desire to unpack my own vulnerabilities, I invite you to join me in an investigation of some family history.

ANCESTRAL NARRATIVES

Bernice was an oak of a woman, firmly grounded and unmovable but for the Holy Spirit catching hold of her. Black oak. Never loud, her physical presence alone negated any need for verbosity. At more than 6 feet tall, the only person my younger self knew to be taller than she was my father, the youngest of her four children. For seven years, my family lived in the garden level of her brownstone in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn. However, soon after my birth, we moved some 40 miles east to the suburban escape of Long Island. We visited my grandparents every couple of months, and though Bernice was an ever-present character in the unfolding drama of my life, I knew her only as that steady oak.

She was a maestro in the kitchen, ever vigilant before the mahogany stove at the rear of the railroad-style first-floor apartment. The dining table set with gold-rimmed china might display serving bowls filled to over-flowing, and yet some neck-bones or pigs' feet would still simmer away in the kitchen. Like my childhood home, there was the primary meal for the family and the secondary meal for the husband who might turn up at any moment from getting "a taste" of liquor on his often-delayed return to the home. And yet, his favorites would be ready for his "I'll be there when I get there." She'd taught this trick well to my mother, who spent many-a-day toiling in just that same manner.

But, Bernice. "Lordy, Lordy," she would often say. A warm toothy smile with a glint of gold was there to greet you when you arrived. A table to be set, silverware to put out, endless dishes to be washed. I think back on my grandfather kicking back in a sunken armchair rattling on about some so-and-so running about back in the woods in the old days, trying to escape the law. At some point, Bernie might holler—he always called her Bernie—Bernie might holler at him to go down to the corner store to get this or that—and he'd talk back at her like a child. But Bernie didn't take no shit—so she'd hustle him up out of that chair and through the front door without even looking up from her simmering pots on the stove some 20 feet away. This was her power and she was our people.

In late 1989, her church threw her a going-away party. She and my grandfather had recently purchased a house in Orangeburg, South Carolina and after many decades of service at the church, they wanted to give her a proper send-off. My family had peered through a window

into this other life of my grandmother once before. Just a few years prior, the church raised funds to sponsor Bernice on a trip to the holy land, where should could walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. My immediate family were church-going Catholics, so we had a very rigid sense of what church was like—and that first visit to a Pentecostal wonderland was altogether disquieting. *The congregation could talk out of turn to praise Jesus? You could stand, raise your hand in the air, and sway to the unheard rhythm of the Spirit whenever it moved you—even if everyone else was seated?* But in 1989, this was a return visit. We were no longer naïve to this approach to praise. But on this second visit, we were treated to another level. The pastor extolled the virtues of Mother Jones (*mother, did he say?*). He glorified her in name and deed for all that she had given to their congregation and spoke with earnest hope of the gift that God would bring to this new chapter in the life of Mother Jones and her dear husband as they went home to Orangeburg.

There were many questions—many images that needed unpacking as they overwhelmed my youthful imagination. But whatever images the pastor may have conjured through his words, it was the actions that lit my mind aflame. For, as Bernice was so overwhelmed with the possibility that God had bestowed upon her, the Holy Spirit got hold of her. “Amen,” might be shouted from one corner. “Praise His name,” from another. But this was child’s play when compared to the outward display of spirit that beset my grandmother. All at once, she was up and down the aisle, arms flailing. I don’t know for sure if I’d heard that people sometimes speak in tongues when God inspires them so, and yet here it was before me.

Following the service, we went downstairs for a repast—just as we had on our previous visit to the church. But this meal came at a much higher cost. To my young eyes, my grandmother had crossed over—she was recast as someone entirely unknown and perhaps unknowable to me. *What had just happened? Should I un-see what I had seen? Who was this Mother Jones?*

What I know now that I could not comprehend then was that this Mother Jones was the same sturdy oak that she had always been. But she was not tethered to the kitchen of my experience—she had strong roots, and it would take many decades for me to excavate their depths.

Bernie was known throughout that part of Orangeburg County for being the hardest worker. At sun-up, there was a prime directive: get to the fields. Breakfast was fried up in a skillet and you were out the door before you knew it. To young eyes, the cotton fields of Orangeburg were a heavy burden. It took years to build up calluses enough to protect tender fingers from slashes by the unforgivingly razor-sharp spikes on the tendrils of the storied crop. And yet, the tender fingers were at the ready when Bernie paraded them to the front. Raine, Junior, Harriett, and Piggy were her able minions ready to sacrifice their fingerprints in service of the family.

Burlap sheets were set to the side of the field—one per family. For some cotton pickers, they might well be a family of one—ready to make their own if they could just pick enough of that wonderful stuff. But this was not Bernie's way. Well-known as she might be for the haul that she alone could bring, but that was not enough to manifest the wonder that she knew her work and God's providence could bring. So her four children were there beside her in the field. Each had a sack slung around their shoulder to catch each boll as they pulled it from the endless sea of plants. There was an order and a rhythm—the mantra: leave no boll untouched—and curse you if you dared damage one stem of the precious providers. Fill your sack and carry it back out to the burlap sheet to add to the mountain of accomplishment that Bernie was building, then right back to your spot on the line to embark on your third or fourth contribution.

When the day was done, Bernie would get the children to help tie up the ends of their burlap sheet so she could carry it off to the truck. There, it would be weighed and tabulated towards their week's earnings. Never mind the unscrupulous wanderer who might have taken a pound or two off the top to add to his pitiful haul when no one else was looking. These were simpler times.

When free moments arrived, the children would run and play. And Bernie, she had game all her own. "Piggy, get in here and get this titty so you can get yourself to bed!" The mortified 5-year-old version of he who would one day be called my father would end the chasing of some neighbor's girl and creep his way back to his momma. Simpler times for each sapling of this fully-grown—but not yet great—oak.

———————

“Screaming Jesus” was her nickname for my younger brother Jason, whose penchant for crying and waling still reign unparalleled in the book of life. Dear Tanya, an older sister of mine, will forever and always be “Motor Mouth” as she was known to “let her mouth run a-mile-a-minute.” These missives were cast from a proprietor whose shop was just about as far afield from Orangeburg as one might possibly be. These were the nicknames of Doris, a city mouse to Bernice’s country mouse—born and raised in the pre-rustbelt cities of Central New York along the not-yet-purposeless Erie Canal.

By the time 1989 rolled around, Doris was a fading smile. She’d passed away the year before at only 62 years of age. And in the starkest divergence imaginable, whereas Bernice was a physically towering presence, Doris was, in a word, frail. When I look at family photos from just a few years before my birth, Doris was in fact just as stout as Bernice. But by the time I came along, all that strength had faded, displaced by the irreversible vestiges of a childhood bout of rheumatic fever. So I never knew her otherwise and as she was only present for the first eight years of my life, there wasn’t time for me to see many other sides to her.

But what did I see? Like Bernice, Doris too was a prayer warrior—but Catholic…familiar…silently reverent. We would go to church with her whenever we visited; when she visited us, she would come to our church, often present as we made our sacraments. There was a lot of smoking in her house—and to my eyes, smoking was a thing of leisure—sitting and smoking. Smoking at the kitchen table where meals were generally served and card games could be counted on. Smoking at the dining table which was often awash in the stuff of daily life—a room for smoking and conversation, but rarely for eating. Smoking in the living room, every possible seat taken with eyes focused sharply on the television. Music playing; game shows never far; delicate speaking and subtle displays of unbridled love. This world of leisure stood in sharp contrast to the work from dawn till dusk at Bernice’s house.

Delicate and frail. But like Bernice, Doris too had her life before I knew her. Her parents threatened to disown her if she married my

grandfather, Ed. She was a city girl and though a war hero, Ed's family were farmers. This disowning dance was replayed when my mom (Donna) told Doris and Ed that she was marrying my father—Black, and though a Marine veteran like my mom, a New Yorker (his family relocated to New York City in the 1960s—story for another time). No doubt, my dad's cotton-picking youth allowed him to forge a kinship with Ed, but Doris remained skeptical.

In 1969, Donna was enlisted in the Marine Corps, stationed in Albany, Georgia at the Marine Corps Supply Center. On the evening of September 7, a male Marine made a pass at her just outside of the women's barracks. As she was unwelcoming of his advances, he slapped her in the face. Understandably shaken-up, Donna entered the barracks and called Doris to tell her all that had happened.

"You have to report this," Doris counseled her.

"But I can't, mom."

"Why can't you?"

"Because he was Black—and I don't want them to think I'm prejudiced," Donna replied.

"That's absurd. What about the other women? If you don't report this, he might do it again."

Doris had a point, but Donna was unmoved. This was 1969 and Donna knew well what a white woman accusing a Black man would mean in Georgia—and she was not going to have any part of that.

Two days later, with Donna remaining steadfast in her silence, Doris had had enough. On the most delicate, powder-blue stationary with pink-floral embellishments, Doris got to work.

Dear Madam,

Re. Private Donna M. Cole

I received a phone call from a very upset girl, my daughter. She related an incident that had taken place the night before, September 7, in which a man—Marine, I presume—not only harassed her but struck her, after which she ran into the barracks. From what Donna said, I imagined he was colored. She did not turn this in as I understand because of her own inner feelings, that this would give the impression she was prejudiced and perhaps incite a riot. I don't believe Donna can identify him. I fully

> understood Donna's viewpoint in the matter, but also tried to make her understand why this should be reported—not only for her welfare, but any other Woman Marine.
>
> My main concern is the welfare of my daughter. It certainly appears that these women are not given much if any protection. Isn't the barracks "off limits" for the men? And isn't this seen to at all times? Like Donna, I don't feel the stress should be entirely on identifying one man, but rather better security for the Women's Barracks and the women. Donna does not know I am writing you and no doubt would be quite upset if she knew. I know you will use your best judgement about telling her you heard from me.
>
> Perhaps you can inform me more about this matter and what has been done about it. I certainly hope no further incidents take place, such as this compelling me to notify my congressman.
>
> Expecting to hear from you immediately before I carry this further at this time.
>
> I Remain
> Sincerely,
> Mrs. Doris Cole

Doris received a second phone call from Donna on September 12. The content of that call might well have been lost to time had Doris not received a response to her letter, this one dated September 17:

> Dear Mrs. Davis[1] Cole,
>
> Your letter of September 9 concerning your daughter, Private Donna M. Cole, was referred to me by the Commanding Officer of the Woman Marine Company.
>
> I was informed on September 8 of the incident in which Donna was allegedly slapped by an unknown assailant. I immediately ordered an investigation, and the results thereof will be

[1] Yes, Davis. But her name is Doris—information that would have been readily accessible in Donna's file.

forthcoming within the next few days.

With reference to your question concerning the security of the Woman Marine Barracks, this area is “off limits” at all times to male personnel, with the exception of a reception room downstairs where our Woman Marines may receive guests during the evenings and on weekends. Also, there is a duty watch posted inside the barracks for the safety and protection of the women within the barracks.

You may be assured that appropriate action concerning this incident will be taken based on the results of the investigation. Donna’s welfare, as well as that of all the Woman Marines on the Center, is the primary concern to me, and I do not condone any violation of their safety.

Your concern for your daughter is appreciated, and I hope that this information will serve to relieve your anxiety.

Sincerely Yours,
Major General[2]
U.S. Marine Corps

No, Major, this information did not relieve Doris’ anxiety. Rather, it inflamed her.

September 18, 1969

Dear Sir,

Enclosed is a copy of the letter mailed, registered mail, receipt requested to Donna’s C.O. I feel that enough time has lapsed for me to have had a reply from her. Captain is her name[3], I believe. This is name on the receipt I have from the registered letter.

I am not an individual trying to make trouble for her or the Marine Corps by contacting my congressman, but is this the action I have

[2] The Major’s name omitted to protect his anonymity.
[3] The Captain’s name omitted to protect her anonymity.

to take?

As I had stated in my letter to this C.O., I felt better protection should be afforded to these Women Marines—especially since there seems to be so much dissention among the colored troops there. I also had left Donna's knowing about my letter up to the Captain's judgement—

Friday, September 12, the date of my receipt from my letter, Donna called late in the day, very upset that the Captain had called her in stating she was drawing up Donna's papers for and recommending her for discharge because of obesity—and did Donna want counsel?

This to me was her reaction to my letter. "Rather than treat the problem at hand, get rid of the individual." Of course, I told Donna I had written her C.O.

I feel I do have a right to inquire about this problem of protection and now about the Captain's action of September 12.

Also, I would like to know why in 16 months of service Private Donna Cole has not been promoted. I am led to believe the Captain has told Donna's work section not to recommend her for promotion because she will do nothing about it. Isn't Private-to-Lance Corporal automatic after 4 months of service? How many of your men and women are not overweight between enlistments?

Hoping to hear from you before I forward both letters to my congressman.

I Remain
Sincerely,
Mrs. Doris Cole

Not yet done, Doris enlisted a family friend to write as well. This friend was a former Woman Marine herself and had encouraged Donna to enlist. The friend wrote,

> When I was in, a man would have been charged for attempted rape for even putting his hand on a girl. Now it seems he can walk away and laugh it off. What kind of justice is this?
>
> Instead of putting Private Cole up for discharge because of a ridiculous thing of obesity, why is she not be transferred to another base? Perhaps a base that is guarded and doesn't have men walking around where they do not belong?

Major General responded to the friend and revealed that aside from the specificity of the third paragraph, his correspondence was a form letter.

Cotton-pickers. Farmers. Country mouse. City mouse. White women on a letter writing campaign to ensure the safety of enlisted women. *Don't make me write my congressman.* Prayer Warriors. Strong. Durable. Frail. Oak. Multiple marginalized identities. Learning about who they were has been a journey to knowing who I am. *But what can I make of that? In what way does their experience speak to who I am today and how did this history engender my own experience of the imposter syndrome?*

As an undergraduate, I recall sitting in a seminar discussing the intersection between literature and science. A gluttonous peer—truly Dickensian in appearance—leaned back in his chair as if he owned the place. At a pivotal moment, he spewed forth, "Well, as we are all of a particular class, I think we have to just admit that some people are not as deserving as we are of what society has to offer us."

"Excuse me," I interjected, summoning my inner-Doris. "My mother works at a gas station convenience store and I'm working two jobs to support myself while I'm a student here. So can we not make assumptions about who 'we' are and what class we are from? Because I don't know anything about the world you are describing."

Sojourner Truth tells us,

> Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man—when I could get it—and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman?

I ain't a woman, but I know well the sting of assumptions about who I am and what I'm supposed to be—what I'm supposed to do. Child of a cotton picker. Grandchild of prayer warriors. Am I *supposed* to be a doctor? An educator? An editor? An author? A professor? Why should I persist in the belief that I am an imposter? I am all these identities and more—*I am enough*. My experience is enough, it has value, and it contributes to the conversation.

Your history defines you—but it need not *limit* you. Discourse in educational theatre is about how we as educators, artists, practitioners, students—whatever the label we take on—engage in the work. *What questions do we ask? What challenges do we face? How do we partner with our constituencies to create? What do we learn from our observations? And how do we share our learning with others?* You don't need a PhD to participate—you need only time, opportunity, and a willingness to share your experience.

WE TURN TO YOU

Whether you've embraced your inner-imposter, overcome that identity, or were fortunate to never have adopted it in the first place, it is now your turn to join us in our shared-endeavor. You too are enough and worthy of contributing to this dialogue. *But where might you begin?* I invite you to read, reflect, write, and submit.

Read

The first task for a would-be contributor is to read. Reading existing publications will keep you up-to-date on what is happening in the field and can then provide a lens through which you can view your own work and start to tease out the aspects of your practice that might be worth sharing. Additionally, reading will aid you in making sense of what kind of writing particular editors and publications will publish. You will soon identify that some publications may not welcome your voice—or they may be in need of the shift outlined at the outset of this editorial. Others might be in a state of transition, in which case looking to the publication website may offer additional context. Some suggested reading includes:

- *Applied Theatre Research*
- *Journal of Applied Arts and Health*
- *RiDE—Research in Drama Education: The Journal for Applied Performance*
- *Teaching Artist Journal*
- *Youth Theatre Journal*

Within recent issues of *ArtsPraxis*, consider:

- In Identity Matters. All. The. Time. Questions to Encourage Best Practices in Applied Theatre, practitioners Rebecca Brown Adelman, Trent Norman, and Saira Yasmin Hamidi explicate the ethical questions that artists and educators should consider when navigating social justice and anti-racist topics.
- In Supporting Students in Rural Regions in the Age of Distance Learning, Jessica Harris, founder and artistic director of Empowered Players, interrogates the lack of access and support creates inequitable outcomes for students in rural Fluvanna County, Virginia.
- In Theatre through a Computer: A Critical Reflection of Online Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Roxane E. Reynolds, a high school theatre teacher in Dallas, Texas, identifies struggles and success in the areas of communication, participation and overall emotional and mental health of students and teachers, due to the environmental shift from in person to online learning.
- In *Aesop's Idols*: Nationalization of Classic Texts to Create a Culture of Inclusion, community-engaged practitioner Kaitlin O.K. Jaskolski highlights the methods used to facilitate, assess and stratify learning outcomes in order to create a culture of inclusion as illustrated through case studies on devising and the performance of *Aesop's Idols* at Westside Inclusive Theatre Company in Houston, Texas.

I highlight these articles because of the positionality of the authors as practitioners rather than academics—so let the shape and tone of their writing serve to broaden your perspective on what is possible. Reading as many current publications as you can will provide essential information as you embark on this journey to authorship.

Reflect

Consider how you as a practitioner in educational theatre might begin to write about your work. Primarily, you as a would-be-writer must first align yourself as a reflective practitioner. Schön (1983) proposed this approach to thinking about reflecting-in-action:

> What features do I notice when I recognize this thing? What are the criteria by which I make this judgment? What procedures am I enacting when I perform this skill? How am I framing the problem that I am trying to solve? (p. 50)

At a theoretical level, you can imagine an educational theatre practitioner grappling with Schön's questions as they plan lessons or workshops in advance of work with their population, or even to frame in-the-moment decision making during the lesson, workshop, or rehearsal.

This process is an articulation of the *noticing* that practitioners may regularly engage in as they facilitate their work. In their writing about the gradual release of responsibility framework, Fisher and Frey (2021) define noticing as, "observing, listening, and using your knowledge of the content, of novice learners, and of their likely misunderstandings or partial understandings to help you formulate the questions, prompts, and cues you'll need to scaffold student learning" (pp. 37-38). This self-reflection tasks the facilitator with considering questions like:

- Are they getting it?
- What might I do differently if this isn't successful?
- How can I replicate my successes with another group?

By reflecting-in-action, the facilitator engages in an active process that requires them to coexist both inside and outside of the dramatic encounter: *I am facilitating the work while simultaneously critiquing the experience in service of improving my practice or solving a problem in the moment*.

Write

Though these approaches are intended to help a practitioner improve their own practice, any of this noticing could then be fodder for

academic writing and publication. *What did I encounter? What about that experience was novel? How did I respond? How did the participants respond? Why might this be meaningful to an outside reader?* The writing is then reflecting-*on*-action, actively looking back at what transpired in service of any number of forward-looking objectives—but first among these is how the writing can contribute to professional discourse.

One approach in that direction is to focus the writing around critique—be that:

- critique of the work described
- critique of an external paradigm that this work might disrupt
- critique of accepted practices in the field
- critique of traditional ideas about a population or approaches to working with a particular population

This attention to critique is integral to sharing the work with an outside audience because it provides significance. Naturally, that you chose to document the experience demonstrates that it was significant to you and/or your population, but the critique is what makes it significant to us. This might be conveyed through describing the context of your population, community, or some aspect of the field (perhaps through a brief, traditional literature review) and how a particular experience unfolded within that context. At times, knowledge or assumptions of the context are so pervasive that it might remain unstated; the work alone (as documented in the writing) is the critique—but the writer has considered that critique while preparing and presenting the manuscript.

This approach to academic writing can be deepened by following the action research paradigm.

> Teachers as action researchers apply the rigors of scientific inquiry in the context of their classroom and classroom experience in an attempt to improve teaching effectiveness. Because action research is conducted by classroom teachers, it serves as a vehicle through which teachers investigate issues of interest and then incorporate the results into their own planning and future teaching. (Parsons and Brown, 2002, p. 4)

The elements of the scientific method Parson and Brown adopt include

identifying the problem, reviewing the literature, stating the hypothesis, developing and implementing a design, data collection, and analysis (pp. 18-24). If you have experience in more traditional forms of qualitative and/or quantitative research, then this language is already familiar to you. If not, then you will observe in your reading that this approach closely aligns with practitioner-authored articles in many journals. Have a go at it to see if it feels right to you—but don't be intimidated by it.

Submit

Each publication will have a set criteria for the kinds of manuscripts they will consider publishing and it's important for prospective authors to identify this criteria and follow it when preparing a submission. These can include the kinds of manuscripts they accept, specific formats needed (sometimes meticulously detailed), deadlines (these are firm), and instructions for how to get the manuscript to the editor (often through an online submission platform). If you have questions about the submission guidelines or publication criteria, contact the journal or the editor—you should find correspondence information on their website. I doubt they will be willing to preview your manuscript as that's just not how this is done, but they should certainly be willing to answer your questions. And if they aren't willing to answer your questions, reconsider your interest in working with them—as all publishing should be a partnership. **A warning:** there are a number of predatory publications that will charge a fee to publish your work. That is not how academic publishing operates and you should avoid these publications. Some publications may require you to be a subscriber to publish with them. Though this is not ideal, it is more reasonable than you paying for them to publish your work.

I submitted my manuscript; now what?

Generally, the editor and/or members of the editorial board will give a cursory review of each submission: *Did the author follow all submission guidelines? Is this article aligned with the questions or themes for this issue?* An article might get rejected at this level for any number of reasons—but do not be put off—there may yet be another publication for which your manuscript is a better fit. That said, if your manuscript makes it beyond this initial review, it will then go for formal

peer review.

Peer review

Many would-be-authors are so intimidated by this mysterious process that they don't even attempt to write—let alone submit—a manuscript, but we need to dispel the fear. Peer review is a process whereby your peers in the field review and give critical feedback on your writing. They are well-versed in the conventions of that particular publication, so their advice is valuable in getting your work in its best shape for that publication and their readership.

But who are these peer reviewers? Often they are members of the editorial board of the publication—so get to Google and find out who those folks are and what their expertise is in the field. If this review suggests that there are folks on the board whose work aligns well with yours, know that you are in good hands. If, however, you see no reflection of work or experience in what you can uncover about those folks, know that their response to your work might reflect that discontinuity. Manuscripts can be rejected at the stage of peer review, but you will often get clear explanation for why they made that decision—and whether or not you might revise and resubmit, revise and submit elsewhere, or disregard their advice and submit elsewhere.

Most but not all peer review is a blind process. In a single-blind process (which is almost-universal), the author will not know who the exact reviewers were who gave feedback on the manuscript. In a double-blind process, the author will not know the identity of the reviewers **and** the reviewers will not know the author (all identifying information is removed from the manuscript). This is meant to ensure objectivity in the review process—but it also protects the authors from preferential treatment. Do not take anything personally, presume that the review is about the work and not at all about you, and be open to what transpires. You never know what doors might be open to your ideas unless you submit your work.

Revision and publication

If your work is accepted beyond peer review, you will be given a deadline by which to make the recommended changes to the manuscript and resubmit for final review. Each publication handles the mechanics of this a bit differently—so follow the instructions carefully

and contact the editor or publication if you have any questions. The deadline is set to be sure your work is ready in time for the publication date, so don't plan on extensions. I've come to be quite dispassionate about this process—the reviewers know the publication and audience better than I do, so I'll generally accede to whatever is asked of me provided that it does not compromise the integrity of my work. But you do you.

There is often, but not always, a publication contract of some kind. Be sure to complete that in time, as it gives permission to the journal to publish your work and outlines where and how you may share the work after publication. Some journals provide free copies to contributors; others make them available for purchase (and individual issues of academic journals can be very expensive—so investigate that in advance if having print copies to share is important to you).

Finally, celebrate your accomplishment!

There are many other permutations of how to approach academic writing, which can include partnering with researchers, co-authoring with other practitioners, and the like. Details of other approaches can be easily accessed and will likely become known to you as you investigate the existing literature, but it all starts with you making a conscious decision to participate in this dialogue. So, to you—the cotton picker, the farmer, the country mouse and city mouse, white women on your letter writing campaigns, prayer warrior—to the educators, the teaching artists, the directors and playwrights, the actors, the therapists—you, the strong, the durable, or the frail—this is your time to have your say. Set aside the imposter mindset and join us. *Don't make me write my congressperson.*

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, most of our diverse contributors have reflected on their practices with a range of age groups from different communities. **Gillian McNally** and **Amanda Rutter** ask: can theatre for the very young (TVY) dare to talk about prejudice and inclusion? In this first-ever U.S. study on TVY, the authors interrogate the impact a TVY play can have on children's understanding of prejudice and inclusion. As members of the education staff at About Face Youth Ensemble, **Lisa Siciliano** and **Mikael Burke** reflect on how they negotiated the theatre

company's growing commitment to youth mental health, traditional "in-the-room" devising practices, and the utilization of online technology. **Alex Ates**, director of theater at a boarding school in Pennsylvania, co-authors an article with his former students: **David Feng**, **Sam Hu**, and **Emily Zhang**. These recently-graduated Chinese-International high school students and their American theater teacher engage in reflective analysis on their digital verbatim performances of American presidential politicians.

Finally, speaking to the necessary evolution of systems and practices in educational theatre, university researchers **Matt Omasta** and **Aubrey Felty** respond to the urgent need for Theatres for Young Audiences companies to produce plays that share the stories and experiences of people of color and to ensure works by playwrights of color are produced regularly (in some ways, broadening the question posed by McNally and Rutter). This article draws on data from a comprehensive survey of artistic, business, and education leaders in the field to consider how it might inform the important discussions taking place in the field regarding equity and inclusion, especially those exploring race and anti-racism. An appendix follows the article, featuring Omasta and Felty's complete report from their survey of every professional Theatre for Young Audiences company affiliated with TYA/USA who shared information regarding a wide range of topics including season selection, finances, education programming, staff demographics, leader perceptions of quality TYA, and others.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 9, Issue 1) will focus on articles under our general headings (drama in education, applied theatre, and theatre for young audiences) looking to engage members of the Educational Theatre field who want to contribute to the ongoing dialogue. That issue will publish in mid-2022. Thereafter, look to the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU for the 2022 Forum on Humanities and the Arts and the Verbatim Performance Lab.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jonathan P. Jones, PhD is a graduate from the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University, where he earned both an M.A. and a Ph.D. He conducted his doctoral field research in fall 2013 and in spring of 2014 he completed his dissertation, *Drama Integration: Training Teachers to Use Process Drama in English Language Arts, Social Studies, and World Languages*. He received an additional M.A. in English at National University and his B.A. in Liberal Arts from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Jonathan is certified to teach English 6-12 in the state of California, where he taught Theatre and English for five years at North Hollywood High School and was honored with The Inspirational Educator Award by Universal Studios in 2006. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at

NYU Steinhardt. He serves on the editorial board for *Applied Theatre Research* and on the board of 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.

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Can Theatre for the Very Young Dare to Talk about Prejudice and Inclusion?

GILLIAN McNALLY

AMANDA RUTTER

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ABSTRACT

In 2021, students at the University of Northern Colorado performed a filmed version of the play Blue *by Annie Cusack Wood. This Theatre for the Young (TVY) piece asks audiences to look at themes of prejudice and inclusion for children under the age of five. In this first-ever U.S. study on TVY, the authors ask: what impact can a TVY play have on children's understanding of prejudice and inclusion? Through surveys to pre-school teachers, the authors document the social and emotional impact of the play on very young children and analyze the potential of artist-educator collaborations to discuss, reflect, and think deeply about serious social issues with very young children and break silos between different sectors of education with similar educational aspirations.*

As the field of Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) expands, artists are challenged with new ways to speak to the intelligence of the audience and balance age-appropriate material for children under the age of five. Lyn Gardner of *The Stage*, says,

> While young people are increasingly stepping up on issues including the environment, mental health and social justice—issues on which we adults have failed woefully—too much work made for young people remains timid in content and form....What are we trying so hard to protect our children from? And in protecting them, might we be damaging their ability to face up to the complexities of the world and difficulties they will face as the old certainties melt away? (2019)

While many TVY plays are age appropriate, creative, and entertaining, there are few that delve into challenging themes. In recent history, Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) in the U.S. has dedicated itself to the development of more complicated characters, plots, and themes for children five years and older. Given our current global and local challenges, now is a ripe opportunity to develop scripts that mirror the complexities of our world for TVY. Moreover, ninety percent of physical brain growth to eventual adult size occurs in the first five years of life, along with extensive neural connections, which is why the foundations of social skills such as empathy should be taught, emphasized, and fostered while young (Schiller, 2010).

This paper will explore how TVY in the U.S. can present challenging social content for children under the age of five. Professor Gillian McNally (Theatre Education) and Assistant Professor Dr. Amanda Rutter (Early Childhood Education) at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) worked together to produce and study how children comprehend prejudice and inclusion by attending the play *Blue* by Annie Cusick Wood. *Blue* explores an imaginary world where everything is blue. When a red sock appears, the characters are faced with the decision of if they should include a new color in their world. The character Sparkly Blue believes that the “blue” rule should always be upheld and that all other colors should be disposed of in their world. On the other hand, the character Inky Blue is filled with curiosity. He is delighted with the multiple colors that magically appear in their world.

At the climactic moment of the play, Sparkly Blue demands that Inky Blue leave because he will not obey the "blue" rules. These best friends almost lose their relationship because of the rules of exclusion. At the end of the play, Inky Blue returns with a cape filled with colorful socks and Sparkly Blue also embraces curiosity and acceptance of new colors. The play cleverly explores themes of inclusion, prejudice, and racism through metaphor. Together, this team of researchers will explore the question: *what impact can a TVY play have on children's understanding of prejudice and inclusion?*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Every other year, undergraduate theatre students from UNC tour a TYA play to the Denver and Northern Colorado community. In recent years, the increased state mandated testing makes it difficult for elementary schools to host a TYA play in the spring. Therefore, it was decided that the 2020 tour should target pre-school students, who are not subjected to state testing.

During the spring semesters of 2020 and 2021, UNC students enrolled in the *Theatre for Young Audiences Tour* course focused on the production of *Blue.* The play was directed by UNC undergraduate students Jasmine Middleton in 2020 and Rhiannon Parent for the filmed re-mount in 2021. Gillian McNally (researcher and co-author of this paper) served as the producer. Because of COVID-19, the play was professionally filmed and released to Early Childhood Centers, elementary schools, and for one public online performance in April 2021. Each of the seven Early Childhood Education (ECE) schools received a study guide for teachers and an invitation to participate in the study.

In our original plans to accompany the production of *Blue*, UNC Theatre Education students created a pre-and post-performance workshop designed specifically for ECE students. Because of COVID-19, these workshops could not occur. In the pre-performance workshop, a scenario much like the play, was created. ECE students were to be told that blue was the best and only color and then given paper socks to color only in blue. As students hung their blue socks on a laundry line, they were to be praised for their color choice. Next, a red sock appears, and the students have to problem solve whether to accept the new color, much like the characters in the play. In the post-

performance workshop, students had the opportunity to color socks again, but this time they could be any color. This activity would have sparked a larger discussion about race, inclusion, and prejudice as seen in *Blue.* When originally creating this study, we expected a larger impact on students because of the planned pre-and post-performance workshops. In previous TYA tours, the workshops were the place where students could reflect deeply on the performance. In 2021, we were not allowed to do in-person teaching in schools or childcare centers, and we believe this had a strong impact on the depth of understanding the more complex themes of prejudice and inclusion in *Blue.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past decade the importance of fostering strong social-emotional skills at young ages has increased significantly within the U.S. Research has demonstrated that the development of social-emotional competence during the first years of life leads to improved classroom behavior, resulting in decreased discipline referrals, as well as increased academic achievement (Hoffman, 2009). TVY has the opportunity, through engaging and interactive performances, to aid young children in the development of their social-emotional competence.

TVY is a relatively new art form in the TYA community in the U.S. The current literature and research describes productions, how they are made, and the theoretical underpinnings to the development of new work for very young children. There are only two articles about TVY in recent issues of *TYA Today*, the U.S.'s only dedicated publication to Theatre for Young Audiences. Lauren Smith documents the development of the play, *Gimme Please*, a TVY collaboration between the Australian PaperBoats platform and the Alliance Theatre (2019). *TYA Today* also published Lauren Jost's "Making Space for Babies," which examines the complicated process of developing new work for children 6 months to two years (2017).

Youth Theatre Journal, a scholarly refereed publication from the American Alliance for Theatre in Education, offers research in the field of drama and theatre for youth, and has two articles committed to TVY. Professors Adrienne Kapstein and Thalia R. Goldstein (2019) define TVY as, "a relatively new and growing area of performance practice

that focuses on works for children under the age of five" (p. 52). In a joint collaboration between the psychology and theatre departments at George Mason University, the professors first worked to overturn assumptions about children under five. Using David Kennedy's framework who,

> identifies the dominant Western cultural understanding of the child to be a "deficit model," in which the child is primarily defined as being not-an-adult. By extension, if children are seen as "incapable of actively contributing to societal production and change" (van de Water, 2012), any cultural offerings made explicitly for them are by association devalued and marginalized. Cementing the negative affiliations further, TYA in the U.S. has a long history of being used as a vehicle for moralistic, spiritual, and educational agendas (van de Water, 2012) giving it a reputation for being didactic and patronizing, removing it from the artistic realm and giving it value in only educational or social contexts. (p. 57)

As the teacher of the TYA Tour class, my first mission was to offer TYA scripts and readings that helped to overturn the negative "didactic and patronizing" stereotypes of the field as noted by the authors above.

Also in *Youth Theatre Journal,* Scottish author Ben Fletcher-Watson of the University of Edinburg, sought to

> contribute to the field by proposing an explanatory theory … as the theory of equality and artistic integrity. The development of the theory from two core categories is explained, and its relevance and theoretical contribution are then considered. The theory may offer a new framework for examining TEY as a set of uniquely sensitive practices. (2018)

The grounded theory practice in this study collected data from Theatre for the Early Years (Scottish term for TVY) practitioners. Fletcher-Watson noted a shifting view of artists in the TVY discipline to a more equal, challenging art form.

Other published pieces such as Alex Ates's "What You, Theatremaker, Can Learn from Theatre for the Very Young" (*HowlRound,* 2019) and Emma Halpern's "Start 'em Early: Theatre for

the Very Young Brings in New Audiences" (*American Theatre,* 2017) describe this relatively new artform in theatre in the U.S. These articles attempt to capture the honesty, curiosity, and often joy expressed by very young audiences and how the artists invite these young people in with humor, movement, music, movement, and story. Our study is significant because it is the first attempt in the U.S. to measure the impact of theatre on children under the age of five.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was grounded in the theoretical lenses of Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Gloria Ladson-Billings' culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), the Pyramid Model of social-emotional development, and Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. In Paulo Freire's seminal work, "*Pedagogy of the Oppressed"* (1970)*,* he explores the banking model of education (teachers directly imparting knowledge to students) as well as the relationship between the oppressed and oppressors. More specifically, Freire contends that the teacher's role is to stimulate learning and students should have opportunities to actively participate in the learning process. Through participatory engagement and critical thinking that incorporates cultures and language, students should learn to think critically about power systems in society.

During the 1990's, Gloria Ladson-Billings reflected, "[I]nstead of asking what was wrong with African American learners, I dared to ask what was right with these students and what happened in the classrooms of teachers who seemed to experience pedagogical success with them" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 74). She coined the term culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) which is grounded in three domains. CRP highlights the importance of cultural competence beyond a superficial level, helping students celebrate and appreciate their own culture as well gaining knowledge in the cultures of others, and sociopolitical consciousness, applying knowledge beyond classroom walls to engage in solving real-world problems. Most importantly, CRP involves challenging students' mindsets. Students are not to merely parrot information but to critically analyze their learning and perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

The Pyramid Model supports the development of social-emotional competence in young children through evidence-based tiered interventions. The basis for this model is the importance of positive and supportive relationships between young children and their teachers,

which is key to effective teaching within the early years and beyond. Further, this model argues that the establishment of vital social-emotional skills leads to better self-regulation and academic engagement as children progress through school (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003).

The social cognitive theory purports that learning takes place in social contexts where there is reciprocal interaction between the person, environment, and behavior. Moreover, people can learn behaviors through observation, modeling, and motivation. For example, the bobo doll experiment demonstrated that imitation behaviors can be reinforced or punished through observation and that models are important for the socialization of children (Fryling, Johnston, & Hayes, 2011).

While each theory is unique, all four theories emphasize the importance of shared learning between teachers and students to foster deep and authentic learning experiences which result in the development of vital social and critical thinking skills.

METHODOLOGY

This mixed methods study was conducted in the Denver and Northern Colorado region. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from participants via Qualtrics surveys consisting of a combination of 5-point Likert rating scale and open-ended questions. Both Likert rating scale and open-ended questions were utilized to assist the research team in correlating data findings. The pre-performance survey consisted of 32 questions total, 8 demographic, 11 5-point Likert rating, and 13 open-ended questions that assessed preschool teachers' perspectives of student's current social skills. The post-performance survey consisted of 34 questions total, 8 demographic, 10 5-point Likert rating, and 16 open-ended questions that assessed teachers' perspectives of children's understanding of prejudice and inclusion and their changes in social-emotional classroom behaviors. The pre- and post-performance survey quantitative data were analyzed via two-tailed paired t-tests conducted within SPSS software. Two-tailed t-tests were selected since the researchers left their research question more open-ended seeking to determine what impact TVY may have on children's social-emotional skills and understanding of prejudice and inclusion. Results from the paired t-test are in table 1.0.

The pre- and post-performance qualitative data was analyzed separately through thematic content analysis, or analytic induction, where each researcher coded and analyzed the qualitative data for themes and then discussed the emergent themes to arrive at a consensus. The themes that emerged from the analytic induction are discussed in the results section of the paper.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the performance was filmed in February of 2021 and a Vimeo link was provided to schools during the month of April 2021. Educators invited to participate in this study included four Early Childhood Centers and three elementary schools. Data was collected via surveys prior to and following the filmed performance. In the original design of the study, select teachers would be interviewed to get detailed, nuanced observations of a live theatre performance. Because of an overload on teachers due to COVID-19 stress, this step could not be completed in 2021.

RESULTS

A total of 10 participants completed some or all of the pre-performance survey, while 6 participants completed some or all of the post-performance survey. All teachers identified as female. 90% identified racially as white and 10% identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native. Nine teachers earned a BA degree and one earned a master's degree. Two participants were from Denver Public Schools (Place Bridge Academy and Montclair Elementary) that have large African immigrant and refugee populations. Montclair Elementary has a population of 42.8% African American, 28.8% Hispanic, and 19% white. Place Bridge Academy is 35.4% Hispanic, 30.3% African American, 20.7% Asian. The other teachers were from Gilcrest Elementary School in rural Northern Colorado. 69.1% of these students identify as Hispanic (Schooldigger.com). No teachers from Greeley, Colorado, the home of UNC, responded.

In order to add additional context to the quantitative data, the qualitative survey data will be explored first.

Pre-survey

The researchers first obtained an understanding of what the social and emotional regulation and behaviors were like in the classroom

environment prior to the observation of the *Blue* performance. Four overarching themes emerged from the qualitative pre-performance survey data. These themes included: developmentally appropriate student behavior; peace-keeping and social-emotional learning; children are aware of differences; and day-to-day and specialized classroom activities.

In regards to developmentally appropriate student behavior, teachers indicated that students: regulate their emotions decently; share well; have occasional conflicts, yet resolve conflicts poorly needing teacher intervention often; are generally not aggressive, yet still touch each other inappropriately (pushing was most cited, along with kicking and hitting), occasionally say mean or negative comments towards each other; only somewhat understand the feelings of their classmates; and somewhat understand concepts like prejudice and inclusion.

On a typical day, teachers indicated that they redirect behavior an average a dozen times per day (ranges were 3-20 times per day). Behaviors that were redirected included: talking (including loudly, blurts), being off task, and unkind exchanges. Sharing was reported as the most typical conflict observed by teachers. To foster peace-keeping and social-emotional learning, teachers encouraged students to solve conflicts through utilizing “peacekeeper” language (ie: When you _____, I feel_____.). When students demonstrated aggression, teachers provided a calm down space and offered breathing techniques. Teachers indicated that children are aware of differences. More specifically students do notice similarities and differences in gender, skin color, and language. Yet, most class conflict comments did not pertain to gender, race, or ethnicity, but occasionally this behavior occurred. Two responders reported comments such as “boys don’t wear headbands” and “all ‘Hispanic’ people are dumb.”

Teachers' day-to-day and specialized classroom activities related to prejudice and inclusion involved diverse songs and literature, and the wrinkled heart activity. In the wrinkled heart activity, a paper heart is passed around the room and folded after each person describes a time they have been hurt. Then, when the students describe healing behaviors, the heart is unfolded. Almost all of the teachers reported doing work on topics about race only during Black History Month and MLK Day. Two teachers shared that these discussions on race focus on the similar theme that “everyone is equal or the same.”

Post Survey

Within a two-week period following the *Blue* performance was observed, participants reflected on the changes in social and emotional regulation and behaviors in the classroom environment. Three themes emerged from the qualitative post-performance survey data. These themes included: active engagement; empathy and peacekeeping; and discussion and dramatization. In relation to active engagement, teachers revealed that students were interested and engaged in the video performance of *Blue*. Within the open-ended responses, teachers shared that they observed strong gaze, inquisitive faces that changed as the tone of scenes changed, smiling, laughing, giggling, and had focused attention throughout the performance.

In terms of the impact on behavior in classrooms and empathy and peacekeeping, instances of redirecting students' behavior was noted to still be roughly the same after seeing *Blue*. However, teachers observed that students were sharing better, and demonstrating more empathy with their words and expression of feelings. Responders also detected fewer instances of aggression (gentler hands) and the ability to quickly ask for help from the teacher. One teacher remarked that touching increased in their classroom after seeing the production.

In relation to discussions and dramatization, after the performance, students incorporated *Blue* into the classroom through discussions and the "sock monster" game from the play into dramatic play. Montclair Elementary School was able to invite the director and the actors to a Zoom class session to reflect on the play. Rhiannon Parent, the director, shared that the students had many questions for the artistic team in this meeting. Unfortunately, qualitative data from this meeting was not collected as a part of the research study. One teacher specifically related *Blue* back to Martin Luther King Jr., and other teachers envisioned concepts from *Blue* to pair with Black History Month activities.

Comparing Pre-Survey and Post-Survey Quantitative Results:

Eight Likert scale questions between the pre- and post-performance surveys were paired. Most of the results did not show statistical significance, however, three points of data did show statistical significance. The results from the paired t-tests are in table 1 below.

Qualtrics Survey Pre- and Post-survey Paired Questions	***p* value**
How well do the children in your class regulate their social-emotional skills? /Following the performance...	0.024
How well do the children in your classroom work/play and share with their classmates? /Following the performance...	0.591
How often do conflicts arise between children in your classroom? /Following the performance...	0.104
How well do the children in your classroom resolve conflicts with their classmates? /Following the performance...	0.025
How often do conflicts within the classroom require teacher intervention? /Following the performance...	0.081
How often do the children in your classroom resolve problems with their peers without becoming aggressive? /Following the performance...	0.193
How often do children in your class touch classmates in a manner that is inappropriate? /Following the performance…	0.096
How often do children in your classroom say mean or negative comments towards each other? /Following the performance...	0.726
How well do the children in your classroom understand the concepts of prejudice and inclusion? /Following the performance...	0.045

Table 1: Pre- and Post-survey p Values

According to statistical analysis, after observing the *Blue* performance, children were reported to significantly regulate their social-emotional skills better, resolve conflicts with classmates better, and better understand the concepts of prejudice and inclusion. When analyzing the *p*-values and means of the survey data and accounting for open-ended responses, fewer conflicts between children were reported, independent conflict resolution between children increased

and the need for teacher intervention decreased, and aggressive behaviors including mean comments between children decreased. However, interestingly, teachers did report children having an increase in the struggle to share materials, and that inappropriate touching, such as pushing, did increase. The researchers were not able to delve further into exploring why these two areas increased, however, they hypothesize that children's interactive dramatic play behaviors increased in a time in which social distancing was in high effect in child care centers and schools.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the performance was delivered in an online video rather than live performance at the participating schools. Normally, UNC Theatre Education students visit each school to facilitate a pre- and post-performance workshop to provide more context, analysis, and understanding of the production. Visitors were not allowed in schools during the time of the study and the essential in-person contact hours with artists and teachers could not occur. Additionally, in the recording, the performers wore masks and socially distanced due to COVID-19 restrictions. All of these factors impacted the social-interaction aspect of the performance. We hypothesize that the lack of face-to-face presence and social interaction with the audience members had an impact on the overall survey results. Additionally, the population size for the study was small due to teachers being increasingly overwhelmed while teaching during COVID-19. Due to the small response rate, the survey results were through the lens of mostly white female teachers. We have plans to replicate this study in the Spring of 2023. Our hopes are that more in-person contact hours with pre-service teachers and artists will create a more meaningful, rich experience for the students.

While this study consisted of a small sample size and there were only a few statistically significant results that indicated that the *Blue* performance impacted the children's social-emotional skills, the results and positive remarks from teachers about the video performance should not be disregarded. The researchers strongly encourage future collaborations between TVY artists/scholars and ECE educators/ scholars to build thoughtful artistic work and inquisitive research.

An additional issue that emerged when exploring the qualitative

data of this study was the recognition that far too often, sectors related to the field of education are siloed. Yet, goals within educational entities, for example in this case preschool and TVY, are in fact similar. In preschool, social and emotional skills and teacher-child interactions are the backbone to the development of the whole child across milestones and developmental domains (physical, cognitive, language and literacy, social and emotional). These social and emotional skills built in the forming years lay the foundation for successful school participation and further development, particularly cognitive development and critical thinking skills. In TVY, creating an immersive, engaging experience that is beyond that of mere entertainment, taps into emotions and fosters critical thinking skills. It is easy to see how these fields could and should collaborate towards the common goal of building social and emotional and critical thinking skills. As a team of researchers, we have been pleasantly surprised to see how our goals as artists and educators intersect.

To foster social, emotional, and critical thinking skills about topics like prejudice and inclusion for young children, teachers need a variety of resources beyond children's literature and brief discussions on Martin Luther King Jr. Day or Black History Month. To disrupt what Freire calls, the "banking model," where teachers deposit information into students and their job is to simply regurgitate the information back, ECE teachers need to engage in complex discussions about the issue of race and prejudice. TVY can be such a resource. In relation to the Social Cognitive Theory, TVY can provide an imitative model for children to explore tough topics in their own dramatic play with classmates and be a resource that leads teachers in discussions and connects to other resources within the classroom. TVY can be an extension of culturally relevant pedagogy and a catapult for deep conversations and activities about complex social issue topics. This goal aligns with Ladson-Billings' goal of harnessing knowledge from the classroom to apply to real world problem solving (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Moreover, early childhood educators should receive regular professional development in culturally relevant pedagogy, justice, diversity, and inclusion pedagogical methods to encourage an equitable classroom. In our small sample study, most teachers identified as white females and seemed to silo conversations about race in the classroom to Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Black History

month. When asked how educators teach topics like prejudice and inclusion, responses included, “we always talk about how we are all the same ” and “we are all important and one person is not better than another.” Given the worldwide response to the killing of George Floyd in 2020, educators working with all age students, *including* ECE children, need to be equipped to include curriculum content and pedagogical methods that courageously explore topics that challenge our communities and country. One of Ladson-Billings’ main pillars of CRP is, “facilitating the development of critical consciousness among P–3 students” (Boutte, 2018). The collaboration between artists and ECE teachers is a perfect place to build this critical consciousness that transfers to social-emotional skills. TVY a unique power to stimulate and inspire these difficult, yet necessary conversations. While we do not believe that a 45-minute TVY play will end racism in the U.S., we do believe that with longer, more in-person, interactive performances and workshops we can begin to do Ladson-Billings’ call for “facilitating the development of critical consciousness.”

Looking forward, how can TYA artists and Early Childhood Educators collaborate to create a new paradigm where we bravely explore the urgent socially relevant themes of our time together and connect this to critical social-emotional development in the early years? How do we hold one another accountable and inspire one another to push the envelope on what very young children are able to learn, discuss, and explore?

Artist-scholars Megan Alrutz and Lynn Hoare (2020) describe why they are dedicated to doing artist work that intersects theatre and social justice:

> [w]e do this work because we believe that young people are essential partners in building a more just world. We are confident in the potential of young people to develop their own critical consciousness and to build and enact their capacities to make change. We do this work because it is absolutely necessary. (p. 9)

Their call to action inspires artists, educators, and scholars to bravely challenge our young audiences to build, critique, celebrate, and imagine a better world for themselves through the arts.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Wedunnit: How About Face Youth Theatre Solved the Mystery of Online Ensemble Devising and Learning

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ABOUT FACE THEATRE

ABSTRACT

In March 2021, About Face Youth Ensemble faced the task of creating a show online with both performers and teaching artists stuck in their homes, separated from each other. At the end of the youth ensemble's three-month long devising process, the virtual production of Whodunnit? A Groovy Queer Murder Mystery at Camp Forest Woods! *was released online. In this paper, members of the education staff share their reflections on how they designed for and engaged in a learning environment that facilitated a particularly connected ensemble. Key aspects of instructional design addressed in the article include the motivation behind the show, the theatre company's growing commitment to youth mental health, traditional "in-the-room" devising practices, and the utilization of online technology. Recommendations for applied theatre programs and their practitioners that work with*

teens, as well as arts researchers, are as follows: 1) Investigate the potential of hiring a certified mental health professional 2) Commit to spending significant time together for emotional connection 3) Design devising activities that support more equitable power dynamics and access 4) Explore the promising possibilities of computer-supported collaborative learning especially when returning to in-person creation.

> The year is 1971. Ten people receive mysterious invitations to a summer camp reunion at a secluded mountain resort. Who has orchestrated this get together? Does it have anything to do with an "accidental" death from their time at camp? Old passions and rivalries reignite as the guests are forced to confront what happened at Camp Forest Woods years ago… before time runs out. (Blurb from *Whodunnit? A Groovy Queer Murder Mystery at Camp Forest Woods!*)

About Face Youth Theatre (AFYT) is an award-winning and nationally-recognized youth theatre program which calls Chicago home. A rotating ensemble of queer youth devise original plays about LGBTQIA+ lives each year and has been doing so for over two decades. With the advent of the pandemic in 2020, AFYT pivoted its work to an online platform producing a monologue-heavy show in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, protests in Chicago, police brutality, and being in quarantine. The following season, now led by a new staff of educators, AFYT once again faced the task of creating a show online with both performers and teaching artists stuck in their homes, separated from each other. At the end of the ensemble's three-month long process of development, the virtual production of *Whodunnit? A Groovy Queer Murder Mystery at Camp Forest Woods*! was released online and shown all throughout June 2021.

Some of the most significant audience feedback received about the show concerned the connectedness of the ensemble members, a seemingly impossible task to pull off in a world of unending online meetings and sustained collective trauma. Therefore, in order to investigate how the closeness of the ensemble developed in the midst of such adversity, we began reflecting upon the program design and

implementation—looking for evidence that would help us crack the case.

The aim of this paper is to share our reflections, as Associate Artistic Director and as Teaching Artist, on how we designed for and engaged in a learning environment that supported this unique kind of connection in a virtual world. We attempt to answer a question posed by Gallagher et al. (2020) at the beginning of the pandemic: "How can virtual drama still nurture community and connection for young people?" (p. 639). We present key aspects of instructional design which include the motivation behind the show and our growing commitment to youth mental health. Additionally, we explain how we made use of both traditional "in-the-room" devising practices and online technology to support ensemble learning and co-creation. We offer our learning to the wider theatre community as a narrative of practice—scholarship in which we advocate for awareness and caring to support youth agency in a tumultuous and continuously changing world.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

In order to investigate the success not only of the show itself but also of the cohesion of the ensemble, we began by sharing stories with each other. These reflections about the work included what we designed as part of the spring session, our rationale for those decisions, observations on how students participated in the learning environment, and reflections upon those observations. We then engaged in analysis of our stories in order to create an agreed upon co-constructed narrative of practice which highlights our key learnings. This type of reflective practice (Dawson & Kelin, 2014), specifically our *reflection-on-action* (Schön, 1987), is one that many teaching artists engage in throughout the course of their careers, yet rarely get an opportunity to report out to the greater theatre community. It is our hope that our design story will serve as an example for others in similar contexts and add to the nascent body of literature regarding theatre teaching, learning, and creating in online communities during times of unimaginable, prolonged struggle and trauma.

TEACHING THEATRE ONLINE DURING 2020

Teaching and learning theatre online was rare, but not a new endeavor before 2020 (Philip & Nicholls, 2007; van Vuuren & Freisleben, 2020). However, as a response to the global pandemic, teachers and teaching artists were rapidly forced to adapt their work with students to online spaces. This adaptation oftentimes occurred alongside a tremendous sense of loss (MacArthur, 2021; Prendergast, 2020). Nevertheless, theatre and drama instructors managed to engage their students in a myriad of creative experiences throughout the year following the initial lockdowns. University students in Norway and Hungary participated in process dramas that focused on exploring issues related to the pandemic (Cziboly & Bethlenfalvy, 2020) and youth in a professional theatre program in Chicago practiced scene work in Zoom breakout rooms (Siciliano, 2021). Some online theatrical learning experiences included university students devising their own work. For example, graduate students in Applied Theatre at CUNY School of Professional Studies collaboratively devised a Theatre in Education experience for master's level social work students at their university (Jemal et al., 2020). In another instance, Weltsek's (2021) students completely redesigned their devised stage play and turned it into a virtual show incorporating student feelings of pandemic-induced isolation. All of the aforementioned theatrical experiences took place within the first year of the pandemic. Our narrative of practice builds upon this scholarship by examining what it was like to plan for and facilitate a collaborative devising process one year after the initial lockdowns.

A MURDER MYSTERY *NOW*?

The idea for the spring show to be a murder mystery came out of a desire to find something that would be fun for young artists. It was quite simply that. After the fall of 2020, the education team at About Face Theatre recognized that our youth ensemble members were having a very difficult time—students were burnt out from being online with virtual programming and remote learning, suffering the very real effects of Zoom fatigue (Peper et al, 2021). Historically, AFYT shows tend to explore significant issues of identity and social justice affecting the lives of the artists. However, given the state of the world at the end

of the fall—the fact that we had just come off of one of the most alarming and upsetting years in American political history and that we were still enduring the relentless ravages of COVID—it just felt necessary to reimagine what the space could be. People were struggling, so we thought let's not do something so serious. Let's make something that people can enjoy that's on the lighter side of things. Rather than exploring what students were thinking and feeling about their lives and then translating those thoughts and emotions of frustration, isolation, and anger into a performance, we instead, wanted to provide a virtual space that was more like an escape for youth to be creative and just be able to breathe together in the midst of everything else. It is not that we suddenly stopped believing in the power of youth advocacy or in the magic that happens when young people's thoughts about the world as they understand it are shared in their own voices. But designing an environment where students could be young and have fun without feeling like the weight of the world was also on their shoulders became paramount as we discussed our instructional goals for the spring session.

The decision to use a murder mystery as a framework for the show helped to facilitate the connectedness of the ensemble members from the very first session. This genre seems to call a particular kind of person to it. In fact, there were several new artists who came to the ensemble in the spring (from around the country thanks to online learning!) specifically excited by the concept. Because most of the students had already been in *Clue The Musical* or *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* or had seen the movie *Knives Out* multiple times (as noted on their pre-session surveys), they came to the online space possessing a common vocabulary from which to draw. We began the spring session then, by capitalizing on group members' prior knowledge about the genre including what they both loved and hated. We also asked them what they wanted to question, challenge, or complicate about the typical murder mystery. Their answers and questions helped guide the ensemble's investigation into creating a murder mystery that served as both an escape from the world as we knew it and as a vehicle to explore queer representations in art.

A SPACE FOR EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

The foundation of any ensemble, of which Chicago has a long tradition (Johnston & Brownrigg, 2019), is a recognition that everyone is working together towards a common goal. With communal openness, people are encouraged to be big and loud and wrong, to experiment, explore, and make mistakes because we're all in this together. In the spring of 2021, even though we chose a subject matter that ultimately was much less emotionally charged than topics we might have previously explored, we intentionally made space for all of the complicated emotions that we knew our ensemble members would bring into the Zoom room. We knew from prior experiences in the fall with the AFYT group members, that students were wrestling with mental health challenges. Additionally, we had become more and more aware of a growing national concern for teens' mental health (Sparks, 2021). Consequently, a new position for a dedicated mental health counselor was created. The primary purpose for this role was to have a trained person in the room to ensure that, at any point, students had someone they could talk to about what was going on in their lives. Knowing how difficult and complex the world had become and its impact on young people, we wanted to make sure that the space we created was one where everyone could bring their full selves into the room at all times, especially on challenging days.

Creating this new position was important because teaching artists are not necessarily formally trained to deal with important student mental health issues. While theatre is certainly a place where emotions and mental health are explored potentially more freely than in other disciplines, it was important for us to have someone "in the room" who had been trained to counsel young people rather than expecting teaching artists to simultaneously wear two different hats. During the session, if youth artists needed to take a moment away from the work, the mental health counselor could provide any needed support which then ultimately allowed students to return back to the group and continue their participation. In addition to being present for each session, our mental health counselor scheduled before and after class sessions for participants to meet together as yet another avenue of support.

The newly-designed role of mental health counselor was one of the many ways we intentionally designed for emotional exploration and connection. In fact, a particular check-in exercise called "Rose and

Thorn" became incredibly important to the group. In this exercise, group members discussed their roses, or positive things that happened to them, and their thorns, negative experiences they wanted to share. One of the teaching artists brought the idea of offering "Flies" as well—things that were distracting a person from being fully present in the room. While this general type of check-in is well known (Harris, 2020) and not revolutionary (at least in the theatre!), the amount of time we devoted to this practice at the top of each session—at least 20 to 25 minutes out of 3 hours—was significant. When we tried to shorten the check-in with another type of exercise one Saturday, it became apparent that the youth artists missed that time spent together. Before jumping into improvising a scene in a break-out room in Zoom, one student even asked their scene partners how they were all doing, as a result of the shortened group share.

The fact that we committed to holding a sort of sacred space for meaningful sharing and connections each week led to the learning of important life lessons. For instance, some older members of the ensemble offered advice and support to younger members who were exploring issues around their own gender identity. Younger members also witnessed how older artists dealt with issues of survival like finding a job and seeking medication and mental health services. These types of conversations were particularly key due to the isolation brought about by COVID. With limited access to previously in-person structures and spaces for learning, our *Rose, Thorn, and Fly* time functioned as a way for the ensemble members to pass along essential knowledge for living. The significant amount of energy we put towards really understanding and supporting everyone's mental health during the spring- making sure people felt safe, heard, and seen in their fullest—resulted in an ensemble that cared deeply for and supported one another. Because they were so invested in the health and wellness of each other, they also were deeply invested in the art they were making together, too.

DEVISING TOGETHER

AFYT members were challenged to create a show "from scratch" with only the framework of a murder mystery as a guide. We believe that the development of a connected ensemble, particularly one in which many of its members had never even met face to face, was a direct

result of the youth artists' work being grounded in the theatrical practice of devising (Oddey, 1996). Acknowledging the tensions in collaborative devising about authorship and ownership (Glarin, 2020), we tried to make sure the students exercised as much ownership and power over the story as possible, constantly asking them the question: "What do *you* want to do?" Our hope was that the students would author (through playwriting and improv) as much of the show as possible, and we would be there to facilitate their authorship process.

A first decision the group was tasked with was determining how they were going to make decisions together, an exercise borrowed from the playbook of the University of Chicago's Leslie Buxbaum Danzig. In addition to decision-making strategies such as voting and "just doing it" without discussion, we also implemented the strategy of taking elements from everyone's ideas to "make a combined super decision." The act of following through with this last strategy time and time again became one of the ensemble's key strengths. Every major decision about the play—the who, what, when, where, why, and how—were results of this "combination" decision-making process. Even smaller decisions for the show were often made with the contributions of the whole group. For instance, one actor offered to design the invitation that all of the guests to the camp reunion (the suspects) would receive at the top of the play. However, once a few sketches were complete, the actor asked if he could share his initial ideas with the group specifically because that was how decisions were made—collaboratively—and that was how things got even better—with others' input.

One of the major tensions that exists in devising original work with young artists is wanting to provide a space for students to exercise their agency and also making sure a well-executed show gets ready in time for final performance (Horn, 2016). We encountered this tension ourselves and had to navigate design tradeoffs throughout the process. We often thought about the balance between providing just enough structure in order for the ensemble to successfully create a piece but also not too much structure so that they would feel stifled, unheard, or even powerless. However, other times, not providing enough structure might cause the group to feel lost at sea because they are not sure what is being asked of them. And yet, sometimes, that struggle was exactly what the group needed in order to realize that they, indeed, were expected to take the lead on all artistic choices for

the show.

To illustrate how we balanced both structure and agency to ultimately facilitate ensemble cohesion and artistic creation, we offer an example of an exercise we ran with the group in one of the early weeks of the devising process. This storytelling activity was one that was meant to create a shared understanding of what the imaginary Camp Forest Woods was like for the characters in the past. We asked each of the actors to share a positive memory about the fictitious camp starting with a phrase such as "Remember when…" Each actor would then add on to that memory, with an improvisational "yes, and..." The last actor down the line was asked to come up with a not-so-pleasant memory in order to engage the idea that the past wasn't as rosy as the previous memories led on. The last actor was asked to start their memory with a "yes, but…" The artists ran with this structure and immediately began changing it to what worked for them. Instead of the last person providing the twist at the end of the group recollection, ensemble members closer to the beginning of the story "circle" began to present memories of unfortunate events—crocodile bites, holes in canoes, and so forth—crafting a much unluckier (and more exciting) camp experience than initially intended. Much of the plot for the entire show was developed from these initial co-created stories and showed up in future improv sessions as well as lyrics to the "Camp Song" sung by the actors in the show.

DEVISING *ONLINE* TOGETHER

In addition to providing time for emotional connection and support as well as the very practice of devising work together, we theorize that creating a show from our individual Zoom boxes and utilizing technology to do so helped support the highly communal nature of the ensemble. We recognize that our proposition may be viewed as antithetical to the discipline itself by some community members. Nevertheless, using technology in order to devise deserves further exploration. In our case, the most successful tool we used as an ensemble included Google Drive with its various suite of applications. In particular, we suggest that the co-creation of artifacts as well as universal access to them functioned as mechanisms for group cohesion.

Before the beginning of our spring session, we made a few key

decisions regarding the show. We knew that the piece would be a mix of script memorization and improv because we wanted to provide a professional experience while simultaneously respecting students' limited time in between Saturday sessions. We also knew that the artists themselves would be writing the scripted portions. Therefore, when it came time to write the introductory scenes, we divided the ensemble up into two groups, split them into Zoom breakout rooms, and shared blank Google Documents. The students then got to work writing lines for their individual characters and sometimes for the characters of fellow creators. What was different about this activity from previous in-person experiences we had designed was that each student was able to view and contribute to the script in real time. Instead of having one person in a classroom in control of a pen and piece of paper or even a single laptop, all members of the group were able to access the "paper" and the "pen" simultaneously. Not only could each person write whatever they wanted, but they could also read what others wrote and respond to that writing immediately either by their own writing or through conversation. Our initial intention for this activity was a student-written script. However, through reflection, we now see that by asking the students to write the script this way (which we only did because we were meeting online), more powerful outcomes may have been achieved. Students may have experienced more balanced power dynamics with power distributed among all the group members as a result of everyone having control of the physical writing space. While there will always be various power dynamics in play in any situation, Google Docs may have supported interactions more firmly rooted in the democratic ideals of devising (Oddey, 1996).

A shared ensemble folder nested within Google Drive itself functioned as an online repository for co-created artifacts throughout the devising process and may have contributed to a sense of balanced power dynamics among ensemble members including teaching artists. Students had complete access to this online folder during and between our Saturday sessions where they could view and change anything they wanted. Items within the shared folder included brainstorming documents for the show, group agreements, goals for how to make the show a very queer murder mystery, the evolving script, and videos of improvs for future reference. Students also were invited to use individual folders within the shared folder for character development and costume planning. While it's not unique to have co-created

artifacts as part of the devising process, what proved significant here was that our work was accessible to everyone at any time. The documents, and thus the story, truly belonged to everyone throughout the entire process. The rehearsal room no longer served as a structure for gatekeeping. We encouraged people to visit the shared folder throughout the week to continue adding to the show in whichever ways they saw fit. Moving forward when we return to the physical rehearsal room, providing an online space for collaborative generation with 24/7 access by the entire ensemble is something we may explore as a tool to support a more close-knit, creative community.

CONCLUSION

A year into the pandemic, the education team at About Face Theatre knew that we wanted to facilitate an online ensemble devising experience for the young artists of AFYT. A main concern which drove our program was the pressing mental health needs of the teens and young adults in the group. Therefore, we made a commitment to designing an environment which would allow the ensemble members to have fun with a quirky concept while also feeling cared for by their peers and a newly hired mental health counselor. Throughout our three months together, we observed how more traditional creative generation prompts along with a variety of technological tools supported the growth of a tight-knit ensemble. Our recommendations for applied theatre programs and practitioners that work with teens are as follows: 1) Investigate the potential of hiring a certified mental health professional 2) Commit to spending significant time together for emotional connection 3) Design devising activities that support more equitable power dynamics and access 4) Explore the promising possibilities of computer-supported collaborative learning especially when returning to in-person creation. We urge the wider arts research community to examine teaching and learning in these areas, as well.

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ArtsPraxis
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Measuring a Verbatim Effect with High School Students 12 Hours Away and Across the World

ALEX ATES

WESTTOWN SCHOOL

DAVID FENG

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

SAM HU

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

EMILY ZHANG

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

ABSTRACT

Three recently-graduated Chinese-International high school students and their American theater teacher engage in reflective analysis on their digital verbatim performances of American presidential politicians in If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could*, produced by the Verbatim Performance Lab at NYU Steinhardt's Program in Educational Theatre (2021). In Part One, the context and conditions of the project are outlined. In Part Two, the students engage in reflective analysis on*

their participation. In Part Three, the teacher synthesizes the students' insights using pedagogical analysis and reflective practice. In Part Four, a "Verbatim Effect" is measured to consider the impact of the project. The following takeaways are noted:

1) *Political verbatim performance allowed the students to exercise emotional release from mounting international tension; however, this release could not be realized through caricature. Instead, catharsis was found in the innate aesthetic conflict of the performance.*
2) *As a discipline, verbatim performance demanded that the students consider the precise details of their characters, which created a tension between requirements and choices.*
3) *This mode of performance allowed the students to analyze and interpret political events that were directly impacting their lives.*

INTRODUCTION

In this collaboratively written paper, we will engage in a reflective analysis with three former high school theater students whose circumstances suspended them within an extreme tension of time and distance in the structure of digital theater education.

David Fung, Sam Hu, and Emily Zhang were seniors at Westtown School, an independent Quaker boarding and day school in West Chester, Pennsylvania with a K-12 student population. These students, co-writers of this paper, digitally participated in educational theater projects from a twelve-hour time zone difference in their home nation, China. This paper is co-written with their theater teacher, Alex Ates, an American. For David, Sam, and Emily, not only were the conditions of time and distance extreme, but global political conditions were dialed to the highest stakes possible.

PART ONE: THE CURIOUS CONTEXT OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SITUATION

A Year of Digital Learning

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, like most other schools, the Fall

2020 and Spring 2021 semesters at Westtown School were conducted online for international students, a surreal anomaly for an institution founded in 1799.

David, Sam, and Emily were students in the class Advanced Theater Topics, which focused on ethnography theater (or, “ethnotheater”). Johnny Saldaña defines ethnotheater as:

> [A] written play script consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print media artifacts such as diaries, blogs, e-mail correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, court proceedings, and historic documents. (Saldaña, 2011).

Students used ethnotheater as a means of researching the conditions that created such a peculiar school year (i.e., politics and public health). The course revolved around four projects and two guest artist residencies.

One such project was a Political Lip-Sync. Inspired by the TikTok comedy of Sarah Cooper, who rose to internet stardom by subversively lip-syncing speeches from Donald Trump, students theatricalized audio of an American politician.

Sam Hu performed a clip of Trump delivering a xenophobic speech where he repeatedly referred to Covid-19 as “the China virus.” In the performance, Sam turned Trump’s iconic red tie into a Chinese flag. The red tie-flag dominated the foreground while an American flag lurked in the background.

Image 1: Sam Hu performing Former President Donald Trump in a Political Lip-Sync project at Westtown School during the 2020 Fall semester.

Emily Zhang performed both Trump and then-candidate Joe Biden in a September 2020 debate clip. Emily filmed her embodiment of Biden and Trump separately and then synced the two clips together.

Image 2: Emily Zhang performing Donald Trump (L) and Joe Biden (R) in the Political Lip-Sync project at Westtown School during the 2020 Fall semester.

David theatricalized the audio of Trump suggesting sunlight or bleach as a potential therapy for Covid-19, as if he were a scientist delivering breakthrough research using a PowerPoint presentation at a conference. David's use of dead-pan irony emphasized the absurdity

of Trump's unedited words.

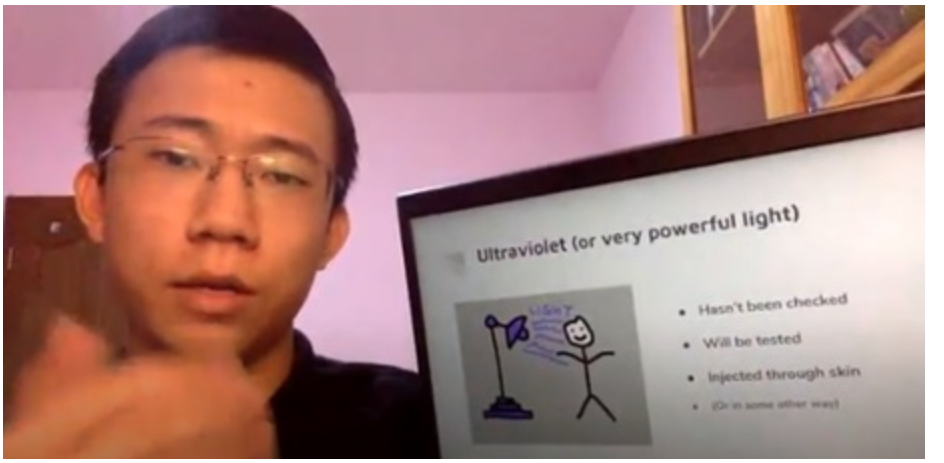

Image 3: David Feng theatricalizing Donald Trump in the Political Lip-Sync project at Westtown School during the 2020 Fall semester.

David, Sam, and Emily's performances in the Fall 2020 Political Lip-Sync prepared them for a Spring 2021 project in partnership with the Verbatim Performance Lab (VPL) housed at New York University's Steinhardt School.

If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could

After the chaotic September 2020 debate where Trump attempted to sabotage the proceedings by persistently interrupting Biden and moderator Chris Wallace, provoking Biden to deliver the infamous "Will you shut up, man?", onlookers widely interpreted the behavior as child-like. The fallout from the debate raised two research questions for an arts-based investigation, pursued by the non-partisan VPL:

1. What do young actors discover about these candidates and the moderator when they take on their speech and gestural patterns through verbatim performance?
2. What happens to an audience's perception of the interactions between the adults during this debate when younger and different bodied actors take on these roles? (VPL Website, project description of *If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could*).

For this investigation, the VPL used its technique of "verbatim

performance," which the lab defines as: "The precise portrayal of an actual person using their exact speech and gestural patterns as a data source for investigation, literally 'word for word' and 'gesture for gesture.'" (VPL website, project page)

Twelve middle and high school institutions around the United States participated in the project, including Westtown. Because David, Sam, and Emily had explored either Trump or Biden (or, in the case of Emily—both) in their Political Lip-Sync, the three students were proposed as Westtown's participants for an April 17, 2021 digital showcase produced by the VPL. The project was titled *If You Wanna Switch Seats, We Could*, paying homage to a sarcastic line Wallace exasperatingly said during the height of mayhem during the debate.

The Digital Process

Because David, Sam, and Emily were in different regions of China (Tianjin, Chengdu, and Ningbo) and each student had varying internet infrastructures, the ensemble utilized the method that Emily pioneered in her Political Lip-Sync, pre-record their individual performance asynchronously and use editing to "harmonize" (if you will) each individual piece together into a trio.

The students developed a protocol where they broadcast the audio of the debate clip (the artifact) into their ears via wireless Bluetooth headsets. Performing in front of a single camera on their laptop, they would count into hitting "play" on the audio from a separate device (usually a cellphone)—"3, 2, 1, GO!"—to help sync the clips in post-production editing.

The students used the audio artifact (the "soundtrack" of the debate) to listen for their cues. Before recording a take, students studied and coded the body language of each character using a scored transcript of the debate clip supplied by the VPL, written in the style of their technique (Salvatore, 2017).

Students rehearsed at 7:00 p.m. in China and 7:00 a.m. in United States Eastern time on Saturday mornings with their teacher, Alex. Before each rehearsal, students uploaded a draft video file of their take to a shared online folder. Together, using screen-sharing, the students watched each submission, participated in a self-critique, and then received a critique from their teacher. During rehearsals, the ensemble cross-referenced their takes with the original artifact to check timestamps, gestures, body language, and rhythm. Rehearsal time

was spent devising protocols for aligning the three characters (i.e., scene work) and troubleshooting tech conundrums. Character names were changed to proxy names by the VPL. The proxy names had the same amount of syllables and served as a tool to provide some distance between the investigation and the stigma of the political figures. The casting was as follows:

- Emily as Sue Thompson (Joe Biden)
- Sam as Walter King (Donald Trump)
- David as Jeff Fariss (Chris Wallace)

Costuming was strategically selected to give the students a “talisman” (Salvatore, 2017, p. 284) to help them source the energy of their character. Below are screenshots of each student’s final performance:

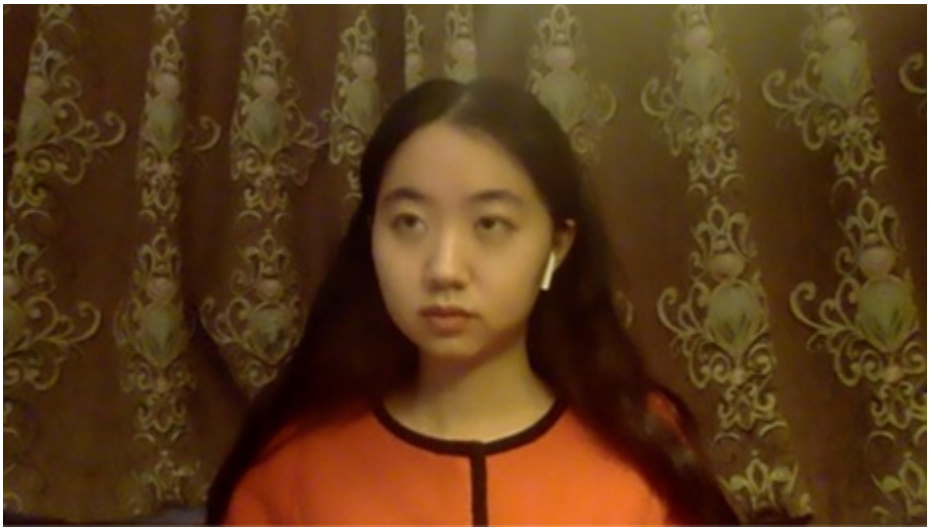

Image 4: Emily as Sue Thompson (Joe Biden)

Image 5: Sam as Walter King (Donald Trump)

Image 6: David as Jeff Fariss (Chris Wallace)

Then, each performance was layered in one at a time in post-production editing:

Image 7: Twelve images in a sequence that conveys how the three individual color recordings are combined into a black-and-white tryptic.

Finally, the aesthetic choice was made to make the video black and white to unify the videos and to draw more focus onto the facial expressions and physical gestures of the characters.

PART TWO: TESTIMONIES FROM THE STUDENTS

Verbatim Performance and Confucian Virtue

Sam: I signed up for my first theater class at Westtown hesitantly. By then, I had embraced stoicism as a token of being a grown-up. Being an international student from China, where a Confucian gentleman's virtue is to be prompt in action but prudent in speech, I could never

envision myself standing up, pouring my heart out in front of a crowd. How awkward and ridiculous would I seem? However, I saw stark differences between verbatim theater and what I used to learn about theater. Verbatim performance is so precise, acute, and analytical to a point that it almost feels more like social science than an art.

Political Rhetoric and Belonging in the United States

Emily: I followed the 2020 presidential election closely, as I was making the hard decision of whether to stay in the U.S. for college. It was hard to feel safe under Trump's constant xenophobic and anti-China stance. Thus, while watching the debate, I felt the absurdity—and even amusement—as an outsider, but also a deep concern. Trump and Biden are not isolated politicians distant from my life, nor are their policies.

Acting as an Emotional Outlet for Political Anxiety

Sam: The hardest part in the entire process for *If You Wanna Switch Seats* was to create an authentic and unbiased impression of Trump. I remember watching the debate clip on repeat for half an hour, yet failing to locate the line between creating a character and creating a caricature of Trump. In its foundation, verbatim still needs *personality.*

Aesthetic Conflict

Sam: No audience will treat my work as a perfect documentary of the debate. The audience sees an Asian teen, speaking and acting unlike any other Asian teen—thus, they find conflict between visual and aural stimuli, and conflict creates space for thought—simple as that. The "Trump" that was presented verbatim is just a superposition of him and myself. Hence, I should not force myself into becoming a miniature Trump, nor find reconciliation with his outrageous comments. I instilled my personality into his speech and gesture to create something that wasn't scientifically precise, nor spiritually harmonic, but nonetheless thought-provoking. It is conflicted and chaotic and uncomfortable and strange.

Process for Digital Verbatim Performance

Emily: I started by watching the video clip repetitively. Like analyzing a script, I tried to make sense of Biden's objective and obstacle: I

simplified that objective to being heard, and the obstacle to being interrupted. Then, I tried to analyze the emotion and motivation behind each move, Biden's frowns especially.

Requirements and Choices in Verbatim Performance

David: In past school productions, I was encouraged to come up with a detailed backstory for my role, even when it was insignificant. As a result, I learned how even the most trivial fictional character can have a complex life. When the endless details of a real-life character were placed in front of me, however, I was overwhelmed. Eventually, I came to the realization that it is impossible to truly understand Chris Wallace and *be* him—I was wrong from the start. My acting strategy had always been satisfying all the basic requirements and then making the boldest choices available. However, there is a real Chris Wallace, and the verbatim acting can be judged based on its accuracy. Some verbatim performances are more objectively correct than others. In this particular project, there were an unattainable number of requirements and no room for choices.

PART THREE: ANALYSIS FROM THE TEACHER

On an Emotional Outlet for Political Anxiety and Aesthetic Conflict

Political verbatim performance allowed the students to exercise emotional release from mounting international tension; however, this release could not be realized through caricature. Instead, catharsis was found in the innate aesthetic conflicts of the performance (i.e., Chinese-International high school students performing American presidents). This aesthetic conflict is more than irony, it's political transgressiveness. Political transgressiveness provides a subversive and nuanced alternative to satire. Instead of mocking the president, one is embodying the president—from there, the aesthetic conflict provides the artist's commentary.

On Requirements and Choices in Verbatim Performance

As a discipline, verbatim performance demanded that the students consider the precise details of their characters, which created a tension between the concept of *requirements* (the "coded" transcript) and

choices (determining tactics related to a character's objective and obstacle). Navigating this tension is essential if artist-researchers want to apply the abstract concepts of acting theory (e.g. objectives and obstacles) that often trip-up high school actors.

On Political Rhetoric and Belonging in the United States

Finally, this mode of performance allowed the students to analyze and interpret political events that were directly impacting their lives. The students used political verbatim performance as a way of considering their futures on a tumultuous global stage, such as Sam coping with Donald Trump's xenophobic remarks by performing the "China virus" speech in the Political Lip-Sync, or Emily using the debate as a way of informing her decision about whether to attend college in the United States. Thus, these performances were an act of civic engagement and roleplay for the students, allowing them the opportunity to kinesthetically consider political concepts and subversively respond to political provocations through the transgressiveness of aesthetic conflict.

PART FOUR: THE VERBATIM EFFECT

In an attempt to measure the "Verbatim Effect" (if you will) on these students; here's what we have to say:

Sam: As I am now pursuing Social Science in college, verbatim encourages me to observe the world around me more carefully; I hope to explore the world with the same keen awareness and acute senses.

David: I am now more interested in performance art as a form of communication. I hope statistics and computer science might provide me with important new insights into the relationship between art and its audience.

Emily: Right after this project, I auditioned for a Chinese-adapted version of *The Vagina Monologues* in Beijing and was lucky enough to be cast as a lead actress. During my rehearsals, I kept coming back to this project: I realized that identity has power. My identity as a woman, a Chinese citizen, and an international student at a U.S. boarding

school together contribute to my life experience and my perspective. Perspectives make me experience the world more fully. Acting as Biden gives me another lens to view the world, and the curiosity and courage to keep exploring new perspectives. Thus, I eventually made the decision to leave the United States.

Alex: For Sam and David, their education in verbatim performance will inform their methodological approaches to their primary academic fields. For Emily, verbatim performance supported the recognition of power in identity. Emily used this power to decide not to pursue education in the United States. At the time of this writing, all three students are heading into their undergraduate educations; this next stage will undoubtedly provide conditioning, exploration, and further opportunities for performance and adaptability. As I look ahead to another semester of teaching, I place this experiment of time, distance, and digitality on the shelf with hopes that the conditions that dictated its circumstances were an anomaly. But, verbatim ethnotheater is permanently applied into my practice as an educator working with a global student population. It's far too highfalutin to assert that theater can change the world; but, the Verbatim Effect indicates that verbatim performance supports a student's discernment of their place in it.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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Data-Based Analysis of Diversity and Equity in Theatre for Young Audience Companies

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ABSTRACT

There is an urgent need for Theatres for Young Audiences to produce plays that share the stories and experiences of people of color and to ensure works by playwrights of color are produced regularly, but data suggests that this is often not the case. This article draws on data from a comprehensive survey of artistic, business, and education leaders in the field to consider how it might inform the important discussions (and hopefully actions) taking place in the field regarding equity and inclusion, especially those exploring race and anti-racism.

To better understand the landscape of the TYA field, I (Matt) conducted a comprehensive survey of the artistic, business, and education leaders of TYA theatres affiliated with TYA/USA (Omasta, 2019). It achieved a remarkable response rate; leaders from 97% of the 61 eligible theatres participated. Together, Aubrey and I published further details from the survey (Omasta & Felty, 2021) exploring how three influential circumstances—theatres' budget sizes, their geographic locations, and their longevity—intersect with, and perhaps affect, other circumstances as well as the perspectives and beliefs of their leaders.

The data in the report is copious and covers a wide range of topics related to contemporary TYA practices and thinking. In fact, the volume of data prohibits a single comprehensive analysis of every subject covered. It does, however, enable scholars and practitioners to analyze detailed data regarding topics that may be relevant to their own work, and we urge them to do so. The report is available as a digital-only appendix to Volume 8 Issue 2 of *ArtsPraxis* and can be accessed here: Perspectives of Theatre for Young Audiences Companies' Leaders by Budget, Region, and Longevity.

In this article, we offer an example of one way the survey data can be studied. Specifically, we analyze a topic relevant to everyone involved in Theatre for Young Audiences: how the data might inform the important discussions (and hopefully actions) taking place in the field regarding equity and inclusion, especially those exploring race and anti-racism.

THE NEED FOR EQUITY

There is an urgent need for Theatres for Young Audiences to produce plays that share the stories and experiences of people of color, to ensure works by playwrights of color are produced regularly, and to move toward equity in general. All children must see themselves represented on stage; as Lorenzo Garcia once observed, a child (or adult) might think: "If theatre's not about me, then maybe it's not for me" (Saldaña, 1991). Clearly explicating the situation, Nutting (2017), who expands the call for equity to include people who are differently abled, observes, "now more than ever, we need to think carefully about how the diversity of our country is reflected on our stages and in our

staff, faculty, and artists" (pg. 5).

The many reasons this representation is essential are likely familiar to readers of this article, and a discussion of the many reasons is beyond the scope of this piece. Those interested in learning more about the need for equitable representation might consult sources such as Esquivel (2019), Kelly (2019), Kramer (2001); Sandberg-Zakian (2008), Schroeder-Arce (2008), among others.

The Lack of Equity

Despite the need for TYA productions to represent the diversity of American youth, they largely do not do so. Ruggiero & Uhls (2019) conducted an analysis of 248 TYA productions in the 2018-19 season and found that only 19% of the plays TYA theatres produced were "culturally-specific productions," which they defined as plays in which "people of color characters / communities / cultures were essential to the story's narrative" (p. 15). Furthermore, only 20% of the plays performed during the 2018-19 season were written by playwrights of color, and only 15% were directed by directors of color[1] (Ruggiero & Uhls, 2019, pp. 10-12).

Scholars have theorized why this might be the case. For example, Schroeder-Arce (2008) suggests financial challenges might play a role, writing, "many TYA companies continue to struggle with the financial aspects of selling shows they perceive as culturally specific (non-white). Whether this is a perception or a reality, 'Latino plays' are missing in the seasons of many major TYA companies" (pg. 7). I (Matt) have previously theorized that in the "turbulent political climate in the United States," a complex social contract between TYA companies and their constituents may obligate TYA companies in some communities to "both mark and mask their efforts to educate about diversity" (Omasta, 2009, p. 109). Much scholarship regarding the lack of diversity in TYA productions, however, is primarily theoretical.

[1] Interestingly, Ruggiero & Uhls (2019) also found that 37% of the roles in plays produced during the 2018-19 season were played by actors of color; that is, the number of performers of color is notably higher than might be expected based on the percentage of the U.S. population that identifies as people of color (24.5%). This is an interesting finding that raises questions about the ways in which a field led primarily by individuals who identify as white and in which directors and playwrights of color are underrepresented is much more likely to employ people of color in public-facing roles such as actors. This is an area ripe for future research.

OUR APPROACH

This article offers a data-based analysis of how the material circumstances of TYA companies, including the demographics and ideologies of their leaders, may contribute to inequity regarding TYA productions featuring the experiences of people of color. This type of analysis is relatively rare in our field. As I (Matt) discuss in greater detail elsewhere (Omasta, 2022), I believe our field "should look for ways in which quantitative work can supplement—not supplant—qualitative, theoretical, historiographic, and other investigations." We accept the post-positivist tenet that theories can never be proven "true" (see Popper, 1959). Furthermore, we acknowledge that this article analyzes data from a project not originally intended to explore the topic at hand in depth; our analyses of the data offer possibilities rather than formal assertions.

We also note that while our study focuses on how and why certain types of plays may appear in TYA companies' seasons, it is not enough to simply consider how often TYA plays featuring characters and stories of people of color are produced, or why. These productions must also promote an anti-racist, pro-inclusive agenda. Fatkin, in a thesis from 1978, argued that (some) TYA plays closely examined racism and tolerance in an "attempt to show young people the causes and negative effects of racism" (p. iii). Over time, however, scholars' analyses of the way race and ethnicity are addressed in TYA have become more complex. Twenty years ago, for example, Kramer's (2001) analysis of programming at three professional TYA companies suggested that while "some programs" at theatres embraced diversity, others "reinforced dominant ideologies" (p. iii). Even when plays are intended to promote holistic and positive depictions of the experiences of characters of color, Garcia (2011) notes that this does not always happen. For example, he asserts that even as the canon of Latinx TYA plays expands, some of these plays may reinforce racial stereotypes. He sees a "push to make the experiences of Latino youth in the U.S. far less 'diverse'" (p. 307). Once again, while it is important to keep such things in mind, investigation of this nature is beyond the scope of this article.

MORE ON METHODOLOGY

The survey introduced above (Omasta, 2019) employed a cross-sectional census design (Barr, 2004; Fricker Jr, 2008; Groves et al., 2009). The research team sent questionnaires developed specifically for each type of leader (artistic, business, and education) and an additional questionnaire for participants who led in more than one area. I (Matt) drafted most questions in collaboration with TYA/USA, which commissioned the original report (Omasta, 2019), and based additional questions on those posed in previous surveys of the field (vanTassel, 1969; Blackwell, 2008). The research team collected data using Qualtrics and analyzed it with SPSS statistical software. For further technical details regarding methodology, see Omasta (2019).

The most recent report (Omasta & Felty, 2021) compared data from theatres in three ways. First, we compared theatres based on their total annual operating budgets during their 2017-18 seasons. The four budget categories were:

Category A: Budgets Under $250,000
Category B: Budgets Between $250,000 – $999,999
Category C: Budgets Between $1 million – $2.99 million
Category D: Budgets of $3 million and above

Next, we compared theatres based on their geographical region, using the four primary regions established by the U.S. Census Bureau: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West.[2] Finally, we compared theatres in three groups based on longevity: those founded in 1979 or earlier; between 1980-1999, and in 2000 or later. The percentage of respondents within each group is indicated in Table 1.

[2] States in the Northeast include CT, ME, MA, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, and VT. The Midwest includes IN, IA, IL, KS, MI, MN, MO, NE, ND, OH, SD, and WI. The South includes AL, AR, DE, DC, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, NC, OK, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV. The West includes AK, AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, and WY.

Budget Size			
Category A	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**
23%	22%	32%	23%
Region			
North-east	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**
15%	29%	41%	15%
Year Founded			
Before 1980	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**	
36%	30%	34%	

Table 1. Percentages of participating theatres by budget size, region, and year founded. *N* = 59.

HOW DATA CAN HELP EXPLAIN POTENTIAL UNDERLYING CAUSES

In this section, we contextualize, share, and summarize selected survey data, noting areas which we will return to in the following analysis. Please refer to Omasta & Felty (2021) for additional detail on these and many other topics.

Who Makes the Decisions?—Theatre Leader Demographics

Many factors contribute to the lack of equitable participation and representation of people of color in both the TYA field and theatre, more broadly. One possible factor is the demographic makeup of theatrical leadership teams and board members, who in most cases identify as white. Before turning to TYA specifically, we discuss the work of Bandhu & Kim (2021) who report the demographics of artists and leaders employed in non-profit New York City theatres. While this geographically clustered group of theatres for general audiences clearly differs in many ways from TYA theatres nationwide, it is one of few statistical projects of this nature to offer any point of comparison.

For contextual purposes, the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) reports that people of color constituted 24.5% of U.S. population in 2018. Despite this, Bandhu & Kim (2021) found that only 12% of the board members

at the theatres they examined during the 2018-19 season identified as people color. Most strikingly, zero percent of artistic directors at NYC's largest non-profit theatre companies identified as people of color (p. 28). Such statistics lead the authors to ask: "How else to explain that almost every single person who has power in NYC theatre is a white person if not by a process of systemic exclusion of people of color?" (p. 28). If the people charged with determining what plays should be produced are extremely homogenous, we must consider if factors such as unconscious bias[3] may be at play. We turn to data from our survey to explore this possibility later in this article.

TYA Leader Demographics

With this in mind, we next turn to the demographics of leaders in the TYA field, nationwide. The data from our project (Omasta & Felty, 2021) reveal that the lack of diversity Bandhu & Kim (2021) discussed in New York City non-profit theatres is largely echoed in our own field. Indeed, our survey revealed that while there are minor differences in the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the leaders associated with theatres of various budget sizes, regions, and longevities (see Table 2), the individuals who make up the leadership of TYA companies nationwide are relatively homogenous. Specifically, we found that the artistic, business, and education leaders of U.S. TYA companies primarily identified as white (93%) women (64%).

[3] David Stewart suggests "unconscious bias" may play a role when theatres hire staff (Lampert-Greaux, 2020), and Grady (2000) asserts that it is "easy … to act our unconscious bias" in settings such as drama classrooms. For more information on unconscious bias, see sources such as Moule (2009).

Budget Size			
Category A	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**
0%	4%	15%	4%
Region			
North-east	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**
19%	0%	7%	11%
Year Founded			
Before 1980	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**	
6%	13%	3%	

Table2. Percentage of leaders at TYA theatre of various types who identify as people of color. Overall *N* = 111. Among all respondents (regardless of theatre type), 7% of leaders identified as people of color.

This means that only 7% of participating leaders identified as people of color. The leaders of theatres in some categories were exclusively white; specifically, none of the respondents at category A theatres or theatres located in the Midwest identified as people of color. None of the participants (at any type of theatre) identified as American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; or Native Hawaiian of Pacific Islander. Given that 24.5% of the U.S. population identified as people of color in 2018 (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), the percentage of leaders of color at TYA companies would need to more than triple for this group of leaders to be more representative of the general population. This lack of diversity is not new; twenty years ago, Kramer (2001, pg. 69) noted that this challenge had existed for at least ten years prior (1991), and it seems likely that this may have been the case throughout the history of the field.

The leaders of color who did participate tended to work in education roles (often, but not always, lower paid and less influential positions than the other leaders surveyed), and sometimes in artistic roles. Leaders of color were much more likely to work with category C theatres, theatres founded between 1980-1999, and theatres located in the Northeast. While our field must pursue inclusivity generally, this is particularly true regarding leadership roles in professional companies.

SELECTED DATA

We should consider if, why, and how the homogenous makeup of TYA leaders might contribute to the relative lack of diversity regarding culturally specific productions and plays written by playwrights of color that was revealed by Ruggiero & Uhls (2019). Though the survey asked TYA leaders about many topics, it generally did not specifically ask questions exclusively about diversity or racial equity. Nevertheless, several questions provided opportunities for leaders to indicate, among other factors, the relative significance of equity and inclusion in their work.

Below, we share specific data from our report (Omasta & Felty, 2021) that leaders participating in the survey provided that may relate to this topic. In each section, we share data in its raw form and briefly summarize it, pointing out findings that we will return to in our eventual analysis of how the data speaks to the questions of inclusivity raised thus far.

Season Selection

One topic directly related to the representation of diversity on stage is season selection. As such, the first factor we report on is the relative importance artistic leaders assigned to eight potentially relevant season selection criteria. Leaders rated each criterion on a scale where 1 indicated “not at all important” and 4 indicated “very important.” Their responses are depicted in Tables 3-5.

The criterion “titles that tell the stories of marginalized people” generally ranked highly, with a mean score of 3.0 (“Important”) or greater at all theatres except Category A theatres. This is an example of a way in which theatre leaders tended to indicate that including diverse and representative plays in their seasons was important when they were explicitly asked about the importance of doing so, a topic we will return to in our later discussion.

It is also noteworthy that selecting plays with “recognizable titles” was a much more important criterion for artistic leaders at category C and D theatres than it was for leaders at category A & B theatres (and it was especially important at the largest-budget theatres). This is another data point we will discuss in our later analysis.

CATEGORY A	CATEGORY B
Artistic Experimentation (3.38)	Current Issues (3.30)
Available Talent (3.33)	TIE: Various Age Groups; Artistic Experimentation; Stories of Marginalized (3.10)
Original Material (3.08)	
Stories of Marginalized (2.92)	
Various Age Groups (2.83)	Available Talent (2.80)
Current Issues (2.42)	TIE: High Revenue; Original Material (2.70)
High Revenue (2.38)	
Recognizable Titles (1.92)	Recognizable Titles (2.60)

CATEGORY C	CATEGORY D	Color Key
Various Age Groups (3.38)	Various Age Groups (3.69)	Score 3.50-4.00
Stories of Marginalized (3.31)	TIE: High Revenue; Stories of Marginalized (3.62)	Score 3.00-3.49
		Score 2.50-2.99
TIE: High Revenue; Recognizable Titles; Artistic Experimentation (3.19)	TIE: Recognizable Titles; Current Issues (3.54)	Score 2.00-2.49
		Score 1.00-1.99
Current Issues (3.00)	Artistic Experimentation (3.46)	
Original Material (2.31)	Available Talent (2.77)	
Available Talent (2.25)	Original Material (2.62)	

Table 3. Mean importance of various season selection criteria, by theatre budget size. *N* = 55.

Tables 3 – 5 use summary terms. Since the exact wording of the criteria matter, they are indicated here in full:

- **"Including plays expected to generate high revenue/sales" (HIGH REVENUE)**
- **"Including plays with recognizable titles" (RECOGNIZABLE TITLES)**
- **"Including a certain number of productions each year for specific age groups" (VARIOUS AGE GROUPS)**
- **"Including plays that provide opportunities for artistic experimentation and innovation" (ARTISTIC EXPERIMENTATION)**
- **"Including plays that respond to current issues and events" (CURRENT ISSUES)**
- **"Including titles that tell the stories of marginalized people" (STORIES OF MARGINALIZED)**
- **"Including plays that are appropriate for the talent of actors available in the theatre's ensemble or region" (AVAILABLE TALENT)**

NORTHEAST	MIDWEST
Artistic Experimentation (3.75)	TIE: Various Age Groups; Artistic Experimentation (3.29)
Stories of Marginalized (3.43)	
TIE: Various Age Groups; Current Issues (3.14)	TIE: High Revenue; Stories of Marginalized (3.06)
Original Material (3.13)	Current Issues (2.94)
Available Talent (2.57)	Available Talent (2.88)
High Revenue (2.50)	TIE: Recognizable Titles; Original Material (2.82)
Recognizable Titles (1.86)	
SOUTH	**WEST**
TIE: Artistic Experimentation; Stories of Marginalized (3.38)	Various Age Groups (3.56)
	TIE: Recognizable Titles; Stories of Marginalized (3.33)
TIE: Various Age Groups; Current Issues (3.19)	High Revenue (3.22)
TIE: High Revenue; Recognizable Titles (3.00)	Current Issues (3.11)
	Artistic Experimentation (2.78)
Available Talent (2.95)	Available Talent (2.33)
Original Material (2.62)	Original Material (2.00)

Table 4. Mean importance of various season selection criteria, by theatre region. *N* = 55.

Because these tables are somewhat complex, we include several indicators of importance to help us understand the data: the eight criteria are presented in order from greatest to least mean importance for each theatre type; the mean rating of each criterion is indicated; and the color scheme helps visually compare mean ratings.

These multiple ways of viewing the data can be helpful given the fact that criteria received different mean ratings even in cases when they were ranked similarly. For example, while both category C & D theatre leaders collectively rated "including a certain number of productions each year for specific age groups" as the most important criterion, category D leaders collectively rated this criterion as more important than category C leaders did.

BEFORE 1980	1980-1999	2000 AND LATER
Stories of Marginalized (3.45)	Various Age Groups (3.56)	Artistic Experimentation (3.21)
TIE: High Revenue; Various Age Groups; Artistic Experimentation; Current Issues (3.35)	Artistic Experimentation (3.38)	TIE: Stories of Marginalized; Available Talent (3.06)
	Stories of Marginalized (3.31)	
	Current Issues (3.19)	Various Age Groups (2.94)
	High Revenue (3.13)	Original Material (2.74)
Recognizable Titles (3.25)	Recognizable Titles (3.00)	Current Issues (2.72)
Available Talent (2.75)	Original Material (2.62)	High Revenue (2.47)
Original Material (2.60)	Available Talent (2.5)	Recognizable Titles (2.28)

Table 5. Mean importance of various season selection criteria, by theatre founding. *N* = 55.

Adaptations

As indicated in Table 6, larger-budget theatres generally produced much greater percentages of adaptations than the smallest-budget theatres. In fact, there was a positive correlation between theatre budget size and percentage of adaptations offered: the larger the budget, the greater the percentage of adaptations produced. The relative percentage of adaptations produced is another factor we consider in our analysis below.

		Budget Size			
Show Type	**Overall**	**Category A**	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**
Adaptations	39%	20%	41%	46%	50%
Musicals	30%	11%	24%	42%	38%
World Premieres	27%	39%	23%	23%	20%
	Region			
Show Type	**North-east**	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**	
Adaptations	19%	39%	42%	48%	
Musicals	16%	39%	30%	26%	
World Premieres	12%	32%	27%	30%	
	Year Founded				
Show Type	**Before 1980**	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**		
Adaptations	55%	37%	25%		
Musicals	37%	40%	14%		
World Premieres	20%	23%	37%		

Table 6. Mean percentages of productions of different types, by theatre budget size, region, and year founded. Overall *N* = 57.

Leader Priorities

Another question that offered a perspective on the relative importance of diversity to TYA theatre leaders asked all theatre leaders (artistic, business, and education) to rate their level of agreement with several statements regarding priorities. The statements were:

> "In general, it is important that the shows my theatre presents and/or produces…"
>
> - "…demonstrate aesthetic excellence."
> - "…are highly entertaining."
> - "…align with school curricula."
> - "…address social issues and diversity."

Leaders rated their agreement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree); their responses are summarized in Table 7.

Leaders from theatres of all budget sizes, regions, and longevities responded similarly. The highest-rated priority among all groups was "aesthetic excellence," and the lowest among all groups was "alignment with school curricula." In most cases, leaders rated "social issues and diversity" second-most important, followed by "highly entertaining"; the import of these middle values was reversed at category A theatres and those founded since 2000. This data again suggests that leaders indicate that diversity is a relatively important priority when explicitly asked about it.

		Budget Size			
	Overall	**Category A**	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**
Aesthetic Excellence	3.83	3.72	3.81	3.81	3.90
Highly Entertaining	3.40	3.39	3.46	3.48	3.26
Align School Curricula	2.75	2.50	2.77	2.88	2.71
Social Issues & Diversity	3.55	3.28	3.50	3.57	3.68

Table 7 – Part 1 of 2. Leader ratings of the importance of various aspects of shows produced. *N* = 121.

	Region			
	North-east	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**
Aesthetic Excellence	3.94	3.92	3.74	3.75
Highly Entertaining	3.56	3.33	3.40	3.35
Align School Curricula	2.39	2.86	2.83	2.70
Social Issues & Diversity	3.61	3.58	3.47	3.60
	Year Founded			
	Before 1980	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**	
Aesthetic Excellence	3.80	3.85	3.83	
Highly Entertaining	3.22	3.50	3.56	
Align School Curricula	2.90	2.71	2.58	
Social Issues & Diversity	3.61	3.59	3.42	

Table 7 – Part 2 of 2. Leader ratings of the importance of various aspects of shows produced. *N* = 121.

Qualities of Quality

One of the most interesting questions in terms of our analysis was an open-ended question that asked leaders to discuss their perceptions of what constitutes "quality" work. The survey asked: "How would you define 'quality' as in 'quality TYA'?" We then coded the responses to identify recurring patterns. We identified 18 "qualities of quality" mentioned by the 122 leaders who responded to this question and present them below in order from the most frequently mentioned to the least.[4]

[4] It is important to note that, given the way the data were collected, the fact that a leader did not mention any particular quality does not necessarily imply that they do not value it. The survey did not present leaders with a comprehensive list of qualities to respond to, so they did not see and dismiss any particular value.

Artistic Excellence (49%)
Respectful of Young People (25%)
Relevant (19%)
Engaging (16%)
Created by Trained Professionals (13%)
Inclusive / Accessible (11%)
Challenging (9%)
Innovative (8%)
Imaginative (7%)
Inspiring (7%)
Pedagogically Excellent (7%)
Thought Provoking (7%)
Age Appropriate (6%)
Original (6%)
Appealing to All Ages (4%)
Empathy-Promoting (4%)
Empowering (2%)
Enjoyable (2%)

Table 8 reports the percentage of leaders from theatres of various types who mentioned each of the qualities above; there was relatively minor variance in responses. Leaders from theatres of all budget sizes, regions, and longevities were most likely to mention “Artistic Excellence” followed by “Respectful of Young People.”

		Budget Size			
	Overall	**Category A**	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**
Artistically Excellent	49%	33%	42%	62%	44%
Respects Young People	25%	24%	42%	14%	38%
Relevant	13%	12%	17%	16%	14%
Engaging	16%	24%	13%	27%	7%
Created by Trained Prof.	11%	12%	17%	14%	7%
Inclusive / Accessible	19%	18%	21%	16%	31%
Challenging	8%	24%	0%	5%	14%
Innovative	7%	12%	4%	5%	7%
Imaginative	7%	12%	4%	11%	0%
Inspiring	6%	0%	4%	11%	7%
Pedagogically Excellent	7%	12%	0%	11%	7%
Thought Provoking	4%	6%	4%	2%	3%
Age Appropriate	7%	6%	4%	8%	10%
Original	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%
Appealing to All Ages	6%	0%	0%	10%	9%
Empathy-Promoting	9%	0%	4%	14%	13%
Empowering	4%	0%	8%	5%	3%
Enjoyable	2%	0%	0%	5%	0%

Table 8 – Part 1 of 3. Percentages of leaders mentioning various "qualities of quality." *N* = 122.

	Region			
	North-east	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**
Artistically Excellent	59%	50%	59%	47%
Respects Young People	41%	29%	20%	32%
Relevant	18%	12%	17%	11%
Engaging	12%	21%	20%	11%
Created by Trained Prof.	6%	15%	17%	0%
Inclusive / Accessible	18%	35%	10%	21%
Challenging	18%	12%	7%	0%
Innovative	12%	12%	5%	5%
Imaginative	6%	6%	10%	5%
Inspiring	12%	9%	5%	0%
Pedagogically Excellent	18%	12%	5%	0%
Thought Provoking	12%	3%	5%	0%
Age Appropriate	0%	12%	5%	11%
Original	12%	0%	0%	0%
Appealing to All Ages	6%	12%	2%	5%
Empathy-Promoting	0%	15%	7%	16%
Empowering	0%	6%	5%	5%
Enjoyable	0%	0%	2%	5%

Table 8 – Part 2 of 3. Percentages of leaders mentioning various "qualities of quality." *N* = 122.

	Year Founded		
	Before 1980	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**
Artistically Excellent	56%	63%	42%
Respects Young People	29%	27%	27%
Relevant	6%	17%	24%
Engaging	15%	20%	18%
Created by Trained Prof.	10%	13%	12%
Inclusive / Accessible	21%	33%	9%
Challenging	6%	13%	9%
Innovative	4%	13%	9%
Imaginative	6%	7%	9%
Inspiring	6%	3%	9%
Pedagogically Excellent	8%	10%	6%
Thought Provoking	2%	7%	6%
Age Appropriate	10%	3%	6%
Original	0%	3%	3%
Appealing to All Ages	8%	10%	0%
Empathy-Promoting	19%	7%	0%
Empowering	8%	3%	0%
Enjoyable	2%	3%	0%

Table 8 – Part 3 of 3. Percentages of leaders mentioning various "qualities of quality." *N* = 122.

ANALYSIS

Despite the need for TYA productions to represent the diversity of American youth, they often do not do so to a significant degree. As discussed, only 19% of TYA plays produced in the 2018-19 season were those in which "people of color characters / communities / cultures were essential to the story's narrative" (Ruggiero & Uhls, 2019, p.15). It is important to explore why this might be, in hopes that learning more about the possible causes might help the field diversify its productions.

As we pointed to several times in the Data section above, TYA leaders tended to indicate that addressing diversity-related issues was important when the survey explicitly asked them about this topic. For example, most artistic leaders indicated that "telling the stories of marginalized communities" was an important factor during season selection, especially at larger-budget theatres and those located in the South and West (see tables 3, 4, and 5). Nutting (2017) states, "as artists and arts administrators, we want to believe that we are truly inclusive of everyone. For many of us, it is why we do what we do and why we believe in the power of the arts to be a catalyst for change as a pathway to common ground and understanding" (pg. 4). Leaders' responses to some survey questions seem to suggest that such plays would be well represented in theatres' seasons, but the data indicates that this is not the case.

Further, when explicitly asked to rate how important it was for their theatres to "address social issues and diversity" in their productions, leaders of all types of theatres generally rated this as quite important (overall mean rating of 3.55 of 4.0). It is true that leaders of all theatre types rated producing shows with "aesthetic excellence" as somewhat more important than addressing social issues and diversity (the overall mean for aesthetic excellence was 3.83). At the same time, they consistently rated addressing social issues and diversity to be much more important than aligning their productions with school curricula (overall mean 2.75) and (except for the leaders of the newest and smallest-budget theatres) TYA leaders collectively rated addressing social issues and diversity as more important than producing "highly entertaining" shows (overall mean 3.4). This again suggests that diversity is important to TYA leaders, and that we might expect to see greater diversity on stage.

However, and perhaps critically, when asked an open-ended

question about what constitutes the qualities of "quality TYA" (without an explicit prompt referencing diversity or any other quality), very few leaders mentioned that quality TYA should address diversity. As revealed in Table 8, only 11% of leaders mentioned qualities related to the broad category of inclusivity and accessibility.[5] This may suggest that while most respondents truly valued diversity, it was not among the first things that came to mind when they considered what constitutes quality TYA. Whatever the reason for this, this finding suggests one reason why the TYA plays produced are less likely to feature stories of people of color or to be written by playwrights of color.

Another possible factor to consider is related to Ruggiero & Uhls's (2019) finding that 23% of productions in the 2018-19 season were productions of just 17 plays that the researchers deemed "popular titles." Furthermore, only 12% of these popular titles were culturally specific productions (p. 16). In other words, nearly a quarter of the shows produced were of popular titles which were very unlikely to feature the stories of people of color.

Unfortunately, Ruggiero & Uhls (2019) do not include a list of the "popular" titles (which were unlikely to feature stories of people of color) in their report, so we cannot be certain if these popular titles were also "recognizable titles" (the term used in our survey). It seems likely, however, that this is the case. We suspect this is the case because 90% percent of the "popular" titles in the Ruggiero & Uhls (2019) report were adaptations (p. 16). Our present study found that, on average, artistic leaders at larger-budget theatres indicated that it was important for them to select plays with recognizable titles for their seasons. If larger theatres value producing popular adaptations, and these plays are unlikely to be culturally specific, it may be unsurprising that relatively few productions of the shows produced in the 2018-19 season featured people of color or their communities and cultures. Thus, a second possible contributor to the challenge of lower representation of people of color in TYA productions is a focus on

[5] Furthermore, many of the comments in this category referred to inclusivity in terms of TYA productions being physically accessible for patrons with physical or other disabilities, rather than inclusivity in terms of racial/ethnic diversity. Accessibility for people who are differently-abled is certainly important, but for the purposes of this article, it should be noted that references to inclusivity in terms of racial/ethnic diversity were quite rare.

popular/recognizable titles at larger theatre.

A confounding finding in this survey related to the above discussion is that theatre leaders generally rated telling the stories of "marginalized people" as more important than selecting recognizable titles for their seasons. While not all stories of marginalized people are those of people of color, we note that people of color have been marginalized throughout U.S. history. As such, TYA leaders' stated interest in telling the stories of marginalized people suggests that a greater number of productions featuring characters of color and stories of their communities should be being produced, but it appears that this is not the case.

In this discussion we have offered some possibilities that may contribute to lack of equitable representation of people of color and productions by playwrights of color in the TYA field, though we cannot make any definitive claims. It is possible that unconscious biases among theatre leaders (93% of whom identify as white) may be at play during season selection. It is possible that an emphasis on producing recognizable titles at larger budget theatres plays a role (and it may logically follow that leaders at these theatres feel they must produce such titles in order to sustain their large organizations, which may be the case). It is possible that entirely different factors, which we could not identify based on the limited data from our survey, play a significant role in this challenging situation. Regardless of the reason, the fact remains that inequities exist in our field, presenting us both an imperative and opportunities to address them.

MOVING FORWARD

Much (though not enough) has changed in the U.S. climate since this survey was conducted. The Black Lives Matter movement, the Stop AAPI Hate movement, the "We see you, White American theatre" letter and theatres' responses to it (see Myer, 2021), recurring media coverage of police violence toward people of color, and other factors have led to increased urgency in national conversations, including those in our field, regarding the dismantling of white hegemony and the promotion of anti-racist policies and thinking.

In 2020, BIPOC in TYA offered "an invitation for the field of TYA to answer the calls for racial justice and transformation" in their Anti-Racist & Anti-Oppressive Futures for Theatre for Young Audiences: An

Interactive Guide. Over fifty TYA companies and ninety independent artists and administrators pledged to work through the guide and conduct check-ins with the BIPOC in TYA group about their progress. Over 450 individuals participated in TYA/USA's "Listen, Learn, Lead: Antiracism in TYA" webinar series that featured numerous perspectives on how people working in our field can pursue equity and inclusivity.

This intensified focus on the problem at hand may drive tangible change in TYA moving forward. Indeed, some writers have begun exploring and documenting how theatre practitioners might strive to promote anti-racism in their work in our field. This may be through work as TYA directors (e.g., Kiley. 2020), or through work directly with youth, such as through the creation of theatrical work exploring cultural assumptions and promoting inclusivity (e.g., Chakrabarty, 2011; Rajendran, 2016) and employing pedagogical methods such as process drama through social/racial-justice oriented lenses (e.g., Streeter, 2020). *Howlround* has created an entire series of essays dedicated to advancing work in Latinx and Latin American TYA (see Schroeder-Arce, 2019). The 2021 virtual TYA/USA conference has repeatedly featured sessions addressing how practitioners in the field address anti-racism. We hope that both practical and scholarly efforts such as these (which are just a few of many) will lead toward a more equitable future in all aspects of the field. We hope the field will grow and benefit from greater inclusion of people of color in terms of stories told and the people who help tell them.

It is also important that we track and measure any progress the field makes. Studies such as this one and the work of Ruggiero & Uhls must be conducted regularly and should intensify their focus on issues of equity, specifically. While anecdotal evidence and positive conversations about change are important, we believe it is imperative that future empirical research explore all aspects of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in our field to help track our accountability efforts over time.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Omasta, M. & Felty, A. (2021). Data-based analysis of diversity and equity in theatre for young audience companies. *ArtsPraxis, 8* (2), 46-70.

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Appendix A

Perspectives of Theatre for Young Audiences Companies' Leaders by Budget, Region, and Longevity: A Survey

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ABSTRACT

This report offers extensive data from a survey project that invited the artistic, business, and education leaders of every professional Theatre for Young Audiences company affiliated with TYA/USA to share information regarding a wide range of topics including season selection, finances, education programming, staff demographics, leader perceptions of quality TYA, and others. The focus of this piece is a comparison of data from theatres of different types.

Specifically, it considers how three influential circumstances—theatres' budget sizes, their geographic locations, and their longevity—intersect with, and perhaps affect, other circumstances as well as the perspectives and beliefs of their theatre leaders. This article provides copious descriptive data and invites readers to draw insights from their personal analyses of the data most relevant to their own practice and/or research.

TYA scholars have long called for empirical studies in the field related to a wide range of research questions (e.g., Cornelison, 1975; Davis, 1961; Klein, 1989; Saldaña, 1988; Ward, 1950). In recent years, many researchers have explored the field through survey research, primarily seeking to better understand aspects of young spectators' engagement with, interpretation of, or understanding of a performance, or how plays might affect young audiences' attitudes, values, and beliefs. The projects usually survey young spectators themselves (e.g., Betzien, 2007; Johari 2018; Omasta, 2011; Pretorious, 2008; and Queponds, 2016) or primary and secondary level educators (e.g., Adamson, 2011; Klein, 1997; Swallow, 2012).

Only three studies have attempted to assess the state of the US TYA field more broadly through survey research. The first (van Tassel, 1969) collected survey responses from 104 "individuals or producing organizations practicing in the field of theatre for children in the United States" (p. 414). The second (Blackwell, 2008), collected responses from 36 "directors, playwrights, university faculty, and educational theatre artists" (p. 12). Omasta (2019) conducted the most recent project, surveying the artistic, business, and educational leaders of TYA theatres affiliated with TYA/USA, the U.S. center of ASSITEJ; leaders from 97% of the 61 eligible theatres participated—an exceptionally high response rate in survey research.

This report shares extensive data from the most recent project, with a focus on comparing data from theatres of different types. Specifically, it considers how three influential circumstances—theatres' budget sizes, their geographic locations, and their longevity[1]—intersect with, and perhaps affect, other circumstances as well as the perspectives and beliefs of their theatre leaders.

Given the wide range of topics the survey covered, the value of

[1] We use this term to refer to the length of time a theatre has been in operation.

the data in this report will vary to a large extent based on the particular interests of each individual reader. We present brief overviews of responses related to each topic along with tables detailing the findings, but it is not possible to discuss the nuances of all data in a report of this nature.

As such, in this report we provide copious descriptive data and invite readers to draw insights from their personal analyses most relevant to their own practice and/or research. Separately, we have published an article (the piece can be accessed here: Omasta & Felty, 2021) that demonstrates how readers can analyze the information presented here. The article analyzes data relevant to a particularly significant and timely topic: the state of inclusivity and equity in our field.

METHODOLOGY

Omasta (2019) invited the artistic, business, and education leaders of each professional TYA company affiliated with TYA/USA to participate in the survey, employing a cross-sectional (Barr, 2004) census design (Fricker Jr, 2008; Groves et al., 2009). As Cantwell (2008) observes, among quantitative approaches, a census can be the only design that "can produce useful information for rare populations" (p. 4). The census approach and theatre-level response rate of 97% suggest minimal likelihood of non-sampling bias or non-response bias.

The research team sent questionnaires designed specifically for the artistic, business, and education leaders of each company, with an additional questionnaire for participants who led in more than one of these areas. We drafted most of the questions in collaboration with TYA/USA and based additional questions on those posed in previous surveys of the field (vanTassel, 1969; Blackwell, 2008). To promote validity, we employed expert review (Groves et al., 2009), cognitive verbal prompting (Hoffmeyer, Sheingold, & Taylor, 2015), and readability analysis (Kincaid, Fishburne, Rogers, & Chissom, 1975).

We collected data using Qualtrics and analyzed it using SPSS statistical software. Two research assistants coded qualitative data, achieving intercoder reliability greater than 96%, with discrepant codes analyzed by a third coder. When possible, we quantitized qualitative data for reporting. For further technical details regarding methodology, see Omasta (2019).

We note that the global COVID-19 pandemic that began the season following the one during which this data was collected radically altered the ways in which TYA companies operated, with many transitioning primarily to virtual operations. As of the publication of this report, many companies have begun to offer live, in-person programming once again. It is uncertain at this time to what degree companies may return to previous practices, retain those from the pandemic era, and/or innovate moving forward. Future research similar to that of this study may provide insights into the evolving landscape of the field in terms of responses to the pandemic and other factors.

Comparison Groups

In this report we compare data from theatres in three ways. We first compare theatres with regard to their financial resources as measured by their total annual operating budgets during their 2017-18 seasons. The four budget categories are:

Category A: Budgets Under $250,000
Category B: Budgets Between $250,000 — $999,999
Category C: Budgets Between $1 million — $2.99 million
Category D: Budgets of $3 million and above

We next compare theatres based on their geographical region, using the four primary regions established by the US Census Bureau: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. Finally, we compare theatres in three groups based on longevity: those founded in 1979 or earlier; between 1980-1999, and in 2000 or later. The percentage of respondents within each group is indicated in Table 1.

Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
23%	22%	32%	23%	15%	29%	41%	15%	36%	30%	34%

Table 1. Percentages of participating theatres by budget size, region, and year founded. *N* = 59.

There are some correlations between theatres which can be inferred throughout the data, including data between larger-budget theatres and theatres with greater longevity. In general, theatres with greater longevity tended to have larger budgets than those founded more recently. As such, observations about differences between, for example, theatres in budget Category A and theatres in budget Category D, also often appear between theatres founded before 1980 and theatres founded in 2000 or later. This is not always the case, however; there are instances in which a theatre's budget or longevity may be more telling than the combined weight of those two factors. Additionally, theatres in the Northeast often reported smaller budgets[1] and were founded more recently[2] than theatres in other regions.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

In this section we briefly summarize the data and what we perceive as salient trends related to each topic the survey considered. To allow for more detailed analysis, we supplement these summaries with more comprehensive data presented in tables. Each table indicates the overall mean (average) response from all participating theatres, followed by responses from theatres categorized by budget size, region, and longevity.

Programming

Season Selection

The survey asked theatres' artistic leaders to indicate the importance of eight potentially relevant season selection criteria. Leaders rated the importance of each criterion on a scale of 1 ("not at all important") to 4 ("very important"). Their responses appear in Tables 2-4. To help understand the data, several indicators of importance are included: the eight criteria are presented in order from greatest to lowest mean importance for each theatre type; the mean rating of each criterion is indicated; and the color scheme helps visually compare mean ratings.[3]

As the tables suggest, respondents from different types of theatres often prioritized various criteria differently; in fact, no criterion was rated at least 3.0 ("Important") by leaders from *all*

[1] Only 38% of theatres in the Northeast reported budgets of $1 million or greater, compared to 53-64% of theatres in other regions.

[2] 100% of the participating theatres in the Northeast were founded in 1980 or later, while only 56-59% of theatres in other regions were founded this recently.

[3] These multiple ways of viewing the data can be helpful given the fact that criteria received different mean ratings even in cases when they were ranked similarly. For example, while both category C & D theatre leaders collectively rated "including a certain number of productions each year for specific age groups" as the most important criterion, category D leaders collectively rated this criterion as more important than category C leaders did.

theatre types. There were some noticeable trends, however.

Criteria that leaders ranked highly (mean score of 3.0 or greater) at theatres of nearly all budget types, regions, and longevity were:

- "Plays that provide opportunities for artistic experimentation" (all theatres except those in the West)
- "Titles that tell the stories of marginalized people" (all theatres except Category A)
- "Including a certain number of productions each year for specific age groups" (all theatres except Category A and those founded since 2000)

While no criteria consistently received very low scores, some received scores of less than 3.0 at theatres of nearly all budget types, regions, and years. These were:

- "Plays appropriate for the talent of actors available in the theatre's ensemble or region" (all theatres except Category A theatres and those founded since 2000).
- "Plays that are wholly original; not adaptations from existing material" (all theatres except Category A and those in the Northeast).

Ratings of other criteria varied more widely. For example, selecting plays "expected to generate high revenue/sales" was relatively unimportant to leaders of smaller-budget theatres, but quite important to larger-budget theatre leaders (especially Category D theatres). Similarly, while selecting plays with "recognizable titles" was the least important criteria for Category A & B theatre leaders, it was much more important to Category C & D theatre leaders.

In general, leaders of Category D theatres were more likely to rate various criteria as "very important." While *none* of the leaders of Category A, B, or C theatre provided on average rated any criteria as 3.5 or above, leaders of Category D theatres collectively rated *five* of the eight criteria this highly. Leaders of the largest-budget theatres feel may greater pressure to meet numerous criteria in general than their colleagues at theatres with smaller budgets.

Leaders of theatres in the Northeast collectively rated "including plays that provide opportunities for artistic experimentation and innovation" as especially important, collectively rating this criterion as more important than leaders of any other type of theatre. While leaders in the Northeast rated including wholly original plays in their seasons to be important, this was the least important criterion to leaders of theatres in all other regions.

Tables 2-4 use summary terms. Since the exact wording of the criteria matter, they are indicated here in full:

- **"Including plays expected to generate high revenue/sales" (HIGH REVENUE)**
- **"Including plays with recognizable titles" (RECOGNIZABLE TITLES)**
- **"Including a certain number of productions each year for specific age groups" (VARIOUS AGE GROUPS)**
- **"Including plays that provide opportunities for artistic experimentation and innovation" (ARTISTIC EXPERIMENTATION)**
- **"Including plays that respond to current issues and events" (CURRENT ISSUES)**
- **"Including titles that tell the stories of marginalized people" (STORIES OF MARGINALIZED)**
- **"Including plays that are appropriate for the talent of actors available in the theatre's ensemble or region" (AVAILABLE TALENT)**
- **"Including plays that are wholly original; not adaptations from existing material" (ORIGINAL MATERIAL).**

<table>
<tr><th>CATEGORY A</th><th>CATEGORY B</th><th>CATEGORY C</th><th>CATEGORY D</th><th></th><th>Color Key</th></tr>
<tr><td>Artistic Experimentation (3.38)</td><td>Current Issues (3.30)</td><td>Various Age Groups (3.38)</td><td>Various Age Groups (3.69)</td><td rowspan="8"></td><td>Score 3.50-4.00</td></tr>
<tr><td>Available Talent (3.33)</td><td rowspan="3">TIE: Various Age Groups;
Artistic Experimentation;
Stories of Marginalized (3.10)</td><td>Stories of Marginalized (3.31)</td><td rowspan="2">TIE: High Revenue;
Stories of Marginalized (3.62)</td><td>Score 3.00-3.49</td></tr>
<tr><td>Original Material (3.08)</td><td rowspan="2">TIE: High Revenue;
Recognizable Titles;
Artistic Experimentation (3.19)</td><td>Score 2.50-2.99</td></tr>
<tr><td>Stories of Marginalized (2.92)</td><td rowspan="2">TIE: Recognizable Titles;
Current Issues (3.54)</td><td>Score 2.00-2.49</td></tr>
<tr><td>Various Age Groups (2.83)</td><td>Available Talent (2.80)</td><td>Score 1.00-1.99</td></tr>
<tr><td>Current Issues (2.42)</td><td rowspan="2">TIE: High Revenue;
Original Material (2.70)</td><td>Current Issues (3.00)</td><td>Artistic Experimentation (3.46)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>High Revenue (2.38)</td><td>Original Material (2.31)</td><td>Available Talent (2.77)</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Recognizable Titles (1.92)</td><td>Recognizable Titles (2.60)</td><td>Available Talent (2.25)</td><td>Original Material (2.62)</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Table 2. Mean importance of various season selection criteria, by theatre budget size. *N* = 55.

NORTHEAST	MIDWEST	SOUTH	WEST
Artistic Experimentation (3.75)	TIE: Various Age Groups; Artistic Experimentation (3.29)	TIE: Artistic Experimentation; Stories of Marginalized (3.38)	Various Age Groups (3.56)
Stories of Marginalized (3.43)			TIE: Recognizable Titles; Stories of Marginalized (3.33)
TIE: Various Age Groups; Current Issues (3.14)	TIE: High Revenue; Stories of Marginalized (3.06)	TIE: Various Age Groups; Current Issues (3.19)	
			High Revenue (3.22)
Original Material (3.13)	Current Issues (2.94)	TIE: High Revenue; Recognizable Titles (3.00)	Current Issues (3.11)
Available Talent (2.57)	Available Talent (2.88)		Artistic Experimentation (2.78)
High Revenue (2.50)	TIE: Recognizable Titles; Original Material (2.82)	Available Talent (2.95)	Available Talent (2.33)
Recognizable Titles (1.86)		Original Material (2.62)	Original Material (2.00)

Table 3. Mean importance of various season selection criteria, by theatre region. *N* = 55.

BEFORE 1980	1980-1999	2000 AND LATER
Stories of Marginalized (3.45)	Various Age Groups (3.56)	Artistic Experimentation (3.21)
TIE: High Revenue; Various Age Groups; Artistic Experimentation; Current Issues (3.35)	Artistic Experimentation (3.38)	TIE: Stories of Marginalized; Available Talent (3.06)
	Stories of Marginalized (3.31)	
	Current Issues (3.19)	Various Age Groups (2.94)
	High Revenue (3.13)	Original Material (2.74)
Recognizable Titles (3.25)	Recognizable Titles (3.00)	Current Issues (2.72)
Available Talent (2.75)	Original Material (2.62)	High Revenue (2.47)
Original Material (2.60)	Available Talent (2.5)	Recognizable Titles (2.28)

Table 4. Mean importance of various season selection criteria, by theatre founding. *N* = 55.

Productions for Various Ages

Table 5 reports the percentages of shows participating theatres produced/presented intended for audiences of different ages. Except for the smallest-budget theatres (Category A), most performances were targeted for children,[1] followed by those intended primarily for the very young or tweens, with few productions for teens and even fewer for adults.

Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) thrived at smaller-budget theatres. TVY constituted the majority of productions at Category A theatres and was also much more common in the Northeast than other regions and at theatres founded since 2000.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Primary Audience	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
TVY	22%	38%	23%	17%	18%	44%	11%	24%	17%	15%	14%	36%
Children	58%	36%	52%	56%	61%	47%	60%	60%	57%	58%	60%	56%
Tweens	14%	13%	19%	20%	15%	4%	23%	12%	13%	22%	14%	6%
Teens	5%	7%	3%	6%	6%	4%	6%	4%	7%	5%	9%	1%
Adults	1%	6%	3%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	6%	0%	3%	1%

Table 5. Mean percentages of productions primarily for audiences of various ages, by theatre budget size, region, and year founded. Overall *N* = 57.

[1] The survey used the following age groups: TVY (approximately ages 0-5), children (approximately ages 5-10), tweens (approximately ages 11-13), teens (approximately ages 14-17), and adults (ages 18+).

Adaptations, Musicals, and Premieres

As indicated in Table 6, there was a positive correlation between theatre budget size and percentage of adaptations offered: the larger the budget, the greater the percentage of adaptations produced. Larger-budget theatres also produced greater percentages of musicals than smaller-budget theatres. Interestingly, world premieres constituted a considerably greater percentage of work at Category A theatres than at larger-budget theatres.

Corresponding trends emerge when considering theatres by longevity: the most-established theatres produced the greatest percentages of adaptations and musicals while the newest theatres produced greater percentages of world premieres. Regionally, the theatres in the Northeast varied from the rest of the country: adaptations, musicals, and world premieres constituted much lower percentages of their total plays produced.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Show Type	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
Adaptations	39%	20%	41%	46%	50%	19%	39%	42%	48%	55%	37%	25%
Musicals	30%	11%	24%	42%	38%	16%	39%	30%	26%	37%	40%	14%
World Premieres	27%	39%	23%	23%	20%	12%	32%	27%	30%	20%	23%	37%

Table 6. Mean percentages of productions of different types, by theatre budget size, region, and year founded. Overall N = 57.

Commissioning and Fees

Most participating theatres commissioned or produced new work, including 100% theatres in several categories, as indicated in Table 7. While still prevalent, commissioning was slightly less common at Category A theatres, theatres in the West, and theatres founded between 1980-1999.

	Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
93%	85%	100%	94%	92%	100%	94%	91%	89%	100%	81%	95%

Table 7. Percentages of theatres that commission / produce new work. Overall *N* = 52.

While nearly all theatres that commissioned plays paid a commissioning fee to playwrights, there was considerable variation among theatres of all types with regard to average fees paid, as illustrated in Table 8. Most theatres paid fees between $2,000 – $4,999. Larger-budget theatres were more likely to pay higher fees (but did not always do so), and the most-recently founded theatres generally paid the lowest fees.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Average Fee	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
$0	3%	0%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	14%	0%	0%	7%
$1 – $1,999	19%	67%	0%	14%	0%	0%	29%	23%	0%	12%	0%	43%
$2,000 - $4,999	43%	22%	83%	36%	46%	75%	29%	41%	58%	29%	82%	29%
$5,000 - $9,999	21%	11%	0%	29%	27%	25%	28%	18%	14%	24%	18%	21%
$10,000+	14%	0%	0%	21%	27%	0%	14%	18%	14%	35%	0%	0%

Table 8. Percentages of theatres paying average fees of various amounts to playwrights whose work they commissioned during the 2017-18 season. Overall *N* = 42.

Performance Types

All theatres except those with the smallest budgets reported that they offered most of their performances in residence at their own venues, split roughly equally between public performances and school performances. However, as Table 9 reveals, nearly half of performances at Category A theatres were touring performances. Touring was most common at recently-founded theatres and those in the Northeast.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Performance Type	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
Public	40%	36%	46%	40%	41%	34%	45%	39%	41%	40%	45%	37%
School (Resident)	35%	16%	46%	40%	39%	33%	32%	35%	41%	39%	40%	27%
Tour	25%	48%	8%	20%	20%	33%	23%	26%	18%	21%	15%	36%

Table 9. Mean percentages of performances for various types of audiences, by theatre budget size, region, and year founded. Overall *N* = 57

Audiences with Special Needs

Most theatres of all types offered *performances* specifically for audience members with special needs (e.g., one or more sensory-friendly performances during the run of a production), as indicated in Table 10. The likelihood of offering these performances was positively correlated with budget size; that is, larger-budget theatres were more likely to offer performances for audiences with special needs. All participating theatres in the Northeast indicated that they offered these performances, while they were least common in the West.

	Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
73%	54%	60%	88%	85%	100%	65%	76%	56%	85%	81%	53%

Table 10. Percentages of theatres offering special performances specifically for audience members with special needs (e.g., sensory-friendly performances). Overall *N* = 55

Overall, few theatres offered entire *productions* intended specifically for audience members with special needs (i.e., all performances throughout the run were designed for members of this population). As Table 11 illustrates, these productions were most common in the Northeast and especially uncommon in the South. Interestingly, although theatres founded since 2000 were the least likely to offer *performances* specifically for audience members with special needs, they were the most likely to offer *productions* for this population.

	Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
12%	7%	10%	19%	8%	25%	12%	5%	11%	10%	6%	16%

Table 11. Percentages of theatres offering special productions specifically for audience members with special needs (i.e., the complete run of the entire production was designed for audience members with special needs.) Overall *N* = 55.

Leader Perspectives

Programming Priorities

To get another perspective on the relative importance TYA theatre leaders placed on potential priorities related to shows (beyond the season selection criteria discussed above), the survey asked all theatre leaders (artistic, business, and education) to rate their level of agreement with several statements. They were:

- "In general, it is important that the shows my theatre presents and/or produces…"
  - "…demonstrate aesthetic excellence."
  - "…are highly entertaining."
  - "…align with school curricula."
  - "…address social issues and diversity."

Leaders rated their agreement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), and results are reported in Table 12.

Leaders from theatres of all budget sizes, regions, and years founded responded similarly. The highest-rated priority among all groups was "aesthetic excellence," and the lowest among all groups was "alignment with school curricula." In most cases, leaders rated "social issues and diversity" second-most important, followed by "highly entertaining"; the import of these middle values was reversed at Category A theatres and those founded since 2000.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
Aesthetic Excellence	3.83	3.72	3.81	3.81	3.90	3.94	3.92	3.74	3.75	3.80	3.85	3.83
Highly Entertaining	3.40	3.39	3.46	3.48	3.26	3.56	3.33	3.40	3.35	3.22	3.50	3.56
Align School Curricula	2.75	2.50	2.77	2.88	2.71	2.39	2.86	2.83	2.70	2.90	2.71	2.58
Social Issues & Diversity	3.55	3.28	3.50	3.57	3.68	3.61	3.58	3.47	3.60	3.61	3.59	3.42

Table 12. Leader ratings of the importance of various aspects of shows produced. *N* = 121.

Qualities of Quality

To understand theatre leaders' perceptions of what constitutes "quality" work, the survey posed the open-ended question, "How would you define 'quality' as in 'quality TYA'?" We then coded the responses to identify recurring patterns. We identified 18 "qualities of quality" mentioned by the 122 leaders who responded to this question, and present them in Table 13 in order from the most to least frequently mentioned (overall).[1] There was relatively minor variance between leaders from theatres of various types; the only two qualities mentioned by at least a quarter of respondents were that work should be artistically excellent and respectful of the young people who view it.

[1] It is important to note that, given the way the data were collected, the fact that a leader did not mention any particular quality does not necessarily imply that they did not value it. The survey asked an open-ended question and did not present leaders with a comprehensive list of qualities to respond to.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
Artistically Excellent	49%	33%	42%	62%	44%	59%	50%	59%	47%	56%	63%	42%
Respects Young People	25%	24%	42%	14%	38%	41%	29%	20%	32%	29%	27%	27%
Relevant	13%	12%	17%	16%	14%	18%	12%	17%	11%	6%	17%	24%
Engaging	16%	24%	13%	27%	7%	12%	21%	20%	11%	15%	20%	18%
Created by Trained Prof.	11%	12%	17%	14%	7%	6%	15%	17%	0%	10%	13%	12%
Inclusive / Accessible	19%	18%	21%	16%	31%	18%	35%	10%	21%	21%	33%	9%
Challenging	8%	24%	0%	5%	14%	18%	12%	7%	0%	6%	13%	9%
Innovative	7%	12%	4%	5%	7%	12%	12%	5%	5%	4%	13%	9%
Imaginative	7%	12%	4%	11%	0%	6%	6%	10%	5%	6%	7%	9%
Inspiring	6%	0%	4%	11%	7%	12%	9%	5%	0%	6%	3%	9%
Pedagogically Excellent	7%	12%	0%	11%	7%	18%	12%	5%	0%	8%	10%	6%
Thought Provoking	4%	6%	4%	2%	3%	12%	3%	5%	0%	2%	7%	6%
Age Appropriate	7%	6%	4%	8%	10%	0%	12%	5%	11%	10%	3%	6%
Original	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%	12%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	3%
Appealing to All Ages	6%	0%	0%	10%	9%	6%	12%	2%	5%	8%	10%	0%

Table 13 – Part 1 of 2. Percentages of leaders mentioning various "qualities of quality." *N* = 122.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
Empathy-Promoting	9%	0%	4%	14%	13%	0%	15%	7%	16%	19%	7%	0%
Empowering	4%	0%	8%	5%	3%	0%	6%	5%	5%	8%	3%	0%
Enjoyable	2%	0%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	2%	5%	2%	3%	0%

Table 13 – Part 2 of 2. Percentages of leaders mentioning various "qualities of quality." N = 122.

Education

Education Programming and Production Season

The artistic, business, and education leaders of participating theatres rated the degree to which their theatres' education programs related to the shows they produced/presented in their seasons on a scale of 1 ("few or none" of the education programs related to productions) to 4 ("all" programs related). As Table 14 indicates, leaders indicated that some, but not most, education programs related to productions. Leaders reported somewhat higher alignment at lower-budget theatres and theatres founded since 2000.

	Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
2.28	2.44	2.62	2.10	2.23	2.35	2.28	2.28	2.25	2.22	2.15	2.50

Table 14. Theatre leaders' mean ratings of the degree to which their theatres' education programs relate to the shows produced/presented in their season on a scale where 1 indicates that "few or none" of the programs relate to productions, 2 indicates "some, but not most" programs relate, 3 indicates "most" programs relate, and 4 indicates "all" programs relate. Overall *N* = 120.

Education Resources Offered

Table 15 indicates the mean frequencies at which theatres of various types offered four types of resources/offerings on a scale from 1 ("almost never") to 4 ("almost always"). Teacher resource guides were very common at all theatres, especially larger-budget theatres and those founded before 1980. Student study/activity guides were offered "often" and were more common at theatres with annual budgets under $1 million, theatres in the Northeast, and theatres founded since 1980. In-school visits, both pre- and post-show, were infrequent overall and especially rare at Category A theatres.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Education Resource	**Overall**	**Category A**	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**	**North-east**	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**	**Before 1980**	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**
Teacher Resource Guides	3.78	3.25	3.83	3.81	4.00	3.71	3.79	3.75	3.87	4.00	3.69	3.60
Student Study Guides	2.99	3.13	3.38	2.63	2.92	3.57	3.21	2.75	2.69	2.83	3.16	3.00
In-School Pre-Show Visits	2.00	1.38	2.08	2.00	2.27	2.29	2.07	1.79	2.13	1.78	2.27	2.00
In-School Post-Show Visits	2.10	1.50	2.17	2.00	2.64	2.00	2.14	1.89	2.63	2.06	2.27	2.00

Table 14. Mean frequencies at which theatres offer various educational resources on a scale where 1 indicates "almost never," 2 indicates "infrequently," 3 indicates "often," and 4 indicates "almost always." Overall *N* = 48-49.

Education Program Script Usage

Theatres also reported the percentage of original scripts used in their education programs (as opposed to licensed scripts). As Table 16 reveals, original scripts were most common in Category A (smaller budget) theatres, theatres in the Northeast, and theatres founded since 1980. Category D (larger budget) theatres and those founded before 1980 were most likely to produce licensed scripts.

	Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
56%	100%	41%	68%	24%	89%	46%	52%	55%	35%	70%	78%

Table 15. Mean percentages of original scripts used in theatres' education programs (as opposed to licensed scripts). Overall *N* = 28.

Theatre Leadership and Staff

Leader Demographics

The survey illuminated one of the greatest challenges facing the field in the US: the demographics of those working in professional TYA. While it revealed some differences between theatres of different types, in general, the data indicate that the field's leadership is fairly homogenous, as revealed in Table 17. By and large, the artistic, business, and education leaders of U.S. TYA companies identified as white (93%) women (64%), the majority of whom held graduate degrees (59%), with a mean age of 47.

Leaders of Category A theatres and those founded since 2000 were generally younger than those at other theatres. At theatres of all types, education leaders were younger than artistic and business leaders. Mean ages did not vary considerably by region.

There was a positive correlation between theatres' budget sizes and their likelihood of employing male artistic leaders; that is, larger-budget theatres were more likely to have male artistic leaders. However, there was also a positive correlation between theatres' budget sizes and their likelihood of employing female business leaders. Education leaders were especially likely to identify as female at theatres of all budgets, particularly at Category A theatres. Only one leader indicated that they identified as non-binary.

In total, only 7% of participating leaders identified as people of color. These individuals were most likely to serve as education leaders or artistic leaders. They were also much more likely to work with Category C theatres and those founded between 1980-1999, as well as theatres in the Northeast.

Most leaders at all theatres, especially larger-budget theatres

and those in the Northeast and South, held graduate degrees. There was a positive correlation between theatres' longevity and the likelihood that their leaders held graduate degrees.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	**Category A**	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**	**North-east**	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**	**Before 1980**	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**
Mean Leader Age	47	39	48	49	48	47	49	46	48	48	51	42
% Female Leaders	64%	78%	54%	60%	66%	65%	68%	63%	63%	58%	68%	69%
% POC Leaders	7%	0%	4%	15%	4%	19%	0%	7%	11%	6%	13%	3%
% Leaders w/ Grad. Degrees	59%	50%	52%	64%	58%	67%	51%	65%	50%	79%	58%	55%

Table 16. Theatre leader demographics. Overall *N* (Age) = 118; Overall *N* (Gender) = 114; Overall *N* (POC) = 111; Overall *N* (Degrees) = 11.

Staff Benefits

The most common staff benefit TYA theatres offered was paid vacation time and/or paid holidays, as indicated in Table 18. The likelihood of a theatre offering its full-time employees paid vacation time and/or holidays was positively correlated with its budget size and longevity. Theatres in the Northeast were markedly less likely to offer paid time off than those in other regions.

Retirement plans were less common at theatres of all types. While the likelihood of theatres offering retirement plans was positively correlated with their budget size and age, even many large-budget theatres did not offer plans. Nearly one-third of professional TYA companies with annual operating budgets of $3 million or greater did not offer their full-time employees any retirement benefits.

Most participating theatres did not offer paid maternity leave, and even fewer offered paid paternity leave. Although there was a positive correlation between theatres' longevity and their likelihood of offering parental leave, there was no correlation between theatres' budget sizes and their likelihood of offering these benefits. Only among Category C theatres did a majority offer parental leave and, notably, it was the smallest-budget theatres (Category A) that were next most likely to offer these benefits.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
Paid Vacation / Holidays	83%	39%	90%	100%	100%	50%	88%	91%	89%	100%	93%	58%
Retirement Plan (Any)	46%	8%	30%	65%	69%	25%	50%	52%	44%	76%	43%	16%
Paid Maternity Leave	40%	40%	10%	71%	25%	43%	47%	47%	11%	43%	39%	38%
Paid Paternity Leave	28%	30%	0%	59%	8%	43%	33%	36%	11%	38%	23%	19%

Table 17. Percentages of theatres offering various benefits to full-time staff. Overall *N* = 54 (Vacation/Retirement); Overall *N* = 50 (Parental Leave)

Leadership Development Opportunities

Most participating theatres offered leadership development opportunities in the field, such as internship and/or apprenticeship programs; hiring assistant directors, assistant designers, and assistant stage managers; and/or offering training programs and classes for aspiring TYA practitioners, as indicated in Table 19. Such offerings were generally less common at Category A theatres, those founded since 2000, and those in the Northeast.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
Opportunity	**Overall**	**Category A**	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**	**North-east**	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**	**Before 1980**	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**
Internships / Apprentices	85%	46%	92%	94%	100%	89%	82%	83%	89%	95%	100%	60%
Assistants & Entry-Level Hiring	73%	54%	83%	83%	77%	56%	94%	67%	67%	81%	72%	65%
Training / Classes	63%	62%	50%	67%	69%	44%	65%	63%	78%	71%	56%	60%

Table 18. Percentages of theatres of various types offering leadership development opportunities. Overall *N* = 59.

Relationships with Unions

Most theatres of all types indicated they never hire union actors, directors, designers, or technicians, or do so only in rare exceptions, as revealed by Table 20. Although there was a positive correlation between theatres' budget sizes and their likelihood of hiring at least 30% union employees of all types, this was uncommon even among the largest-budget theatres.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
≥ 30% Equity	19%	0%	20%	24%	36%	14%	19%	20%	22%	29%	17%	11%
≥ 30% SDC	15%	8%	10%	18%	27%	14%	6%	20%	22%	24%	8%	11%
≥ 30% USA	21%	0%	20%	24%	46%	29%	13%	20%	33%	29%	17%	16%
≥ 30% IATSE	12%	0%	0%	6%	46%	0%	19%	10%	11%	19%	17%	0%

Table 19. Percentages of theatres reporting that at least 30% of the artists and technicians of various types that they hire in a typical season are members of their respective labor unions, including the Actors' Equity Association (Equity), the Stage Directors and Choreographers Association (SDC), United Scenic Artists (USA), and the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE). Overall *N* = 52

Finances and Property

Income and Expenses

On average, among theatres of all types, salaries consisted of just over half of each organization's expenses, as Table 21 indicates. The only notable difference was at theatres in the Northeast, which had higher salary expenses than those in other regions. There was also little variation in the balance of income sources among different types of theatres, with earned income generally constituting just over half of revenue. Category B theatres and those located in the West tended to report somewhat higher proportions of contributed income.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	**Category A**	**Category B**	**Category C**	**Category D**	**North-east**	**Midwest**	**South**	**West**	**Before 1980**	**1980-1999**	**2000 & Later**
Salary Expenses	54%	54%	55%	55%	51%	67%	52%	52%	51%	55%	53%	53%
Non-Salary Expenses	46%	46%	45%	45%	49%	33%	48%	48%	49%	45%	47%	47%
Contributed Income	44%	45%	39%	45%	44%	42%	47%	47%	30%	43%	45%	43%
Earned Income	56%	55%	61%	55%	56%	58%	53%	53%	70%	57%	55%	57%

Table 20. Mean percentages salary/non-salary expenses and earned/contributed income. Overall *N* = 53.

Venues

As Table 22 illustrates, most theatres of all types rented at least one of their performance venues. While the majority of theatres did not own any of their performance venues, there was a positive correlation between theatres' budget sizes as well as longevity and their likelihood of owning at least one of their venues. Regionally, ownership was highest in the Midwest and much lower in the Northeast.

There was a negative correlation between theatre's budgets and their likelihood of indicating they were at least partly itinerant (the larger a theatre's budget, the less likely it was to be partly itinerant), and there was a corresponding negative correlation between theatres' longevity and the likelihood of being at least partly itinerant. Theatres in the Northeast were more than three times as likely to indicate they were at least partly itinerant when compared to other regions.

		Budget Size				Region				Year Founded		
	Overall	Category A	Category B	Category C	Category D	North-east	Midwest	South	West	Before 1980	1980-1999	2000 & Later
Own	30%	8%	30%	35%	42%	14%	38%	29%	33%	43%	23%	21%
Rent	68%	69%	70%	65%	75%	57%	69%	67%	78%	67%	77%	63%
Itinerant	25%	62%	20%	12%	8%	71%	19%	19%	11%	5%	15%	53%

Table 21. Percentages of theatres indicating they owned and/or rented at least one of their performance venues and/or were at least partly itinerant, performing in a variety of spaces. Overall *N* = 53.

CLOSURE

As discussed at the beginning of this report, the true utility of the data presented here is reliant on the analysis of individual readers. We have identified some of the trends that interested us in the summaries above, we recognize that what constitutes the most relevant information will vary based on the questions raised by readers' particular work. We offer one example of the way this data can be analyzed in our piece regarding equity in the field (see Omasta & Felty, 2021), and encourage others to similarly use the data here to explore issues of pertinent to their own research and practice.

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