AATE Takes a Stand Against Bullying
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Dear AATE family,

Have you seen any great productions lately? I have. Amazing productions. They are the kind that remind me of what is important at the American Alliance for Theatre and Education—what we stand for, what we value, and who we are.

• Recently, I saw the production of the Red Kite Roundup at the Chicago Children’s Theatre in Illinois. The interactive theatre programming is tailored specifically to the needs and interests of children on the autism spectrum. Unlike any production I have ever seen, this play expands my understanding of inclusion and empowerment.

• And then there was my recent encounter with the Albany Park Theater Project of Chicago, IL, one of the premiere youth theatres in the country. The workshop they led for university students was stunning, both in its form and its content. I can’t wait for all of us to share the extraordinary work of APTP at the 2011 Chicago conference. These young artists affirm the importance of teens in the constellation of our field.

• AATE past-president Betsy Quinn directed an unforgettable production of Jungalbook at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. In the tradition begun by Winifred Ward almost a century ago, Betsy cast a mix of college actors and middle school students in a fiercely urban retelling of this tale of loyalty, betrayal, and survival. The students formed a multi-ethnic community with a lot to teach each other, even as the paint-can percussion warned against the dangers every young person faces and heralded possibilities for the triumph of love over fear.

• Lastly, I recently witnessed Theatre for the Very Young. Moms and dads parked their strollers in the lobby of the theatre and gathered in a large open room on colorful carpet squares. Together they experienced Dot and Ziggy, created by Linda Hartzell, Mark Perry, and the Seattle Children’s Theatre in Washington. The toddlers were beaming, even as the young parents were occasionally weepy. The equity cast was remarkably skilled; the production brought our highest artistic values to our youngest audience members.

These productions, each remarkable in its own way, celebrate the breadth and scope of AATE. We are pre-K through university. We care about inclusion. Teens are important to us. Diversity matters. Research fuels productions that in turn fuel research. We don’t follow trends—we create them. Our members are the movers and shakers of the field.

I am so delighted to be a part of the AATE family.

With warm wishes,

Rives Collins
President, AATE

Coming up in Incite/Insight

We will consider submissions on any topics, but specifically welcome submissions that align with the theme for each issue. Our next two issues will focus on:

September issue
Reflections and Responses to AATE Chicago 2011 Conference
Due date for submissions: August 10th

November issue
Remembering those Dog Days of Summer: Responses to summer artist retreats, teacher training, youth camps, youth productions, etc.
Due date for submissions: October 1st

Please see the last page of this issue for submission guidelines.
LOOKING AHEAD TO LAKESIDE REFLECTIONS

Albany Park Theater Project to Discuss their Process and Performance During the Conference Opening Event

After an exciting day of pre-conferencing, the ensemble and artistic staff of Albany Park Theater Project will perform and discuss excerpts from past, present, and future APTP performances. Join us the evening of Wednesday, July 27 to witness the work of Chicago’s nationally recognized youth theatre—and see how APTP’s ensemble takes on roles as ethnographers, researchers, and performers. Haven’t seen APTP’s work yet? Video excerpts can be found at http://www.aptpchicago.org/.

José Cruz González and Juliana Saxton to Join the Reflection Committee as Conference Facilitators.

The conference committee is busy brainstorming the multiple ways that reflection can be woven into our time together at conference—how can we relate what we see, hear, and feel at the conference to ourselves, our students, and our work? How can we remember and record our experiences together?

In order to navigate these questions, playwright/director José Cruz González, and author/scholar Juliana Saxton started working with the conference reflection committee to shape our time as a community while at the conference. What questions do we ask ourselves and our students as we work? Which structures help our reflective process? Which structures hinder it?

We are excited to announce that González and Saxton will be in attendance at the conference to discuss and facilitate these questions and many more along with other members of the reflection committee.
Catch Wind of Chicago’s Free Arts Events

By Karen Weberman

Any true Chicagoan will tell you that we live for the summer. We are willing to put up with the bitter arctic tundra of lake effect snow and bone chilling wind because we know that Chicago summers are quite simply the best. The lake, the parks, the skyscrapers, the people watching, and the FREE arts and cultural events make the Second City the perfect destination for the 2011 AATE Chicago Conference: Lakeside Reflections.

Free events you ask? That’s right! Whether you’re coming early to the AATE conference or staying late for an extended visit, there are several free and fabulous events for you enjoy!

Chicago Summer Dance

Set in beautiful Grant Park, come take a one-hour dance class with a professional instructor, followed by two hours of dancing and live music on an impressive 4900 square foot dance floor in the sultry summer breezes.

Dates/Times: Every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evening, from 6–9:30pm, and Sunday afternoon from 4 to 7pm, if the weather allows.

Location: Spirit of Music Garden in Grant Park, 601 South Michigan Avenue

Website: www.chicagosummerdance.org

Grant Park Music Festival

Cozy up on the lush lawn of Millennium Park and treat yourself to classical music led by the Grant Park Orchestra and Chorus and acclaimed guest artists, such as Finnish guest conductor Hannu Lintu, counter-tenor Ryan Belongie, soprano Lindsay Metzger, baritone Kevin Keys, and violinist Jennifer Koh. Notably, Millennium Park prides itself in complete accessibility, including wheelchair loans in the Millennium Park Welcome Center (201 E Randolph St),
spaces for wheelchair seating in the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, and assisted listening devices at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion Sound Booth.

**Dates/Times:** Friday, July 22nd at 6:30pm; Saturday, July 23rd at 7:30pm; Wednesday, July 27th at 6:30pm; Friday, July 29th at 6:30pm; Saturday, July 30th at 6:30pm; Wednesday, August 3rd at 6:30pm

**Location:** Millennium Park; N. Michigan Avenue and East Randolph Street

**Website:** [www.grantparkmusicfestival.com](http://www.grantparkmusicfestival.com)

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**Movies in the Parks**

Snuggle up under the stars as you watch a movie in one of Chicago’s many lovely parks. Visit their website for full details of movie titles and specific park locations. Don’t forget to bring your own blanket, towel, chair, and favorite movie treats!

**Dates/Times:** Friday, July 22nd-Saturday, July 23rd at 8:30pm; Monday, July 25th-Saturday, July 30th at 8:30pm

**Locations:** Visit website for details

**Website:** [www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/events.calendar/month/7/year/2011.cfm](http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/events.calendar/month/7/year/2011.cfm)

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**Chicago Cultural Center**

The stunning architecture of the Chicago Cultural Center is worth the visit alone! The Chicago Cultural Center offers free theatre, music, and dance events, as well as art exhibits and films for people of all ages to enjoy. While you’re in Chicago for the conference, you will have your pick of free events to enjoy in this landmark building. Visit their website for full details of all arts events and exhibits.

**Location:** 78 E. Washington St

**Website:** [www.explorecity.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/events.calendar/month/7/year/2011.cfm](http://www.explorecity.chicagoparkdistrict.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/events.calendar/month/7/year/2011.cfm)

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**Taste of Lincoln Avenue**

Rock out to more than 40 live music acts on five different stages at one of Chicago’s largest neighborhood street festivals. Satisfy your appetite by sampling delicious food and drinks from Chicago food vendors. The music and merriment are free, but be sure to bring your wallet should you wish to purchase food and beverages.

**Dates/Times:** Saturday, July 30th and Sunday, July 31st from noon to 10pm

**Location:** 2500 N. Lincoln Ave. between Halsted St. & Wrightwood

**Phone Number:** 773-868-3010

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**Art Institute of Chicago Museum**

Immerse yourself in one of the great cultural hubs of Chicago. The Art Institute houses over 300,000 works of art, including famous works such as Grant Wood’s *American Gothic*. Treat yourself to some romantic gazing time at the recently reinstalled Marc Chagall America’s *Windows* exhibit, made famous in the 1980s film *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off*.

**Dates/Times:** Wednesday, August 3rd from 10:30am – 5pm

**Location:** 111 South Michigan Ave.

**Website:** [www.artic.edu/aic/](http://www.artic.edu/aic/)

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Karen Weberman is a freelance teaching artist, director, and stage manager in Chicago. She received her MFA in Theatre for Young Audiences from the University of Central Florida.
Playwrighting Network: Multiple New Projects for Sandra Fenichel Asher

Sandra Fenichel Asher’s *Here Comes Gosling* premiered at Eastern Michigan University in March, directed by Patricia Zimmer, with music by Ric Averill. It toured to a local Head Start and university lab school in addition to performances on campus. The traditional, proscenium version opens at the Pollyanna Theatre in Austin this month, directed by Judy Matetzschk-Cambpell, also with music by Ric Averill. It will play there May 19-23.

From June 5 - 12, Asher will be at New York University as the invited guest of their New Plays for Young Audiences program at the Provincetown Theatre in Greenwich Village developing a new one-woman script called *Walking to America*, directed by David Montgomery and based on the WWII memoirs of Ilga Katais-Paiglis Vise. Public readings will be on Saturday, June 11 at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, June 12 at 3 p.m.

On September 14, the second production of *The Princess and the Goblin*, adapted by Asher from the novel by George McDonald, opens as a joint effort of Utah Valley University’s Noorda Center and Resonance Storty Theatre in Salt Lake City.

Correction from April Issue

The bio for Delanna Studi at the end of the article “The One Person Show: KICK” states she was the lead in the film *Somewhere in America*. The correct title of the film is *Edges in America*. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused.

Youth Theatre Network: Save the Date for YTN Conference

**WHEN:** January 6-8 2012  
**WHAT:** Youth Theatre Network Conference: Defining Best Practices in the Field of Youth Theatre  
**WHERE:** Imagination Stage, Bethesda, MD  
**WHO:** Practitioners working with youth in the classroom and in the rehearsal hall

Designed as a follow-up to the Youth Theatre mini-conference that took place in NYC in April 2007, this project will bring together teaching artists, education directors, and administrators to explore, share, and define best practices in working with young people aged 8-18. Anticipated foci of the weekend include:

- Six participatory sessions on ways of working with young people using both scripted and devised entry points.
- Four working breakfasts/lunches to share exemplars in areas such as lesson planning, assessment creation, publishing opportunities, and parent/student contract creation.
- The filming of a DVD of interviews with YTN members sharing the scope of Youth Theatre work to be used as an educational and recruitment tool for the field and for AATE.

Join us for a planning session in Chicago 2011!

To have your network’s news published in the next issue of Incite/Insight, send it to your network chair or editor@aate.com by August 10th.
Marilee Hebert Miller Retires from Anchorage Press Plays

Waiting in the wings … that feeling of excitement, nervousness, and anticipation is what I am experiencing as I am stepping forward into the next act of my life.

Anchorage Press Plays (APP) has now become a part of Dramatic Publishing of Woodstock, IL. For the short term, I am still working on tying the loose ends of the business transition for APP in Louisville, KY. Sometime later this year, I plan to move from Louisville to New Orleans, LA to join my husband, Bob Miller, whose work has taken him there some months ago. What I will be doing in New Orleans is a mystery.

My theatre friends who have “retired” from their previous jobs give me inspiration. It seems that theatre people don’t really retire — we take the opportunity to come back to our passions of writing, acting, directing, producing, teaching, or creating something we have never done before. My next production is TO BE ANNOUNCED!

I send thanks and greetings to AATE friends. I hope that our paths will cross often.

Marilee Hebert Miller has been active in numerous fields of theatre since the early 1970s. She recently retired as editor/publisher of Anchorage Press Plays. Marilee spent over 23 years with Actors Theatre of Louisville in various capacities including 17 years as associate director working alongside Jon Jory and Alexander “Sandy” Speer. Marilee is married to Robert K. (Bob) Miller and they have two adult children: Allison and Paul Miller.
Ten years ago I made the decision to use the arts to do for education what Johnny Depp has done for pirates. Pirates were a thing of the past until Depp came along, with his swagger, dreadlocks, and guyliner. Suddenly, pirates were appealing, attractive, and sexy.

Similarly, I looked at an outdated, failing educational system. When I moved to New York City from Buenos Aires ten years ago, the city had only a 38 percent graduation rate. I realized our field could not only exist on the pursuit of high standards in arts-making; rather, our field now had to hold itself accountable to system-wide changes (and challenges) faced by students and teachers—changes like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The reality forced me, and many others, to look at arts education in a new way. I looked at the flawed system and all of the challenges it faced, and asked, “How can I (in the least sexual way) make education ‘sexy’?”

Now, in all seriousness, let’s stop for a minute and honestly explore this connection between myself and Johnny Depp, between education and pirates:

A few months after moving to New York I enrolled in the Educational Theatre program at NYU and auditioned to be a founding member of the only Shakespeare educational touring troupe in the city. I was hungry for performance opportunities and for any chance to go into schools, so you can imagine how excited I was when I was cast as a company member. You might also be able to imagine how un-excited I was when I was told that rehearsals were on Saturdays at 8 a.m., but it was a huge honor and I wasn’t about to turn it down.

I’m a firm believer that we only ever truly learn from mistakes, so I have absolutely no problem sharing that I was a horrible company member. I rarely showed up on time (or at all), and if I did, I was in no condition to be rehearsing Shakespeare. Let’s face it, being focused at 8 a.m. on a Saturday morning is hard enough without everyone in the room speaking 400-year-old English. I was too proud to quit, and the director of the program wouldn’t kick me out or ask me to leave (even though sometimes I really wanted him to). Instead, one morning rehearsal, to which I’m sure I was late, he took me over to our props and, in what I can only imagine was pure frustration, buried his arm and randomly pulled out a cheap pirate hat with a plastic hook and an eye patch. He handed them over to me and said, “You’ll be playing the pirate … and you’ll be in every single scene of this play.”

For those of you unfamiliar with The Taming of the Shrew, of all the amazing and complex characters Shakespeare wrote in that play, a pirate was not one of them.

So there I was: a pirate with no lines and no apparent reason to exist. All I had was a hat, an eye patch, a hook, and several “yarghs” and “HAHAHAHAHAs” to use at my discretion.

This went on for several weeks. I would roll into rehearsal, pick up my props, and as rehearsal unfolded, I would get scolded: “The pirate isn’t reacting! React! It’s your job to physically and vocally react to what’s happening on stage!” So I did, and it would be embarrassing, and everyone laughed, but I guess I deserved it.

None of this rehearsing would ever prepare me for our first performance at a middle school. As the pirate, it was my job to engage in what was going on with all of the characters. However, when I (unprofessionally) looked out of the corner of my one unpatched eye, I noticed that 75 percent of the students were staring directly at me, and not looking at the real characters on stage, even during the most pivotal scene in the play. This went on for the entire play: students just looking at me and laughing.
Then came the post-show Q and A. You could tell the students’ questions had been prepped, pre-approved, planted, and polished for politeness. It wasn’t until 10 minutes in when a teacher, clearly indignant, said, “Where do you people get off lying to our students about Shakespeare and presenting this mockery of classical theatre?” One by one, adults raised their hands, objecting to what they had just seen, and one by one, the hostility started directing itself straight at me. “There wasn’t a pirate written in The Taming of the Shrew! Why are you misrepresenting what actually happened and butchering Shakespeare?” I wanted to crawl under a rock. However, I soon started to remember how so many students looked at me during the performance, and I found myself realizing that they weren’t staring at me in disgust but in anticipation. Students were looking to the pirate to help make sense of what was happening on stage, and by watching the pirate react they were watching the show through his eyes. Since the pirate understood what was going on, they were able to understand what was going on with him.

The pirate had inadvertently gone from being a poor mistake on my part to an educational tool that was bridging the massive gap between 400-year-old literature and modern day 12-year-olds.

In this moment of revelation, I took off my eye-patch and said to one of the teachers, “You should be thanking the pirate! The pirate was creatively contextualizing concepts that your students otherwise may not have understood!”

Creatively contextualizing concepts. Let me try and unpack that phrase because this is very important to me and the work I do:

Currently there is a global trend in education where curriculum design is slowly moving away from fact-based to concept-based. This means that in the near future, for example, students will no longer learn about the Holocaust as it was traditionally taught, but instead they might learn about “empathy” first.

Let’s use this example of empathy as an “in” to discussing the Holocaust. Once students have understood what empathy means within the context of their own lives—where they have seen it or experienced it, times when they wished someone had been empathetic toward them or vise versa—they are then able to use this lens to create more meaningful and engaging connections with a variety of historical contexts, including the Holocaust.

As exciting as this new model is, it presents a very big challenge to educators because it creates a new gap. This new gap is between themes and their practical applications (in this case, between “empathy” and “the Holocaust”). And the more conceptual the curriculum, the more removed it’ll be from the different realities to which it could be applied. This gap is also a new opportunity. Education, as we know it, will begin to take place in this gray area between ideas and realities.

“So what do the arts have to do with any of this?” you might ask. Art is the only remaining place where creativity is still celebrated, and creativity needs to be at the center of this process. It promotes student engagement and creative problem-solving skills, which are more important than ever before, mostly because we no longer know what realities are out there for today’s students. A generation ago graduating high school students were welcomed by a far more secure and established “real world.” How do we prepare students for a the real world in the constantly-changing 21st century, where social, economic, and political models are threatening the way people live—whether it be through massive financial inflation or bullied gay youth committing suicide?

I don’t have an answer to that question. I don’t think anyone does. What I know though, is that today’s youth will have to create one. That’s why we need to not only embrace and protect creativity, but also acknowledge its importance.

Some might say we need more concrete advice. Okay. If we truly want to protect creativity, we first need to find it, and that’s getting harder to do. In almost all the schools I visit, creativity is
found in the art room, the auditorium, and the music room (if they’re lucky to have them). So next time a school wants to cut the art program, discontinue their drama club, or fire their music teacher, we need to say “NO.” The next time a general education teacher faces opposition for dedicating class time to arts integration, we need to stand up for its presence in our school system. Not because we want our children to be artists, but because we need to provide them the tools with which to succeed on whatever path they choose.

This tool kit now needs to include creativity in a bigger way than ever before. Because while the world still needs the Pablo Picassos, the Meryl Streeps, and the John Len nons, it also needs, now more than ever, creative politicians, creative business-leaders, creative economists, creative doctors, and creative educators.

Creativity and originality are at the forefront of innovation. I hope that we can begin (and continue) to make this connection between intelligence and creativity, between the knowledge we acquire today and the ways in which we choose to practice it in tomorrow’s ever-shifting world.

Every single person has the ability to be a pirate, to creatively contextualize concepts for others who may not understand them. As artists, business leaders, parents, and above all, educators, we have a responsibility to tell young people, “I have no idea what your world will look like, but here are tools with which to survive, create, and excel in it regardless of what path or profession you choose.” And if creativity is at the forefront of those tools, then we will be leaps closer toward creating a better world through education.

Alex Sarian is the director of education and outreach for MCC Theater, a leading off-Broadway producing company. An education professional with a theatre background, he has taught, designed, and implemented arts education and arts integration programs in three continents. Originally from Buenos Aires, Argentina, Sarian has been invited to present workshops and lecture on the subject of arts education at conferences (including TED) in London, New York, San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Toronto among others. Currently, Sarian also serves as a committee member for the New York City Arts in Education Roundtable. For more information, please visit: www.mcctheater.org and www.alexsarian.com.

Insight Link:
Visit www.keepartsinschools.org to see what others are doing to bring arts into the classroom. The website also includes research on the academic benefits of arts inclusion, and talking points for individuals wanting to serve as advocates of the arts.

Incite Link: www.americansforthearts.org provides quick links to contact Congress and President Obama relating to the need for arts in several capacities in the US, including arts education.
Dramatic Change: AATE and TYA/USA Take Action against Bullying

By Elizabeth Brendel Horn

Terrorism, the environment, the economy … and bullying. All of these topics filled the air in the White House over the past few months, but one of these things seems unlike the others. The first three are impactful on a national and global level and require immediate attention, while the latter is confined to schoolyards and is a natural part of growing pains, right?

After all, we’ve all been there. We endured name-calling, rumors, or physical violence, or perhaps we regretfully played the victimizer at one point or another. Regardless of how or when we encountered bullying, we did. But chances are, we made it out relatively unscathed—we have successful careers, loving friends and family, and only faint scars left over from our distant pasts.

The face of bullying has changed, however. President Barack Obama said in his opening remarks at the first-ever White House Conference on bullying prevention in March 2011, “Today, bullying doesn’t even end at the school bell—it can follow our children from the hallways to their cell phones to their computer screens.”

With bullies taking full advantage of the immediacy and far-spread reach of technology, many youth cannot escape bullying, and the results are devastating. According to the website http://stopbullying.gov, being bullied increases the chance of suicidal tendencies even into adulthood, and in 12 of the 15 school shooting cases of the 1990s the shooters had a history of being bullied. Those who are bullied are more likely to skip classes or drop out of school, and even to complain of health issues. Heeding parents’ advice to “Ignore them and they’ll leave you alone” simply seems too passive for today’s day and age.

A Need for Change

As people that work with and for youth, the membership of AATE knows the impact of bullying all too well. In response, AATE is pairing up with sister organization Theatre
for Young Audiences/USA to respond to this nationwide crisis through a new effort entitled Dramatic Change: An Anti-Bullying Initiative. “This is our first ever joint collaboration with TYA/USA,” said AATE Executive Director Lynne Kingsley. “We’re thrilled to be partnering with such a like-minded organization.”

Stan Foote, artistic director of Oregon Children’s Theatre in Portland, began the conversation that grew into this initiative. Overwhelming news coverage of bully-related tragedies caused Foote to reflect on his own struggles with being bullied as a youth. Foote spoke of his childhood with the participants at the May 2011 TYA/USA One Theatre World conference in Seattle, WA. “All I wanted to do was get out,” he recalled. “And then I found theatre.”

Linking theatre to the positive changes in his own life motivated him to start a conversation with his colleagues. “What I’m struck by when I come into this room is all the storytellers here,” he said at the conference. “What we can do together as a group within our individual communities is tell a story on a national level.”

Foote recognizes that in many ways, this story is already being told. “We do it every day. We know how to do it. We are doing it,” Foote said, speaking not just of productions, but of all efforts to build community and dialogue.

His hope, and the mission of the Dramatic Change initiative, is that individuals and organizations will sharpen their attention to the issue, and will connect on a national level to share ideas and celebrate accomplishments. Through this initiative, AATE and TYA/USA hope to, as stated by TYA/USA President Megan Ann Rasmussen, “Harness the power of what we do.”

A Call to Action

Kingsley, along with 2012 Conference Chair Jeremy Kisling and AATE Board Member John Newman, jumpstarted the initiative with a call to action at the One Theatre World conference on May 11, 2011.

“Bullying is not a harmless rite of passage; it is not something young people grow out of; it is not something we should accept as a normal part of growing up,” Kingsley said in the call to action. “Bullying is an epidemic; the effects are harmful and far-reaching.”

Kingsley believes that as theatre artists, we play a special role in the lives of young people. “We see their tears, feel their pain, and tell their stories. We are a safe haven for these outsiders, the bullied children,” she said.

The initiative acknowledges that merely empathizing with these youth is not enough to create the drastic change necessary to confront this issue. At One Theatre World, Kisling challenged each individual to begin brainstorming ways to bring focus to the issue as a part of their work in some way over the next two to three years.

Similarly to Foote, Kisling believes, “Almost every company here is already doing this.” He stressed, however, that through sharing with one another these efforts can be strengthened. “We can learn from each other and grow from the conversation,” he said.

The initiative was met with hesitation by some conference participants. Mark Lutwak, education director of the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park in Ohio, expressed concern that producing explicitly anti-bullying plays could lead to what he terms as “fluff” or “medicine” plays. Lutwak believes that the cause of the bullying epidemic is that “we have a weak soul as a community,” a problem he says can be cured by good theatre and art of all scopes and themes.

For others, dialogue is already flowing on new approaches to the issue, and on the importance of the dialogue itself. “It’s one thing to say we talk about these things all the time,” said Ernie Nolan, associate artistic director of Emerald City Theatre in Chicago, IL. “But we need to highlight those focused conversations.”

The Bully Plays

The opening event of Dramatic Change, in addition to the call to action, was the staged readings of four ten-minute plays at the One Theatre World conference. These plays are among 23 newly-commissioned pieces that comprise The Bully Plays, available soon from Dramatic Publishing.

In light of recent tragedies surrounding bullying, the company wanted to work quickly to generate material, hence the decision to commission multiple short plays. Additionally, the flexibility of ten-minute plays provides accessibility, allowing these plays to be used individually, as a whole, in the classroom, or on the stage.

At the reading, audience members met not only youth that encountered bullying, but also zombies, dinosaurs, and mythical beasts. These four plays, written by Playwrights Doug Cooney, Brian Guéhring, Ernie Nolan, and Y York varied greatly in structure, tone, and even the types of bullying the characters encountered.

There be Dragons, by Cooney, follows three middle school students from different social groups stuck together on a school field trip to a museum. The three rapidly switch who bullies, so that, as Cooney explains, “students will have to question themselves and examine their own behavior without pointing fingers at other kids.” Dinosaur skeletons come to life to add humor and surrealism to the piece, with quips such as, “I thought the Cretaceous Period was bad—but seventh grade is ferocious!”
Guehring employs a similar humor in Mindless, Drooling Teenage Zombie Bullies. “I actually gave the topic of bullying to my teen theatre troupe Pride Players (a teen devised theater piece exploring gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and straight allied teen issues) to improv and they came up with a fun idea of using zombies as a metaphor,” Guehring says. While a high energy, playful dance party cures the students of both homophobia and their zombism, the messages about individuality and tolerance are not lost. Guehring’s play is already making change, as the royalties from the production will go toward the Tracy Iwersen Pride Player scholarship for graduating high school theatre activists.

Nolan’s Beasts takes a comedic approach to the Greek mythology of Theseus. Explaining his choice to turn to mythology, Nolan says, “I was intrigued by the idea of young people as heroes who are also bullies—when a society says, ‘This person is a hero because he killed a bunch of people.’” In a Beasts versus Humans battle, Nolan keeps the power changing, allowing both parties to be seen as the victims and the bullies. The story turns when both the beasts and the humans are able to unite only to gang up on the mythological equivalent of “the new kid”—one lowly Cyclops.

York expressed her struggle with wanting to avoid a prescriptive piece during her brainstorming process. “I played many ideas out in my head and they were all bad,” she admitted.

In March of 2011, the first-ever White House Conference on Bullying Prevention was convened in our nation’s capital. Recent stories of the tragic outcomes of bullying have compelled parents, teachers, and leaders to cry out, “Enough.” Bullying is not a harmless rite of passage; it is not something young people grow out of; it is not something we should accept as a normal part of growing up. Bullying is an epidemic; the effects are harmful and far-reaching. According to the website stopbullying.gov, people who have been bullied:

- Have increased thoughts about suicide that may persist into adulthood. In one study, adults who recalled being bullied in youth were 3 times more likely to have suicidal thoughts or inclinations.
- Are more likely to have health complaints. In one study, being bullied was associated with physical health status 3 years later.
- Have decreased academic achievement (GPA and standardized test scores) and school participation.
- Are more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school.
- Are more likely to retaliate through extremely violent measures. In 12 of 15 school shooting cases in the 1990s, the shooters had a history of being bullied.

In his welcoming remarks, President Obama said, “So consider these statistics. A third of middle school and high school students have reported being bullied during the school year. Almost 3 million students have said they were pushed, shoved, tripped, even spit on. It’s also more likely to affect kids that are seen as different, whether it’s because of the color of their skin, the clothes they wear, the disability they may have, or their sexual orientation.”

The president went on to explain, “Today, bullying doesn’t even end at the school bell -- it can follow our children from the hallways to their cell phones to their computer screens. And in recent months, a series of tragedies has drawn attention to just how devastating bullying can be. We have just been heartbroken by the stories of young people who endured harassment and ridicule day after day at school, and who ultimately took their own lives.”

To the bi-partisan gathering, which included such decision makers as Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and U.S. Department of Education Secretary Arne Duncan, the president asserted, “No family should have to go through what these families have gone through. No child should feel that alone. We’ve got to make sure our young people know that if they’re in trouble, there are caring adults who can help and young adults that can help; that even if they’re having a tough time, they’re going to get through it, and there’s a whole world full of possibility waiting for them. We also have to make sure we’re doing everything we can so that no child is in that position in the first place.”

The leadership of TYA/USA and the AATE wish to respond to the call. We witness the effect of bullying on the young people we serve. We see their tears, feel their pain and tell their stories. We are a safe-haven for these outsiders, the bullied children. But it is not enough! In a first-ever joint collaboration, our two organizations have come together to create DRAMATIC CHANGE: AN ANTI-BULLYING INITIATIVE. We believe that we as theatre artists, scholars and educators are uniquely well-positioned to make a difference in the landscape of bullying. We know that theatre and its techniques allow participants the opportunity to explore, challenge and examine social issues and topics through a fictional fourth-wall, but with a real look at the life changing consequences. With our national community of playwrights, producing theatre companies, teaching artists, researchers, classroom teachers and drama specialists, our mandate is to tackle the epidemic of bullying in all its complexity, in ways that only the theatre arts can. We are proposing to use performances, interactive applied theatre models lesson plans, and media resources to raise the awareness needed to empower our youth to make changes toward reaching a more civil society that celebrates our differences rather than exploiting them.

Over the next weeks and months our organizations will begin rolling out this multi-year, nationwide initiative designed to harness the many and diverse strengths of the theatre and education communities. Keynote addresses, workshops, cyber resources, empowerment strategies, new plays and productions – the best minds in our organizations are engaging to make a DRAMATIC CHANGE in the lives of the young people we serve.
Henry must come to terms with his own actions and the consequences they had in his life and the lives of others.

The Future of Dramatic Change

At the present, Dramatic Change is an idea in formation, and the members of both TYA/USA and AATE can do much to focus it. Whether working on stage, in the classroom, or in the community, the organizations hope members will be inspired to bring focus and innovation to the issue at hand.

From there, Kisling stresses the importance of creating a dialogue about our different approaches and the challenges and successes they bring. “We want to create a national online database of work,” he says. “We want to post what we’re doing, share what we’re doing, celebrate what we’re doing.”

The organizations also announced a joint pre-conference before the AATE 2012 National Conference in Lexington, KY. This one-day event will include a devising session led by Juliana Saxton and Carole Miller, co-authors of Into the Story: Language in Action Through Drama.

Saxton and Miller will work with students, teachers, and artists to devise a piece of theatre around the topic of bullying. The goal of the workshop is to provide attendees with practical theatre tools to apply with youth to create dialogue about bullying.

Regardless of what ways people choose to apply their efforts, Foote says, “At worst, we just keep doing the great work we’re doing. At best, we focus our work so that theatre gets a national identity for what we do.”

He also points out that when the lives and wellbeing of young people are at stake, no effort is too small. “What if only one kid decides it’s worth sticking it out?” he asks.

Sitting in Seattle Children’s Theatre on the closing night of One Theatre World conference, over two hundred theatre educators, directors, playwrights, and artists gathered for a performance of Jackie & Me by Steven Dietz, based on the book by Dan Gutman.

In the play, the protagonist is bullied, and his hot temper causes him to bully back. From at least one person’s perspective, however, it did not feel like an anti-bullying piece. Rich with themes of family, racism, and the drive for success, the protagonist had much to fight for. Dimensional characters, witty dialogue, heart, and pain all made a meaningful piece. The audience was never lectured. The protagonist learned a lesson, yet remained beautifully flawed. Amid the swift pace of the play and the exciting inclusions of sports and time travel, a young person might never fully realize the anti-bullying message of the play.

But the message was still there.

Elizabeth Brendel Horn is a high school theatre educator and director and the managing editor of Incite/Insight. When Elizabeth was in middle school, she got a bad haircut and was dubbed “The Big Headed Freak” by her homeroom bully. She still thinks of it every time she goes to the salon.

Incite Link: Visit http://www.itgetsbetter.org to see videos posted by LGBT adults and teens, including many celebrities, to reach out to LGBT youth who are bullied and/or feeling suicidal. Post your own video or make a pledge to help these youth.

Incite Link: http://stompoutbullying.org is a website designed for youth to counteract bullying and cyberbullying. It also has an Adult Page with teacher and parent resources.
Blind Spots

The Glee Effect
By Abra Chusid and Sarah Coleman

Over the past decade, discussions about diversity on our stages have become increasingly prominent and essential. The creation of “Blind Spots” itself represents the presence and acknowledgement of this issue in the AATE community. As a field, we have begun to recognize the gaps in our representation onstage, and have responded with new Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) plays and community engagement efforts. As the country’s demographics continue to shift, we encourage each other to query: whose stories are we telling?

Beyond asking whose stories we tell, it is necessary to ask why and how we tell them. In considering the effects of contemporary attempts at diversity, please indulge us as we look at the popular TV comedy, Glee. Since its premiere, critics and organizations, including Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), have heralded Glee as one of the more diverse shows on prime time television. It claimed the Favorite New Television Cast Ensemble Award from the Multicultural Motion Picture Association in 2009. In January 2011, it was nominated for a NAACP Image Award. When compared to other current high-school shows with exclusively white casts, such as Gossip Girl and Vampire Diaries, Glee’s diverse casting is indeed notable. Looking at the cast of Glee, the white characters appear alongside a South Asian principal, two Korean students, and a black student. Additionally, three white characters represent diverse ability and sexuality, with a student in a wheelchair, a student with Down Syndrome, and an ‘out’ gay male. The lead characters, however, are played as white normative characters—the football star, the cheerleader, the diva, and the feuding teachers.

In the Glee episode “Funk,” originally aired on June 1, 2010, Quinn, the white, pregnant cheerleader, confides in Mercedes, the black student. Divulging her frustrations and anger at being seen as an outcast, Quinn realizes and acknowledges that, while she will only feel this way for nine months, Mercedes, unable to step away from her skin color, will feel different forever. This poignant moment of conversation is uniquely progressive for prime time. First, it is the white teen who is pregnant, disrupting the stereotype of the black pregnant teen. Furthermore, the scene portrays a white female recognizing that she can never truly understand what it is like to be a black female. However, the dialogue in this scene quickly moves away from this acknowledgment and on to the next plot point.

In this instance, Glee glosses over Quinn’s recognition of difference, thus avoiding the opportunity for a more in depth conversation about race. What might have happened if the show took the less conventional route, allowing Mercedes to acknowledge that Quinn has no idea what it’s like to live in her skin? What new streams of conversation might have occurred in the media the next morning? What dynamic ways of discussing racial issues in the U.S. might have been brought to light?

Are TYA artists—playwrights, performers, directors, designers, educators, and producers—on the lookout for such opportunities in TYA work? Are we noting when we embrace them and when we run away from them? In TYA, it is the recognition of such missed opportunities that should present an impetus to address issues of diversity on a deeper level.

What does it mean to address diversity deeply and responsibly? We suggest three ways to address diversity in TYA, at varying levels of depth. At the first level, we address visual diversity by casting actors who look different than each other—based on skin color, body shape, physical abilities, and so forth. At the second...
level, we create and present diverse stories directly related to race, culture, religion, physical or mental difference, etc. And at the third level, characters’ diverse experiences and perspectives inform the story, though it is not necessarily about that diversity.

In our experiences as white twenty-something females involved in academia and professional theatre, American TYA is incredibly progressive at the first level of diversity: showcasing visually diverse casts. TYA has been casting actors with diverse external markers longer than our colleagues in adult theatre, and as a field, we pride ourselves on “non-traditional” or “color-blind” casting. In fact, it is not uncommon to see onstage families where each member has a vastly different skin color or body shape. Nevertheless, as with all choices made for productions, we cannot ignore the effects of our casting decisions.

A recent TYA production illustrated how such casting decisions can lead to missed opportunities in TYA. Set largely in an elementary classroom, this production featured nine actors cast as students, with the six named characters played by five white actors and one Latino actor in a Spanish-speaking role. A white actor, a black actor, and an Asian actor played the three non-named, non-speaking characters. Similarly to Glee, this production featured a somewhat visually diverse cast. However, throughout the production, the two unnamed minority actors remained insignificant to the plot, appearing instead as a token acknowledgement of diversity.

As audience members, these casting choices unintentionally brought race to the forefront of our experience, causing us to ask: How did the young audiences respond to these choices? Is it better to cast actors of racial minorities in unnamed roles, or to not cast them at all? What if the actors of visual diversity had more prominent roles? What do we do in instances where the only actor of visual diversity is cast in a supporting role that perpetuates negative stereotypes of non-white populations? Do we intentionally cast less talented actors in more prominent roles if it heightens this visual diversity? In asking these questions, we want to deepen the conversation around the intention and impact of visual diversity on TYA stages.

At the next level of diversity, we tell stories that directly address diverse experiences. The TYA canon features many such plays: Home on the Mornin’ Train by Kim Hines draws parallels between African American slavery in the US and German Jews in WWII. Braille: The Early Life of Louis Braille by Lola H. and Coleman A. Jennings follows Louis Braille’s experiences and difficulties with blindness. The Rememberer by Steven Dietz portrays an American Indian girl who is forcibly removed from her community, and looks to her ancestors for guidance.

Individually, these, and others, are stunning scripts that make for powerful productions. So what happens when the only exposure an audience has to the Jewish experience is through the Holocaust, or the only stories of physical disability or difference feature a character overcoming adversity to achieve greatness? What results is a race, ethnicity, or community defined by a singular narrative.

As we think about these challenges, we suggest a third, even deeper level of diversity. This occurs when plays feature diverse characters, and the stories are not necessarily about their varying identity markers; rather, their diversity shapes the world and events of the play. Plays that achieve this level of diversity include AATE’s 2010 Distinguished Play Bud, Not Buddy by Reginald André Jackson, 2007 Distinguished Play Kara in Black by Max Bush, The Edge of Peace by Suzan Zeder, and Sangre de un Ángel by Roxanne Schroeder-Arce. These plays do not directly address diversity, nor issues or events particularly linked to one specific population, but feature diverse characters whose identities shape their experiences and unique perspectives.
These stories move beyond the idea that plays representing a specific race, ethnicity, or culture must be about a specific event; a Latino play need not be about immigration; a Black play can represent more than the Civil Rights Movement or slavery. The above plays contribute new narratives, expanding on our young audiences’ experiences of and introductions to diverse communities. What results are multiple narratives representing a wide variety of individual experiences, informed by race, ethnicity, and community.

As we consider the questions and challenges we face as a field, there is no one clear answer. As we strive to be more responsible in the portrayal of diversity on stage—considering race, culture, ethnicity, social class, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, and ability—we should continue to engage in conversations about these choices and moments, and how they look, sound, and read on stage. Unless we make our conversations about diversity more frequent, deeper, and yes, sometimes more uncomfortable, are we truly being responsible artists and citizens?

Though we are big fans of Glee, TYA creates an opportunity for conversation that television does not. American education directors and dramaturgs do incredible work to help young audiences connect to and consider the ideas of our plays, specifically in promoting the continuation of conversations begun by the work outside of the theatre space. As we continue to embrace this responsibility, let’s provide our youth with more challenging material and more difficult dialogues.

In a recent keynote address at the International Performing Arts for Youth Showcase in Tampa, playwright José Cruz González spoke about his multicultural plays and his hope that audiences will not only see their own stories on stage, but also learn about others they may not know, saying, “I am not only a storyteller, but an ambassador, too.”

As artists and educators in TYA, we all have the ability to be ambassadors. Yes, as a field we have made much progress in terms of addressing diversity on stage, but our blind spots still reveal many oversights, many missed opportunities. It will only be through asking difficult questions that gaps in the portrayal of diversity on TYA stages will continue to be filled.

Abra Chusid and Sarah Coleman have just finished their second year of the MFA program in Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities at The University of Texas at Austin.
After all, listening and speaking are strong components of language arts, and theatre games and activities develop those skills.

Have English language learners in your classroom? Theatre games are great for teaching a second language—they incorporate repetition, listening, and physicalizing language. Many theatre games create a safe environment for English language learners.

Working with multiple learning styles? Theatre covers the gamut, reaching students who need visual, auditory, tactile, or kinesthetic stimulation in order to learn.

Having a hard time reaching students? Because theatre is a form of play, it is a great way to hook students into a lesson. It also ignites their imagination and teaches empathy. Incorporate theatre and see how it transforms their writing. Your students will not only retain more information, they will invest in what they are learning, giving them a purpose and drive like never before.

Above all, theatre games will make your class a team. Many theatre activities are designed to build teamwork, communication, and problem solving skills—skills that most companies say are lacking in employees. By developing these life skills that will better prepare students for adulthood, you are giving them more than any textbook, lecture, or worksheet ever could.

Sure, it will feel like play. But wasted time? I think not. Engagement is essential to learning.

Gai Jones is an associate professor and professional theatre educator who works with elementary through senior citizens, including college and university students at California State University, East Bay and Ventura College. The black box theatre at El Dorado High School, in Placentia, CA is named The Gai Jones Theatre. She is the author of two theatre education textbooks: Raising the Curtain published by www.perfectionlearning.com and Break a Leg: Tips and Truisms for Theatre Educators, a self-published love letter to Theatre educators, at www.gajones.com. She is Membership VP of CA Thespians, and Drama Teachers of SO CA, and serves on the Policy Council of CAAE and the National Board of EdTA. She teaches ensemble-building workshops for professional development and theatre associations around the world. She is a past AATE California representative.

Many thanks to Teri Ang, Autumn Browne, Judi Garratt, Rozan Gautier, Marcie Jones, and Terry Miller for contributing to this response.

Have a question you would like to ask to an expert from the field? Send submissions to editor@aate.com.

Incite Link: Visit the San Diego Unified School District for lesson plans on Visual and Performing Arts for Grades 1-5.
Standing on Their Shoulders: Dr. Lin Wright

By Karen Libman

Credit Dr. Lin Wright, Arizona State University Professor Emerita, former high school teacher, creative drama specialist, author, editor, playwright, and arts in education advocate, as one of the most influential people in the area of drama and theatre for youth in America. While her work includes many publications, research projects, service positions, creative endeavors, and honors, perhaps her former students in the profession articulate her legacy best. They include professors, artists, directors, storytellers, teachers, designers, playwrights, researchers, and your current AATE president! In fact, AATE has continuously had a Lin Wright protégé on its board for the past ten years.

I had the good fortune to study under Dr. Wright in the mid-1980s at Arizona State University. Her mentorship, her rigor, her sense of humor, and her demand for excellence shaped me into the artist and educator that I am today. And I am not alone:

Lin inspired and challenged me; she taught me to believe in my own assets and to build on them. She was a fierce and feisty lady back in those early days of the Child Drama Program at ASU. Lin brought together a diverse bunch of students, teachers, and theatre artists and shaped them into the “ASU MAFIA.” (Anne Thurman coined that title!) She taught us to always do our best, to be accountable, and to give back to the community that nurtured us. Her “babies” as she called us, have spread throughout the world and continue to teach and inspire generation after generation. Lin Wright put the professional in our profession - Theatre Education.

Nancy Norvell Ball
Retired Drama Specialist
Evanston, IL

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Dr. Lin Wright shaped my career trajectory in ways both large and small. She believed in me, even when I made the worst tyro mistakes. She pointed out my inconsistencies and then told me how to fix them. She asked questions she didn’t know the answers to, and then told me to go find out. She modeled female leadership in a setting that is not kind to women and is an inspiration as a creative curser. Today she continues to volunteer at my daughter’s elementary school where she creates playful improvisational structures, takes the fifth graders to the Tempe Historical Museum to create plays around the exhibits, and sends home holiday cards from her dog. We are all better for her presence.

Stephani Etheridge Woodson,
Associate Professor of Theatre and Film
Arizona State University, Phoenix

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Lin Wright changed my life. Lin was mentor, shepherd, nudge, nourisher, and promoter of her students. Under her tutelage, I gained the confidence to think beyond definitions and established practices to find my own voice, my own understanding, and my own practice grounded in the best of what is possible. She taught me that we all make mistakes and that to make them publicly only keeps us humble and reminds us that we’re human. She taught me to always remember that whether we are directing a production or leading a drama class we must be “knee deep in the art form of theatre.” She taught me that when you don’t know the answers, you ask, and you ask, and you ask until you find out or someone wants to throw you out
the door. She taught me that a loving marriage gives you humor, perspective, courage, and is the source of a tasty sandwich when dedication to a noble cause threatens to consume all of your time. She taught me that giving back to the field is the only way to express gratitude for what’s been given to you. She taught me, through example, that being oneself is not only okay, but also the only option for an authentic, fulfilling life.

Joan Lazarus
Associate Professor of Theatre
The University of Texas at Austin

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Lin Wright had an enormous impact on my career, and I owe her an enduring debt of gratitude on countless levels. At the top of the list has to be the heartfelt and enthusiastic personal support she has always extended to all of her graduate students (myself most definitely included). From a long-remembered Thanksgiving dinner at her house in Tempe, to the generous evaluations she contributed to my various applications for tenure and promotion, Lin has served as a model of how to carry the role of supervising professor well beyond the expected norms.

From an academic standpoint, it was Lin who taught me about research in theatre education. Not only did she show me that there was a body of research that we could learn from (even back in 1979), but she also encouraged me to look at that research with a critical eye. I became aware of both the usefulness and limitations of some of the existing studies, and also of the responsibility that each of us carried to raise the standards of research in our field. With regard to my own study of ritual in child drama, a rather off-beat topic at the time, I have always been grateful to Lin for her openness to my area of interest and her wise and flexible guidance as I struggled to pin down a thesis and a methodology that might fit the topic.

Larry O’Farrell
Professor of Drama and Arts Education
Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario

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Lin Wright has indeed been a true mentor—a friend, a counselor, and a teacher. I can always count on Lin’s advice to serve and advance my thinking. What I remember most about Lin’s teaching is that the art form of theatre must be understood and honored in the learning process if classroom drama is to be of value to the students. When I co-authored my book, Dramatic Literacy, I wanted Lin to write the foreword. She agreed and I remember she said to me, “It does my old heart good to know that one of my kiddos was paying attention.” Of course, I paid attention, Lin—you are my mentor.

J. Daniel Herring
Associate Professor of Theatre Arts
California State University, Fresno

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I remember Lin Wright saying, “Welcome to my home.” As graduate students, we were frequent guests in Lin’s home, and she always made us feel comfortable and welcome. I remember once commenting on the many striking pieces of art hanging on her walls. Lin said, “When Jimmy and I were first married, we spent more money on art than we did on furniture.” And we knew she meant it. I learned a valuable lesson that day. Lin didn’t just talk about the arts, they were an integral part of her life every single day. A master teacher, Lin taught us in the classroom, in the corridors, in her home, everywhere! I feel so lucky to count myself among those who were transformed by her teaching.”

Rives Collins
AATE President
Professor of Theatre
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL

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Lin Wright was an amazing and insightful mentor during graduate school. She had high expectations, pushed me to my potential, and honestly evaluated me. There were many sides to Lin and that is what made working with her so fruitful. Lin understood the need for research and theory but also was grounded in sound practices. I left the program she developed at ASU with a solid foundation in the practical and a curiosity for the theoretical. In my 30 years I never felt behind the times for Lin had linked me to AATE and local groups and associations. Her friendship and guidance continued throughout my career. She celebrated my achievements and kept me connected to movements in the field. Without Lin Wright, I would not have been able to provide such solid programs for so many young people for so long.

Jenny Akridge
Education Outreach Director
Mesa Arts Center, AZ

For a concise yet thorough enumeration Dr. Wright’s accomplishments, visit the Arizona Archives Online. But I cannot think of any better way to know a person and understand her influence than to ask others what they think about her. As you can see, there is no loss for accolades.

Karen Libman is a stage director, writer, and storyteller, and theatre professor at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI. She received her MFA from Arizona State University in 1987.
Igniting Young Voices: A Sample of Programs Dedicated to the Development of Young Playwrights
by Jim DeVivo

It is remarkable to witness the transformation of students during a playwriting program. About four years ago, a teaching artist told me the story of one quiet sixth grade playwright in a local playwriting residency. The playwright had been working on a play that honestly depicted early-adolescent love and relationships and all the tricky emotions that went along with them. A little more than midway through the residency, the student became embarrassed about the play and did not want parents or friends to hear it at a feedback session.

Fortunately, the artist was able to convince the student to continue working on the original script, which was eventually chosen for presentation during a local playwriting festival. The student was a constant fixture at rehearsal. With the guidance of the teaching artist and director, the student became comfortable enough to answer questions from the cast and collaborated with them on the further development of the script. By the time of the production, the student emerged from the work with a new-found confidence.

This story demonstrates how playwriting may empower young people to communicate their ideas and emotions with a community audience. As a teaching artist and the coordinator of the New Jersey Young Playwrights Festival for Playwrights Theatre, I have seen this first-hand and heard from young people (and artists) who have felt transformed by their experiences in the program. It was in discussion with some of the young writers that I developed an interest in student experiences with playwriting programs such as the NJ Young Playwrights Festival and began to research similar programs at professional theatres across the United States.

Formal playwriting programs gained popularity nearly 30 years ago with the founding of Young Playwrights, Inc. by composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim on October 16, 1981. Today, almost every region and major metropolitan area in the country is home to some kind of playwriting program for youth. These “young playwrights festivals” typically engage children ages 18 and under who have written a play during a visiting-artist residency, as part of a school curriculum, or independently by providing written critiques, creative workshops, or one-on-one instruction. Playwrights may also work alongside a director and/or dramaturg through rehearsals and the eventual performance of their play by professional and/or emerging actors.

The power of a young playwrights festival is evident in the responses of those playwrights who have experienced the process. A playwright from Young Playwrights, Inc.’s Writers Conference said the program “…had an incredibly profound impact on my identity and the way I look at myself and the world. I am a playwright: thank you for helping me realize this word and its significance. Thank you for helping me to begin to realize my VOICE as a writer, and its importance. You have given me the confidence to continue the exploration into myself and my writing: how can I possibly thank you enough?”

When adult artists are involved, much of this confidence building comes from their commitment to the work of the young playwrights. “… That’s what this experience was all about: real actors taking my real work very seriously,” a high school playwright from the New Jersey Young Playwrights Festival said. “This was invaluable to a young artist like myself. It made me feel like I wasn’t just some kid who wrote some play about moody teenagers […] It made me feel like I was a real dramatic force that had something to say and they were there to cultivate that. Adults. Real actors. My own play’s stage manager. It was unreal.”

In addition to validating these playwrights, the workshop process also helps develop their writing and language skills. “The discussions I had with my dramaturg and director showed me that there is a purpose for every character, action, and line of dialogue, whether I realize it at first or not, and they helped me realize that purpose,” a playwright in Actors Theatre of Louisville’s New Voices Young Playwrights Festival said. “Thanks to their help, I feel I can better assess my own writing and writing skills next time I put pen to paper.”

Possibilities are limitless in an
environment in which young people have the freedom and encouragement necessary to thrive. While these programs cater to young people, adults can learn and gain inspiration by attending one of the many festivals throughout the United States. Profiled below are Young Playwrights, Inc. in New York City, Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey, Philadelphia Young Playwrights, Actors Theatre of Louisville, and ACT Theatre in Seattle, just five of the organizations who perform works written by young playwrights. Information about these programs was gathered from the profiled theatres’ websites and the author’s personal communication with program staff.

Young Playwrights, Inc.
New York, NY

Young Playwrights, Inc. (YPI) is, as stated on its website, “the first professional theatre in the United States, […] devoted entirely to introducing young people to writing for the theatre and for themselves.” Though marketed in the New York City area, the first festival, conducted from April 27 to May 16, 1982, drew scripts from 35 states. The Young Playwrights Festival National Playwriting Competition now receives about 1,500 plays per year. Play submissions in the national program are reviewed by theatre professionals through a series of individual and group review sessions and each play receives an individual critique written by a professional theatre artist. Select playwrights are invited to attend the Young Playwrights Conference in New York to continue developing the scripts in a series of workshops and readings. The national winners are selected from the plays read at the Conference. Notable alumni of YPI programming include Jonathan Marc Sherman and Kenneth Lonergan. YPI will announce the results of the 2011 national competition in June. YPI also provides in-school programs, various workshops for teachers, and playwriting intensives for teens. See YPI’s website for more details: www.youngplaywrights.org.

Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey
Madison, NJ

Developed in 1984 by New Jersey Teen Arts, the New Jersey Young Playwrights Festival (NJYPF) was adopted by Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey (PTNJ) a few years later and has had a permanent home there since. Similar to the YPI model, the NJYPF accepts scripts developed during residencies and those that are written independently. Plays are grouped into categories by grade level: High School (grades 10-12), Junior HS (grades 7-9), and Elementary (grades 4-6). Additionally the Rewrites division (grades 10-12) considers plays that were submitted to previous NJYPF and have been revised. The Podstages division (grades 10-12) is a new category for radio plays. Two first round readers provide written feedback to each playwright meant to encourage revision of the current play and to inform future writing.

Winning plays from each division are performed at the Festival. High school playwrights are paired with a director who serves as dramaturg prior to rehearsals. Winning high school playwrights are also honored with a New Jersey Governor’s Award in Art Education. The 2011 New Jersey Young Playwrights Festival was presented on May 23 and 24 on the campus of Kean University in Union, NJ through a partnership between Playwrights Theatre and Premiere Stages. For more information about the NJYPF and other Playwright’s Theatre programs, visit PTNJ’s website: www.ptnj.org.
for first, second and third place in those divisions. Each script submission is read by PYP staff and every playwright receives a written critique. Select plays are performed in the Play Development Series, which includes professional productions of the work as well as readings and in-school programs. Notable alumnae include Quiara Alegría Hudes. A variety of performances are scheduled throughout the next few months and more information can be found on the PYP website: www.phillyyoungplaywrights.org.

**Actors Theatre of Louisville**

Louiseville, KY

Actors Theatre of Louisville is well known for its development of new work through the Humana Festival of New American Plays, now in its 35th year. In 2005, the theatre began its New Voices Young Playwrights Festival in conjunction with a series of in-school playwriting residencies at local schools. The program has since expanded to include submissions from schools across Kentucky and southern Indiana. The festival culminates in fully-produced performances of selected young playwrights’ works featuring actors from the theatre’s Apprentice/Intern Company. Modeled on the Humana Festival process, the New Voices Festival provides each playwright with dramaturgical support and multiple opportunities to continue working on the play through workshops and meetings with an assigned director and dramaturg. The 2011 New Voices Young Playwrights Festival was presented on April 19 and 20. For more information about the festival or the playwriting residencies, visit the Education department’s website: www.actorstheatre.org/learn/education/.

Further exploration of young playwrights’ work at these theatre companies will continue during a panel discussion titled “Igniting Young Voices: A demonstration and discussion of young playwrights festivals from across the United States” to be held on Saturday, July 30 at the 2011 AATE Conference in Chicago. Additionally, please see the Resources for High School Playwrights link located on the Playwriting Network’s website for a list of young playwrights programs in your area. This list is currently being updated. Please contact the author to provide information about a program not currently on the list, or to update your program listing.

*Jim DeVivo is a Ph.D. candidate in the Program in Educational Theatre at NYU. He is also the Director of Education for Playwrights Theatre of NJ, has taught classes at NYU and Middlesex County College, and is an independent teaching artist specializing in the creation of new work by and for young people. Jim may be reached by email at jvd210@nyu.edu.*
Maybe it’s completing my first issue as Managing Editor of Incite/Insight. Maybe it’s the reflections and goal setting that come with wrapping up one school year and gearing up for the next. Maybe it’s preparing for the 2011 AATE Conference in Chicago. Whatever it is, something is causing the title of this e-zine to spin over and over in my head: Incite. Insight. Incite. Insight.

I love what these words mean and what they motivate me to be and do. Incite reminds me that our art form is based in actions, and we are therefore called to take an active role in shaping our lives, our careers, and our field. I find myself wondering: What have I incited in my life this year? How have I incited change or growth within my field? How have I encouraged my peers, or my students, to incite change or growth?

Insight reminds me that the sharing of ideas is best when it is a two-way street. When we think we can no longer learn from others, we lose out on so many of the insights they have to offer. When we think that we are not knowledgeable enough, talented enough, experienced enough, or whatever enough to have any insights to share, we cause others to lose out. As a field, we have a responsibility to learn and grow together through the sharing of all of our insights.

For those of you attending the 2011 Conference, let these words spin in your head. At the conference, what do you hope to incite—a conversation? A friendship? A new leadership position in the organization? More importantly, what do you hope to incite when you leave the conference—what do you hope to take and run with? As you participate in discussions and workshops, recognize that your insights are a valid and appreciated part of that experience, and also soak in everything you can from the insights of others.

You are not just attending a conference. You, along with your colleagues, are the conference. Let’s make it a good one!

- Elizabeth Brendel Horn

Incite/Insight Submissions Policy

Incite/Insight is the membership e-magazine of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE). We welcome unsolicited submissions by and about those working in the field of theatre for youth and education. We are interested particularly in articles and essays about the following:

- Drama in the classroom
- Theatre for Young Audiences
- Playwrighting
- Advocacy
- Green Theatre
- Theatre for Diverse Audiences
- Reviews of Resources
- Celebrating Diversity
- Innovative Higher Education Programs
- Teacher Preparation related to Drama and Theatre
- Technical Aspects of our Craft
- Youth Theatre Programs and Productions
- Other Relevant Topics

We are also interested in featuring exemplary work by established and emerging playwrights and in play script, production, or relevant book reviews. We are interested in exemplary programs, groundbreaking work, cutting edge techniques, and clear thought provoking writing.

We accept electronic submissions only. Manuscripts should be double spaced with one-inch margins and pages numbered. Essays and reviews should run between 650 and 750 words. Feature articles should run 1,800 to 2,000 words. Electronic links and other web-friendly possibilities are especially welcome.

The author is responsible for obtaining permission for the use of all photographs and non-original materials. Photos are highly desirable to help tell the story. Cover photos must be 800KB or greater. Hi-res photos are preferred, but not necessary unless a cover shot. The author is responsible for photo identifications. There is no monetary compensation for writers. Publication is at the sole discretion of the Editor and the AATE Editorial Advisory Board.

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