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# A Survey





# of School Theatre



A landscape study of theatre education in United States high schools

BY MATT OMASTA

DURING THE 2011-12 school year the Educational Theatre Association (EdTA) and Utah State University (USU) partnered to conduct a study assessing the state of theatre arts education in United States high schools. Building on the foundation of research laid by previous studies conducted in 1970 and 1991, the project surveyed theatre educators and secondary school administrators nationwide regarding a broad range of topics.

The 1970 survey, *A Survey of the Status of Theatre in United States High Schools*,<sup>1</sup> was commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and conducted by Joseph Peluso of Seton Hall University. In 1991, EdTA conducted a similar nationwide survey, *Theatre Education in United States High Schools*,<sup>2</sup> authored by staff member Kent Seidel, using the earlier survey as a baseline of comparison. The present study builds on and references data from these earlier works throughout.<sup>3</sup>

Participants provided data about their curricular theatre programs; play production activities; student and parental involvement; faculty demographics, training, and employment conditions; performance facilities; production resources and new technology used; and program finances. Teachers and administrators detailed their views on the purposes, roles, and values of educational theatre and drama. Questions probed the types of social issues that theatre educators explored with their students through coursework and pro-

duction experiences, and discussed the challenges that can arise when engaged in such work. Like its predecessors, the survey offers a snapshot of theatre education activities in high schools throughout the country, allowing us to begin exploring how secondary school theatre has both evolved and remained the same over time.<sup>4</sup> While many of the topics explored were addressed in the 1970 and 1991 studies, the new survey also covered new ground, examining the effects of technology on theatre educators and their students.

This article reports national-level descriptive statistics<sup>5</sup> based on surveys completed by teachers and administrators from over 1,200 U.S. high schools, exploring issues they face and identifying emerging trends in practice (see the sidebar below for an overview of the survey methodology). The study summary provided here is not, however, a fully comprehensive report from which definitive claims can be made about every school in the nation. While all public schools in the U.S. that met certain criteria were invited to partici-

## How the survey was conducted

ANY WELL-CONDUCTED study is only as reliable as its methodology. This brief overview offers a summary of how the *2012 Survey of Theatre in United States High Schools* was conducted. Readers are encouraged to review the full methodology report at [Schooltheatre.org](http://Schooltheatre.org) to familiarize themselves with the study's design and limitations, particularly if they are interested in using the data as part of a research project.

### Study design and methodology

The broad question the survey sought to address was: "What is the state of theatre education in U.S. high schools today?" A self-administered hybrid mail/online survey was the most straightforward way to explore this question, given the large population of schools nationwide, the existence of two prior survey studies addressing similar questions, and available resources. The study was originally designed to employ a randomized, stratified sampling design; however, based on early return rates, the research team amended the design to employ a modified census methodology.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, every public high school in the fifty United States and the District of Columbia with a total enrollment of at least two hundred students was invited to participate.<sup>2</sup>

The surveys replicated some questions from those administered in 1970 and 1991 studies, but several questions were modified or removed, and new questions were added. To help ensure construct validity, survey questions were assessed using three methods: expert review, modified cognitive interviews, and field pre-tests with theatre teachers and school administrators.<sup>3</sup> Copies of the survey instruments are available online.

Data collection began in November 2011 and concluded in June 2012. Though the exact date any given school was invited to participate varied, all data was collected during the 2011-12 school year. Invitations were sent to the principal of each school through e-mail and/or the U.S. Postal Service.<sup>4</sup> Each invitation explained that it consisted of two self-administered surveys: one to be completed by the school principal or her/his designee, and the second, by a school faculty or staff member who was involved with theatre courses or activities. Participants either entered their responses directly into an online survey system<sup>5</sup> or by returning a hard copy of the survey to the research team at Utah State University. All surveys received by mail were processed using a double-data entry system to help protect against errors.

### Participation, non-response, and risk of generalization

In an ideal world, research projects would be able to evaluate every case relevant to the study (for example, it would have been ideal if every single high school theatre teacher in the country completed a survey for this study), but this is almost never the case. Many studies therefore choose a representative sample from which to draw conclusions about the total population. A sample is generally considered representative of a population if it is similar to the population in many or most important ways. The "statistics" in these studies describe only the cases actually included in a sample (e.g. "Forty-five percent of teachers who completed surveys indicated that they prefer vanilla ice cream."), while population "parameters" describe the entire population (e.g. "Forty-five percent of all teachers in America prefer vanilla ice cream.") Sample *statistics* are often "generalized" to make inferences about population *parameters*, though generalization always involves some degree of error, as no sample is ever *exactly* the same as a population (at least when humans are concerned). Many different types of error can come into play; for example, "sampling error" occurs when the cases in a study are, in fact, quite different from those in the population at large.

pate in the study, only some schools opted to share information.<sup>6</sup> A degree of caution must therefore be exercised when interpreting the data. Despite this limitation, the study offers a wealth of information drawn from the greatest number of schools to participate in a national theatre education survey to date. It can help theatre educators, school administrators, and others invested in theatre education better understand the unique circumstances of their individual programs within the broader context of educational theatre

taking place throughout the country today.

The data presented here includes only the most fundamental facts, figures, and analysis of the survey; it will take time and additional study to present a more comprehensive report. Given the space limitations in this printed edition of *Teaching Theatre*, supplemental survey content is available online at [Schooltheatre.org](http://Schooltheatre.org). This issue also marks the premiere of the web-based *Teaching Theatre Digital* (see the sidebar on page 29

for more information). Additional data and analysis related to the study will be posted online in the coming months.

*This study was reviewed by Utah State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and granted exempt status under federal guidelines [45 CFR Part 46.101(b)]. The study was also reviewed and approved by school district IRBs throughout the country as per each district's research authorization process.*

Because this study employed a census methodology, it is not susceptible to sampling error. It is, however, potentially affected by non-response bias; of the roughly 13,000 schools invited to participate in the present study, about 10 percent<sup>6</sup> ultimately participated. Any study with less than a 100 percent response rate is potentially affected by non-response bias. However counterintuitive as it may seem, research has demonstrated that there is not necessarily any relationship between non-response rate and non-response bias, and in fact, in some cases a higher response rate actually *increases* non-response bias, rather than decreasing it.<sup>7</sup> Response rate is ultimately less important than *representativeness*—if the schools that participated are significantly different from the schools that did not participate *based on the variables being measured*. In other words, good representativeness makes it possible to generalize the data and make inferences about the total population, while non-response bias potentially does not.

A number of methods can be used to assess the potential non-response bias in a study. Several of these tools (including wave analysis and respondent/non-respondent analysis) will be used to do more in-depth analyses of the 2012 survey, the results of which will be posted online when they are

complete. Regarding the data presented in this print report of the study, readers are cautioned that the participating schools are *not necessarily representative* of the total population of U.S. high schools that offer theatre programs. When considering known variables (data publicly available), the schools *are* likely representative in some ways (e.g. student demographics such as enrollment by race/ethnicity and gender), but they are *not* likely representative in other ways (e.g. student socioeconomic status). Schools with relatively high enrollment of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs are likely under-represented, as are schools located in the southeastern region of the nation. Conversely, schools with a relatively low enrollment of students eligible for free/reduced lunch programs, and schools located in all other regions of the country, are likely over-represented. Until the further analyses currently underway are completed, however, it is not possible to say what impact (if any) these variables will have on study-related variables.

—M.O.

### Endnotes

1. Schools that participated in the original sample design, but would not have been eligible for selection using the census design, are excluded from the present analysis.
2. See endnote six of the main article.

3. See Robert Groves, et al., *Survey Methodology* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2009), 259-264 for details. Expert reviewers included faculty experts in theatre, education, and psychology, as well as a team of theatre education professionals from the EdTA central office. Field pretests were conducted with a small group of theatre teachers and secondary school principals who also provided retrospective think-aloud feedback.

4. Schools included in the original sample were initially contacted by USPS; schools added as part of the census were initially contacted by e-mail when a principal e-mail address was publicly available. When e-mail was not available, or if the initial e-mail contact did not result in a response, schools were then contacted by USPS. Non-responders received three follow-up invitations, at least two of which were delivered by USPS.

5. The commercial survey program Zoomerang ([www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com)), now part of Survey Monkey, was used to collect data from participants.

6. The actual response rate (as it is traditionally understood), is likely higher than 10 percent, however. While approximately 13,000 schools included in the 2009-10 CCD were invited to participate, many of those schools were no longer in operation during the 2011-12 school year; others had moved and did not receive forwarded mail, and still others were not actually high schools but were misclassified in the CCD (the research team learned that the entities classified as public "high schools" included, among others, middle schools and elementary schools that did not enroll any high-school level students, as well as education consulting organizations that partnered with schools but were not actually schools). As of the release date of this article, post-hoc analysis is continuing in an effort to identify all such cases in order to better estimate the participation rate.

7. See Groves et al., 183-191.

## PART ONE



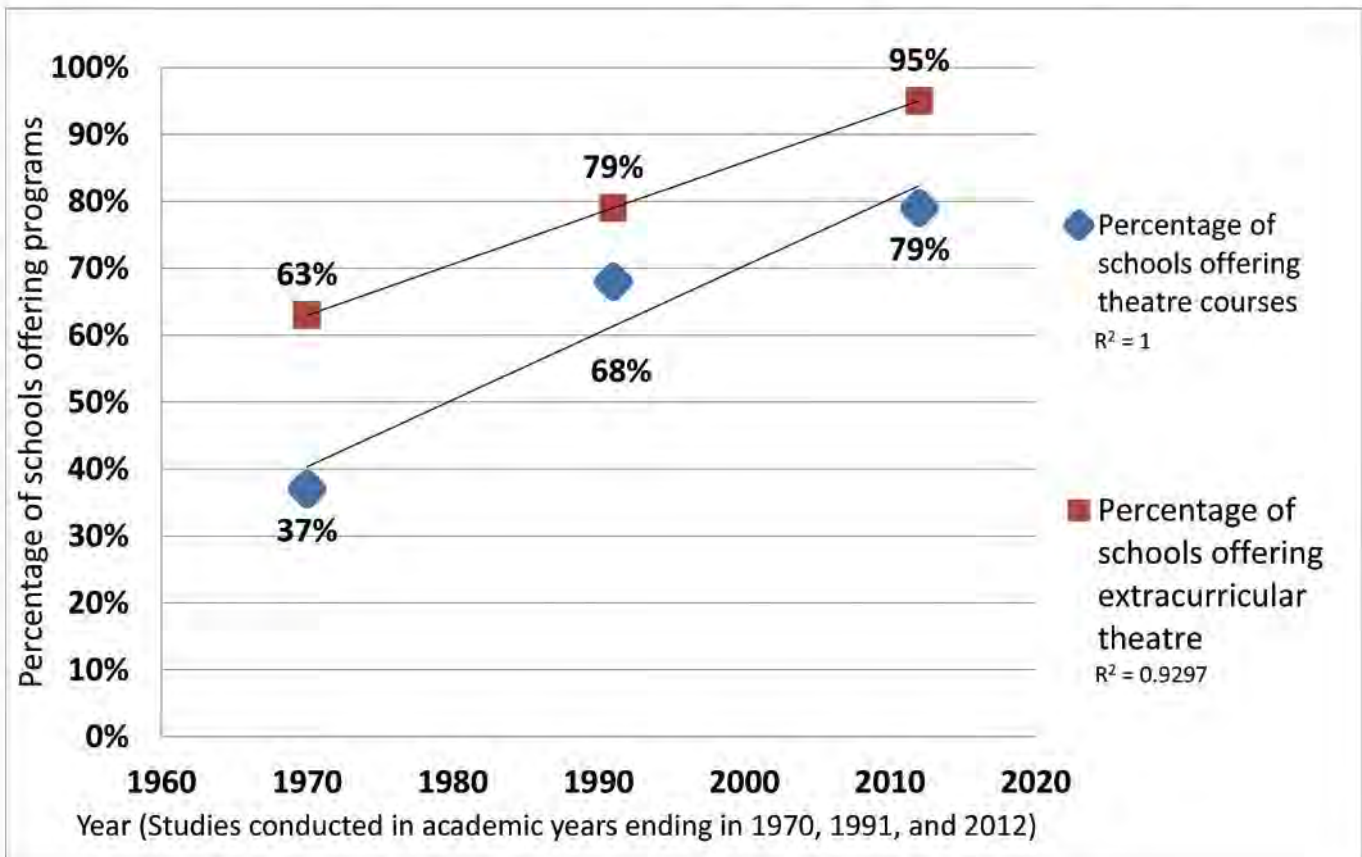
# Educational Theatre Program Models

SECONDARY SCHOOL THEATRE programs exist in multiple forms throughout the nation. A limited number of schools offer comprehensive, arts-based models of education that place theatre at the center of the curriculum, employing multiple specialists and other educators who use theatre to teach a variety of subjects. Others follow more traditional models while still offering

robust theatre programs consisting of multiple classes in performance, design/technology, playwriting, or arts management, while simultaneously producing an array of faculty and student-directed musicals, dramas, one-acts, plays for young audiences, and even student-written work on a regular basis throughout the year. Many schools feature more modest programs,

perhaps offering a single curricular theatre course and producing one or two shows each semester. Some schools include no theatre courses for credit, but do offer students a variety of extracurricular programs such as theatre competitions, play production, drama clubs, or student theatre honor societies. Conversely, some schools confine theatre opportunities exclusively to the

**Chart 1: Percentage of schools reporting availability of theatre courses and extracurricular activities**



Studies drew from different populations of schools; comparisons over time should be made with caution. See Peluso (1970), Seidel (1991), and the methodology report posted on [Schooltheatre.org](http://Schooltheatre.org).

regular school day. And of course, others offer no theatre programs at all. All of these program models are employed by different schools in this study; each offers students and teachers unique opportunities and challenges.

About 70 percent of participating schools required students to take at least one course in the arts (e.g. music, theatre, visual art, film, or dance) during their enrollment. School administrators estimated that the average<sup>7</sup> percentage of students from these institutions actually taking at least one arts course

during their high school years was approximately 76 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Seventy-nine percent of schools offered at least one course in theatre during the regular school day during the 2011-12 school year, which may suggest that theatre course availability has increased over the past twenty to forty years<sup>9</sup> (**Chart 1**). Further, on average, administrators from schools that offered theatre classes estimated that approximately 23 percent of their schools' students took at least one theatre course during their enrollment.<sup>10</sup>

Just under 95 percent indicated that they offered theatre-related extracurricular activities such as play production. It is difficult to compare the availability of such programs over time; each study drew from a different population and employed slightly different terminology to ask about such programs. However, the available data suggest that such programs may be more abundant now than in prior years; 79 percent of respondents to the 1991 study indicated that their schools offered "out-of-class theatre activities," and in 1970, 63 percent of schools reported having a "drama club or similar activity."<sup>11</sup>

## PART TWO



# Purpose and Impact of Theatre Programs

THEATRE TEACHERS and school administrators both shared their opinions regarding how significant a role various factors played in maintaining their schools' theatre programs (**Chart 2**). While responses varied, theatre educators may be encouraged by the finding that the majority of all respondents rated every factor as being "significant" or "very significant." As in previous studies, teachers and administrators generally rated factors that involved developing inter- and intrapersonal intelligences<sup>12</sup> highly. The highest-rated factor for both groups (in all three studies) was "to enable students to grow in self-confidence and self-understanding." Improving students' interpersonal skills and creativity ranked second and third most significant for all respondents. Least important to both groups were factors related to student behavior such as reducing anti-social behavior and low-

ering truancy/dropout rates. Teachers generally rated each trait more highly than did administrators.

When asked to rate how important a role their school theatre program played in developing various skills and competencies, teachers and administrators emphatically agreed that theatre played a strong role in developing students' self-confidence. On average, both groups rated the importance of theatre in developing self-confidence at 3.9 out of 4.0. Both groups ranked *interpersonal* skills (communication and collaboration) and *intrapersonal skills* (self-discipline, self-understanding, and creativity) highly (**Chart 3**). Most respondents also indicated that theatre played an important role in developing the skills necessary to work with others to solve problems (leadership, problem solving/critical thinking, and social/cross-cultural skills).

While the majority of respondents felt theatre played an important or

very important role in developing all of the skills listed, relatively fewer participants felt that theatre played an important role in developing management/administrative abilities, media literacy, and information technology skills. This may stem in part from perceptions of theatre as a live, unmediated art form, despite the rapid expansion of digital technology used in almost all aspects of the field. It also suggests that teachers and administrators may see theatre playing a stronger developmental role for students involved in performance-based capacities, as opposed to those working as stage managers or in front-of-house or some technical roles that do not overtly promote self-confidence. Nevertheless, the tasks associated with these roles still demand that students communicate and collaborate effectively with other creative team members.

### Relative value of theatre arts

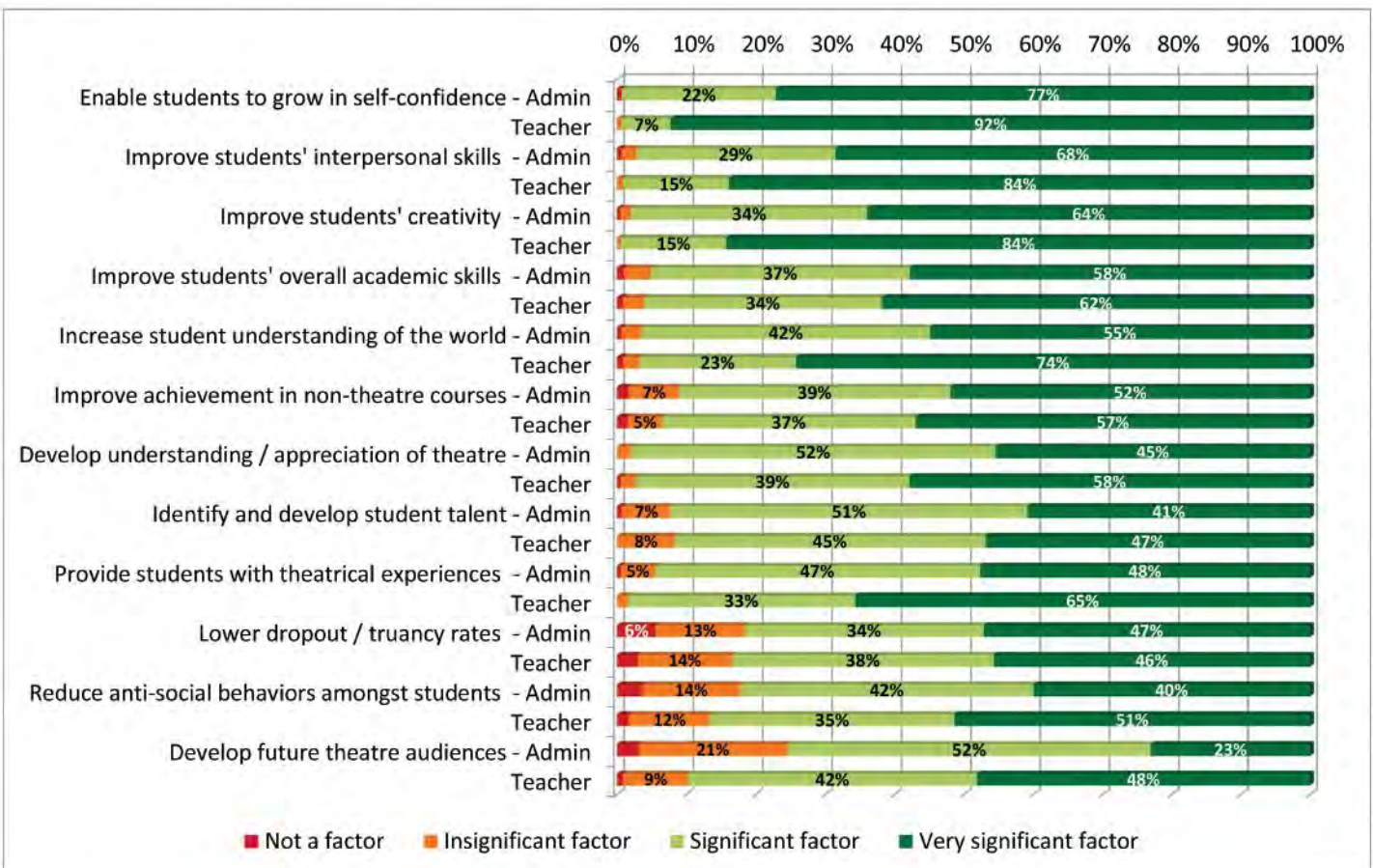
School administrators were asked to compare theatre to other student activities at their school such as sports, music groups, yearbook, and service clubs, ranking theatre's standing in terms of how time-intensive, expensive, profitable, and generally important it was (Chart 4).

While many theatre educators may agree with the 82 percent of administrators who indicated that theatre was at least "somewhat" time-intensive/

in the top 50 percent of most time-intensive activities at their schools, they might be surprised to note that many administrators indicated that theatre was less expensive than other activities; only 21 percent indicated theatre was either "very" or "extremely" expensive. However, administrators also generally considered theatre programs to be less profitable than other school activities, with a clear majority (58 percent) indicating it was "not very" or "not at all" profitable.

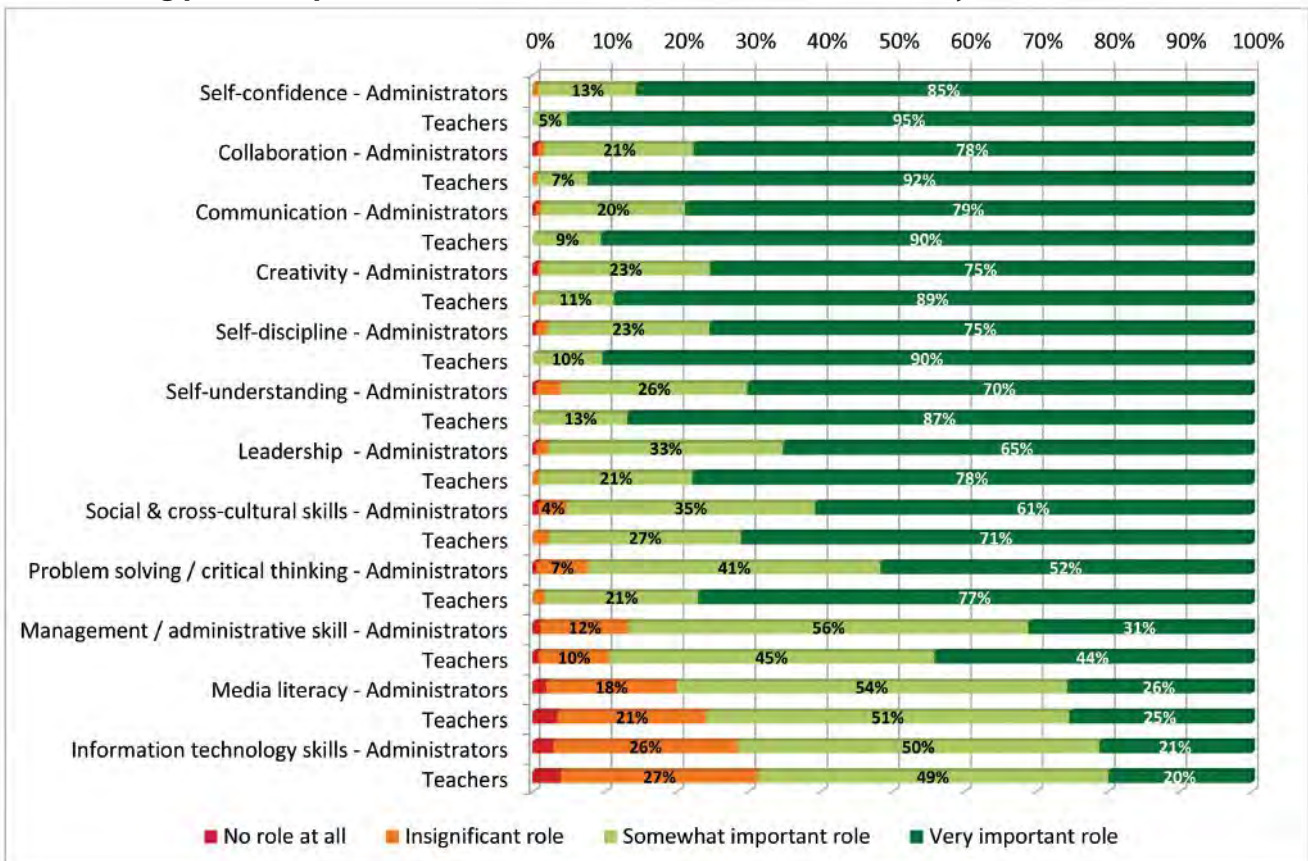
Finally, administrators were asked to rank how relatively "important overall" theatre activities were to all students; the term "important" was deliberately undefined. Theatre fared well in this category, with 82 percent indicating that theatre was in the upper 50 percent of activities in terms of overall importance, and only a small minority (just under 5 percent) not considering it important "at all."

**Chart 2: "How important a factor do you feel each of these reasons is in maintaining a theatre program at your school?"**



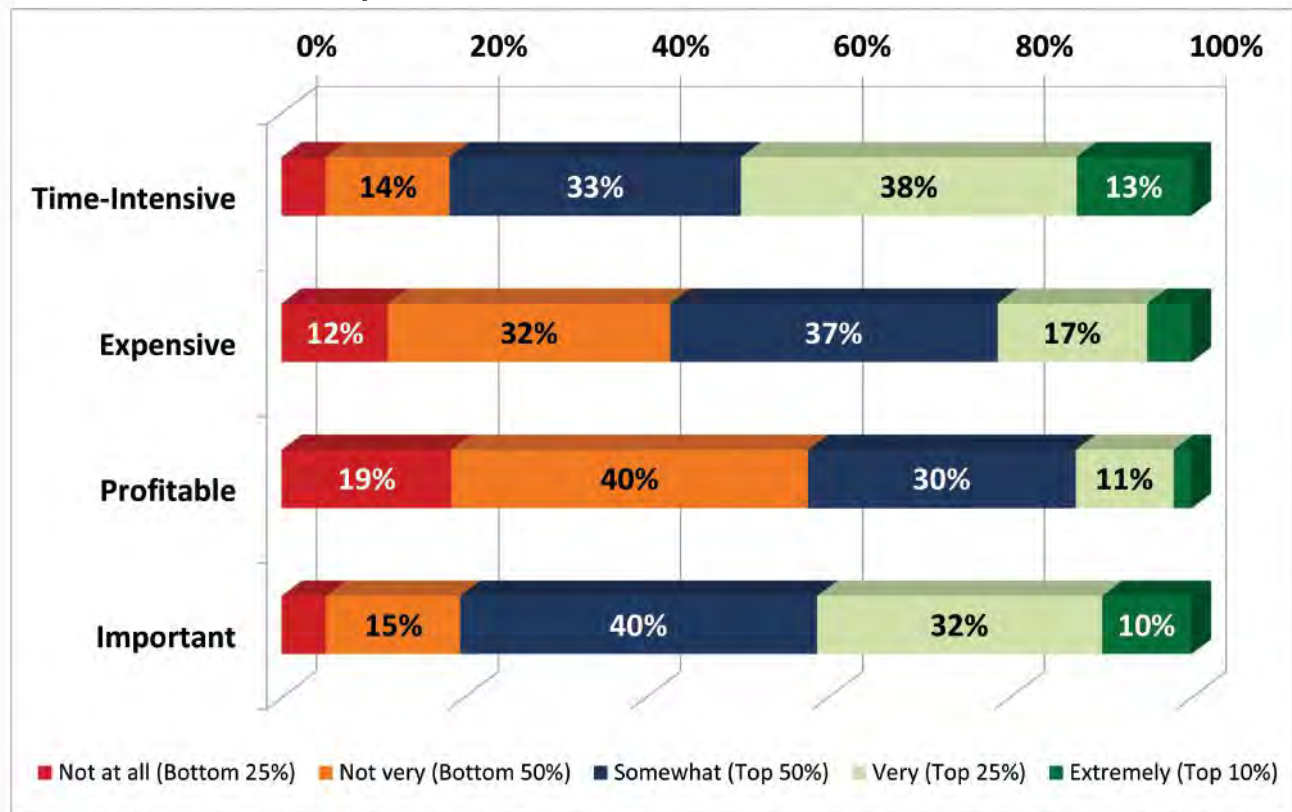
Comparison of percentage of administrators' and teachers' ratings for each factor was created using a 4-point scale. Respondents selecting "Don't know/no opinion" were excluded from analysis.

**Chart 3: “How important a role do you feel your theatre program plays in teaching and strengthening the following personal qualities and social/workforce skills in students at your school?”**



Percentages of administrators and teachers selecting each response on a 4-point scale. Respondents selecting “Don’t know/no opinion” were excluded from analysis.

**Chart 4: Administrator comparisons between theatre and other student activities.**



Average (mean) responses from administrators on a five-point scale (n≈835).



## Theatre Faculty and Staff

THE THEATRE TEACHERS who participated in this study were demographically similar to those participating in the 1991 study; the majority of respondents to both were white women in their thirties or forties who were married or in domestic partnerships.<sup>13</sup> Although theatre teacher demographics (**Chart 5A**) are similar to those of twenty years ago, student demographics have changed considerably since then (**Chart 5B**). The 1991 study reported a 21-point gap between the percentage of white, non-Hispanic theatre teachers (97 percent)<sup>14</sup> and white, non-Hispanic students (76 percent). When comparing the percentage of white teachers in the present study (93-96 percent, depending on how multiracial teachers are classified) to the percentage of white students enrolled at their schools (61 percent), an even wider gap equal to 32-36 percentage points is revealed. The gap between student and teacher gender is also considerable; a slight majority of students enrolled at the participating schools were male (51 percent), but only 37 percent of participating theatre teachers were male.

### Employment status

Most teachers were employed full-time (90 percent), with almost 9 percent working part-time and less than 1 percent serving as volunteers. Full-time theatre teachers reported working an average of fifty-five hours per week during the regular school year,<sup>15</sup> while part-time teachers generally worked hours associated with full-time employment.<sup>16</sup> While many participants

(40 percent) indicated that they were originally hired primarily to teach theatre courses at their school, a sizeable minority (34 percent) were not, but assumed theatre responsibilities later in their careers. Twenty-six percent were hired in part to teach theatre, but primarily to fulfill other responsibilities at the school.

On average, slightly less than half of the classes taught by participants were theatre courses (49 percent). When only considering those who teach at least one theatre class (e.g., eliminating those whose theatre involvement was exclusively extracurricular), the average percentage of courses taught was 57 percent. Considering the average percentage is misleading, however, as relatively few teachers reported teaching approximately half of their class load in theatre. Among teachers who teach at least some theatre classes during the regular school day, the most common (mode) percentage of theatre courses taught reported was actually 100 percent; approximately one-third of participants taught theatre exclusively. A roughly equal group indicated that theatre classes comprised 25 percent or less of their total teaching load each year, with the remaining one-third distributed between 25-99 percent.

### Compensation

It is difficult to compare teacher compensation given the differences in cost of living and other factors in various regions of the country. Just under half of the nation's theatre educators who

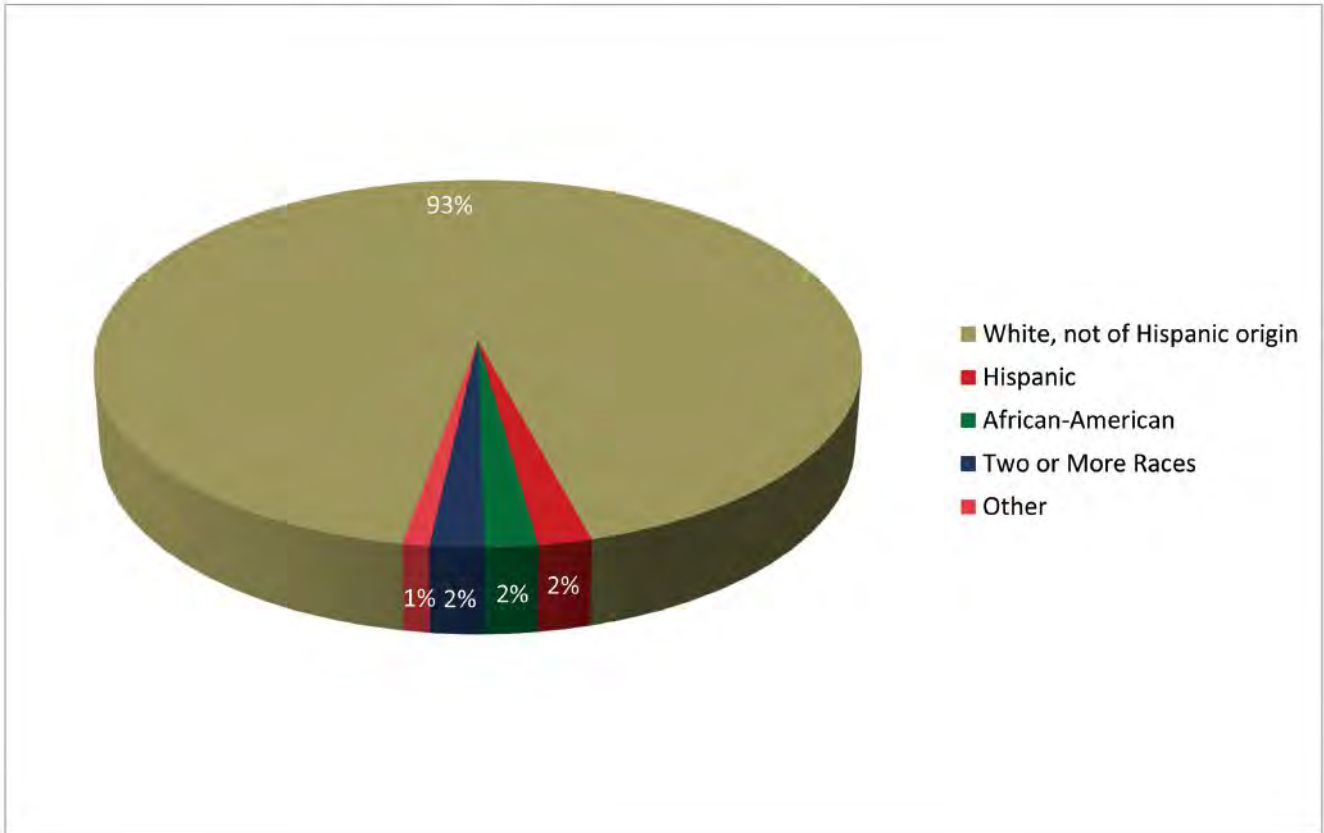
participated in the study earned base salaries of \$30-\$49,000 annually, well below the national average salary for high school teachers in 2010-11, which was \$56,350.<sup>17</sup> Less than 2 percent earned under \$30,000 annually, while less than 1 percent earned six-figure salaries. The average (mean and median) salary range was \$40,000-49,999. Most teachers (86 percent) received stipends, in addition to their base salaries, for extracurricular theatre work. Of these teachers, most (73 percent) were paid an annual stipend (usually \$2,000-\$3,000),<sup>18</sup> approximately 25 percent were compensated on a per-show basis (usually around \$2,000),<sup>19</sup> and about 2 percent were paid an hourly wage.

### Teacher qualifications

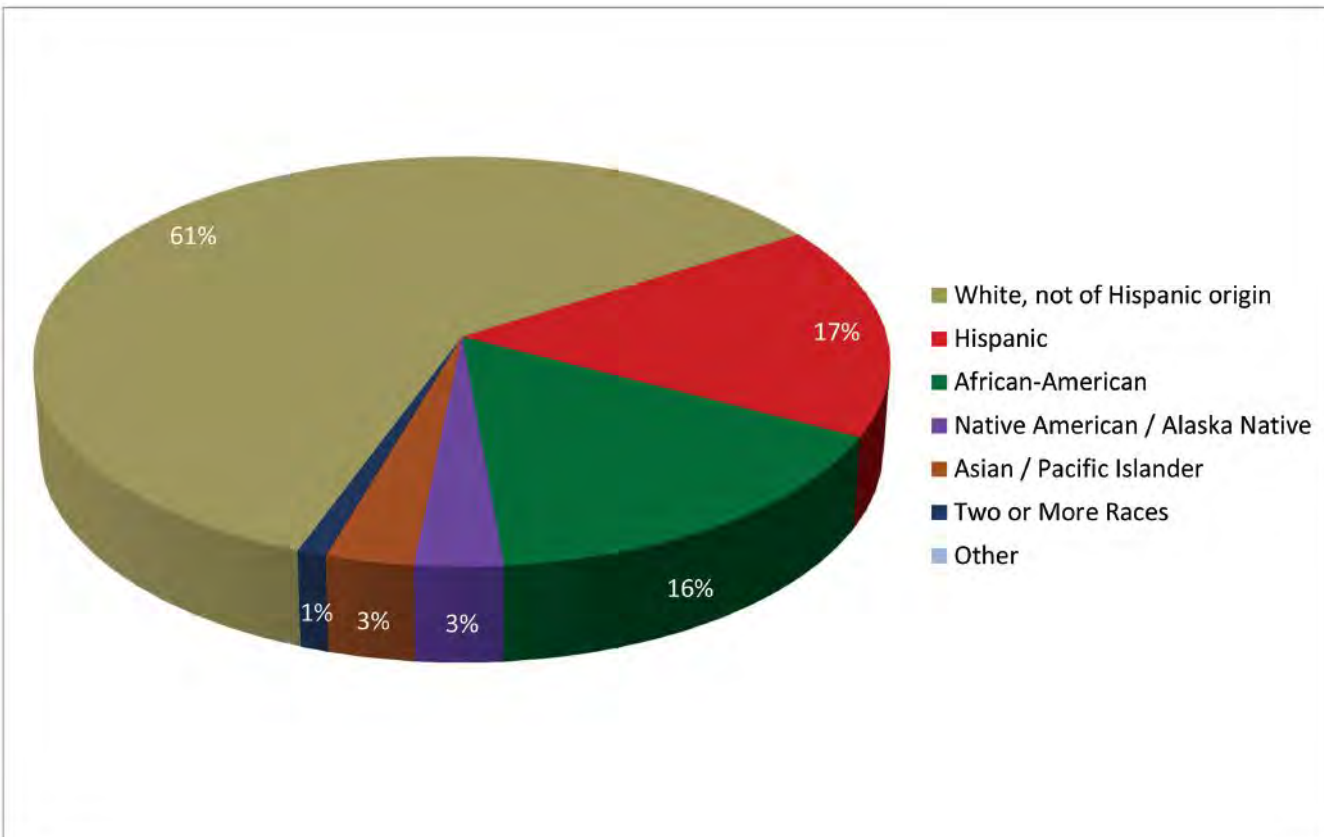
Administrators were asked to select from a list of thirteen predefined qualifications they considered to be the *minimum* when hiring for a theatre position (**Chart 6**). Only three criteria were selected by the majority of administrators as "minimum qualifications" for a theatre teaching position. The first two (a strong interest/desire to teach theatre and effective overall teaching abilities) require no training in theatre. Experience teaching theatre was considered a minimum requirement by less than two-thirds of responding administrators. The arguably most rigorous qualifications (a master's degree in theatre or theatre education and professional theatre experience) were the least-often selected as minimum qualifications by administrators.



**Charts 5A: Theatre faculty demographics**

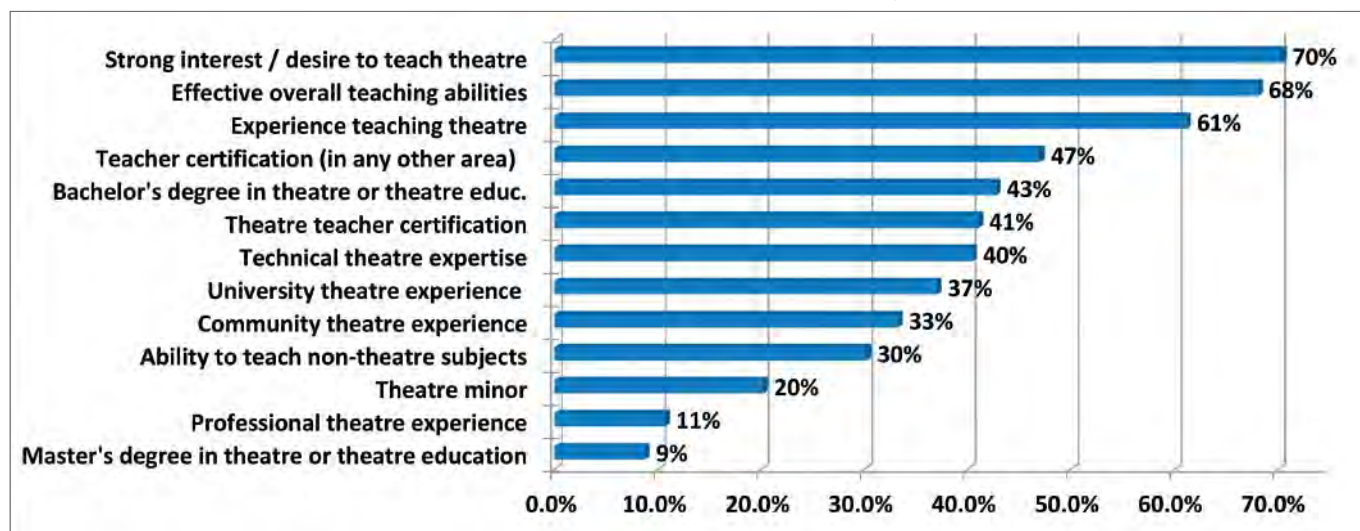


**Chart 5B: General student population demographics**



Responses were drawn from teacher surveys for faculty and the National Center for Educational Statistics' Common Core of Data for students; only students from participating schools are included in chart 5B, which represents the mean *total percentage* of students of various races enrolled at each school (*not* the percentage of students involved in theatre activities).

**Chart 6: Minimum qualifications administrators consider when hiring for a theatre position.**



Percentage of administrators selecting each qualification (n=820).

That more administrators considered teacher certification in a subject other than theatre to be a minimum hiring requirement than certification to teach theatre speaks to the potential need for theatre teachers to develop expertise in and the ability to teach a second subject area; this may be particularly true in states that do not offer teacher certification in theatre.<sup>20</sup>

It is also clear that aspiring teachers will encounter a wide array of expectations when entering the workforce, with some administrators expecting both a master's degree and professional theatre experience as a minimum qualification for a teaching position, and others indicating that only an interest in theatre is required. Given this range of expectations, pre-service teachers may benefit from committing considerable time to researching the qualifications required by state and local education agencies as well as individual schools/districts well before they enter the field as professionals.

The two qualifications that most administrators sought are difficult to quantify, and the study did not assess teacher interest in theatre or their overall teaching abilities. It did however assess their directing and teaching experience and certifications. On average, the participating teachers had taught theatre for fourteen years. Fifty-five percent possessed a state-issued credential, endorsement, or accreditation specific to teaching theatre.<sup>21</sup>

Teachers' directing experience varied widely, with some participants

indicating they had never directed a production at any level and others indicating they had directed several hundred plays in a variety of contexts. Not surprisingly, teachers were most likely to have directed school plays<sup>22</sup> on a regular basis; on average, teachers had directed twenty-six productions at the school level. Many teachers had also directed community theatre productions,<sup>23</sup> university theatre productions,<sup>24</sup> and professional theatre productions,<sup>25</sup> though the most common number of such productions reported was zero in each of the latter three categories.

A fair number of teachers participating in the study were members of theatre education associations at the regional/state level (45 percent) and/or national (33 percent) level, considerably more than in 1991 and 1970 (**Chart 7**).

Approximately 99 percent of all participating teachers held at least undergraduate degrees and about 62 percent held graduate degrees. In addition, around 38 percent had also completed thirty credit hours of coursework beyond the master's degree, and 2 percent held doctoral degrees. The most commonly held undergraduate degrees were in English education (29 percent),<sup>26</sup> theatre (*excluding* theatre education or theatre for youth, 28 percent), and theatre education (23 percent). Among graduate degree holders, the most common degrees were in theatre (*excluding* theatre education/theatre for youth, 29 percent), education (not specific to theatre or any other subject

area, 28 percent), English education (23 percent), and theatre education (22 percent).

Approximately fourteen percent of in-service teachers were currently enrolled in graduate degree programs, and 41 percent indicated that they had taken coursework (outside of a degree program) to update their training in theatre or education in the last two years. While some indicated that their school system paid for post-graduate study at college or universities (22 percent in full, 3 percent in part), three-quarters did not receive this type of financial support.

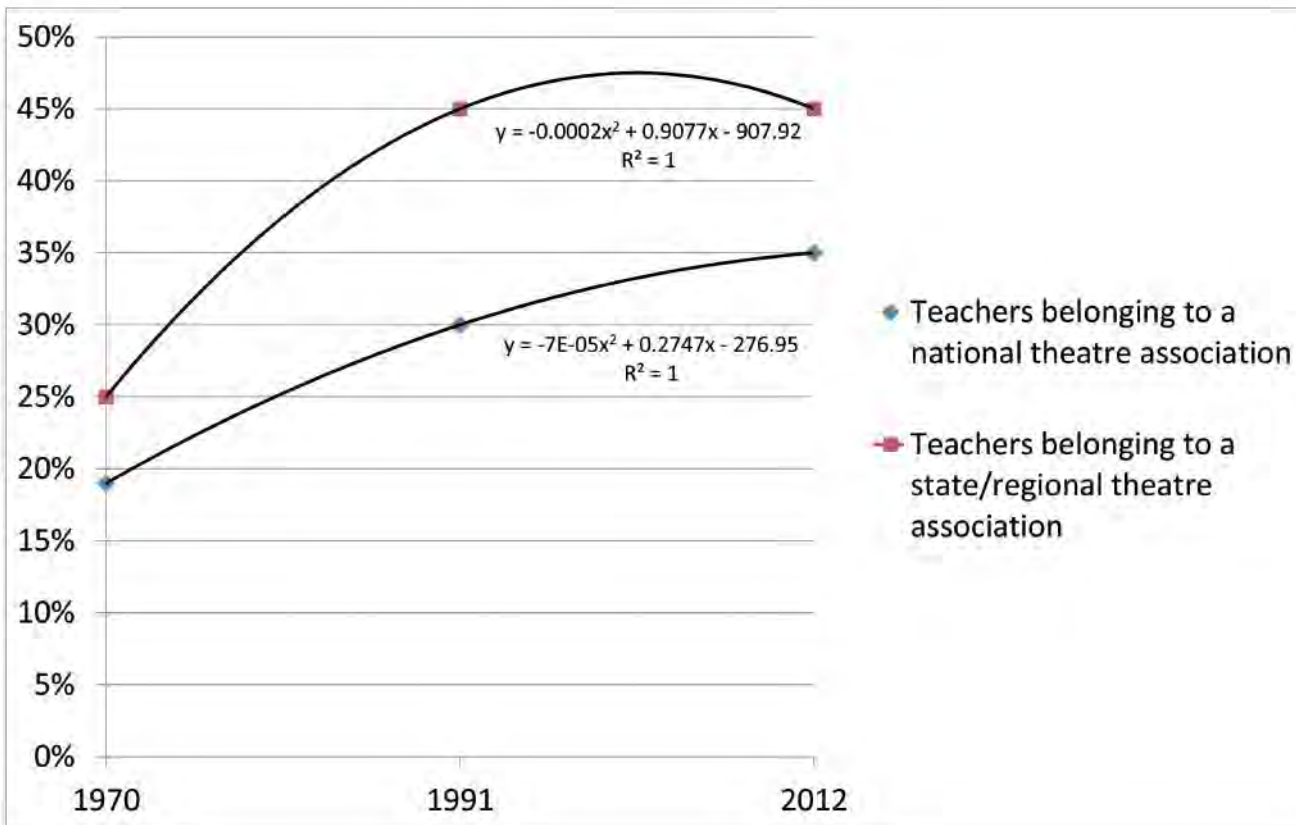
### Theatre teacher job responsibilities

There are myriad perspectives on the responsibilities educators need to prioritize once they begin teaching. Teachers and administrators were asked to consider a list of job duties that theatre faculty might perform, and to rate how important they personally felt each duty was to the theatre teacher's job overall (**Chart 8**). As indicated, teachers assigned relatively higher scores than administrators to every responsibility listed.

### Teacher assessment

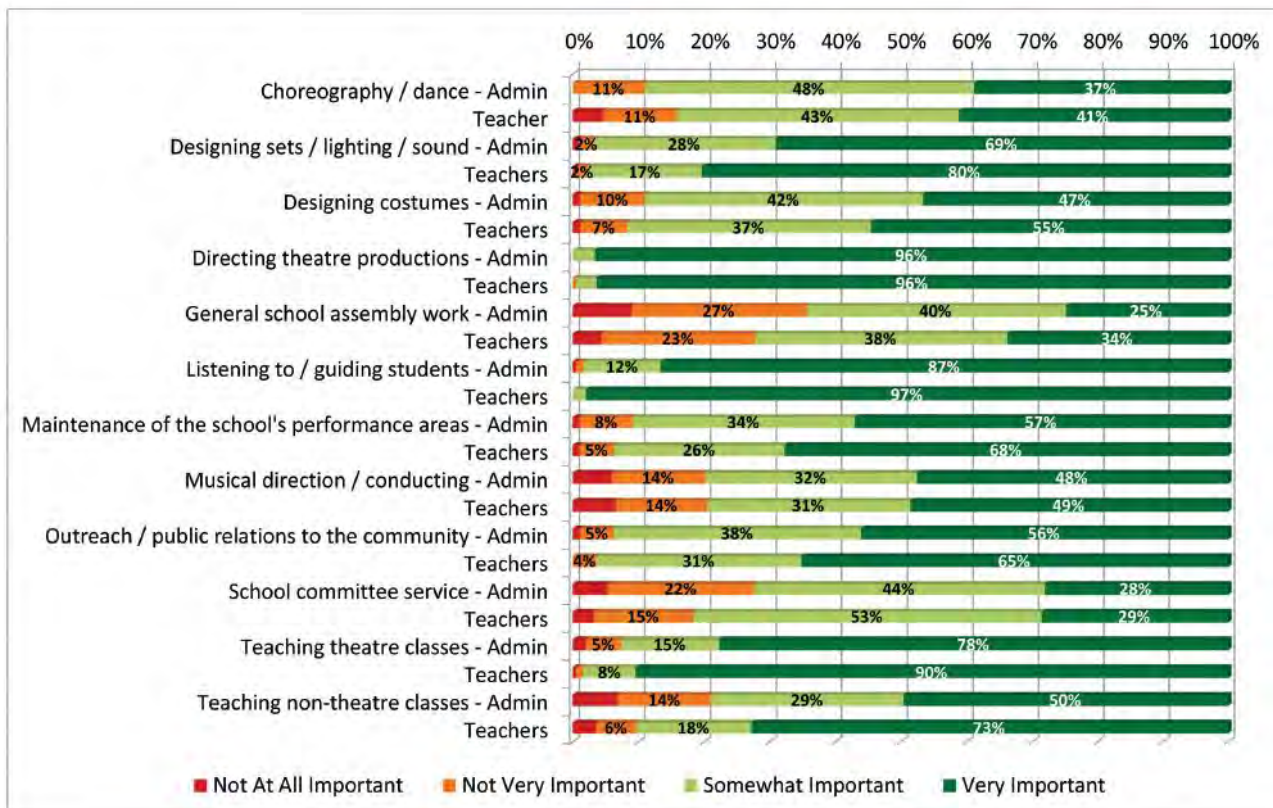
Almost all (99 percent) participating administrators indicated that theatre teachers were assessed directly by the school principal. Assistant school administrators were also regularly involved with teacher assessment (39 percent), as were some department chairs (10 percent). Schools rarely reported using peer-assessment

**Chart 7: Percentages of teachers belonging to theatre education organizations**



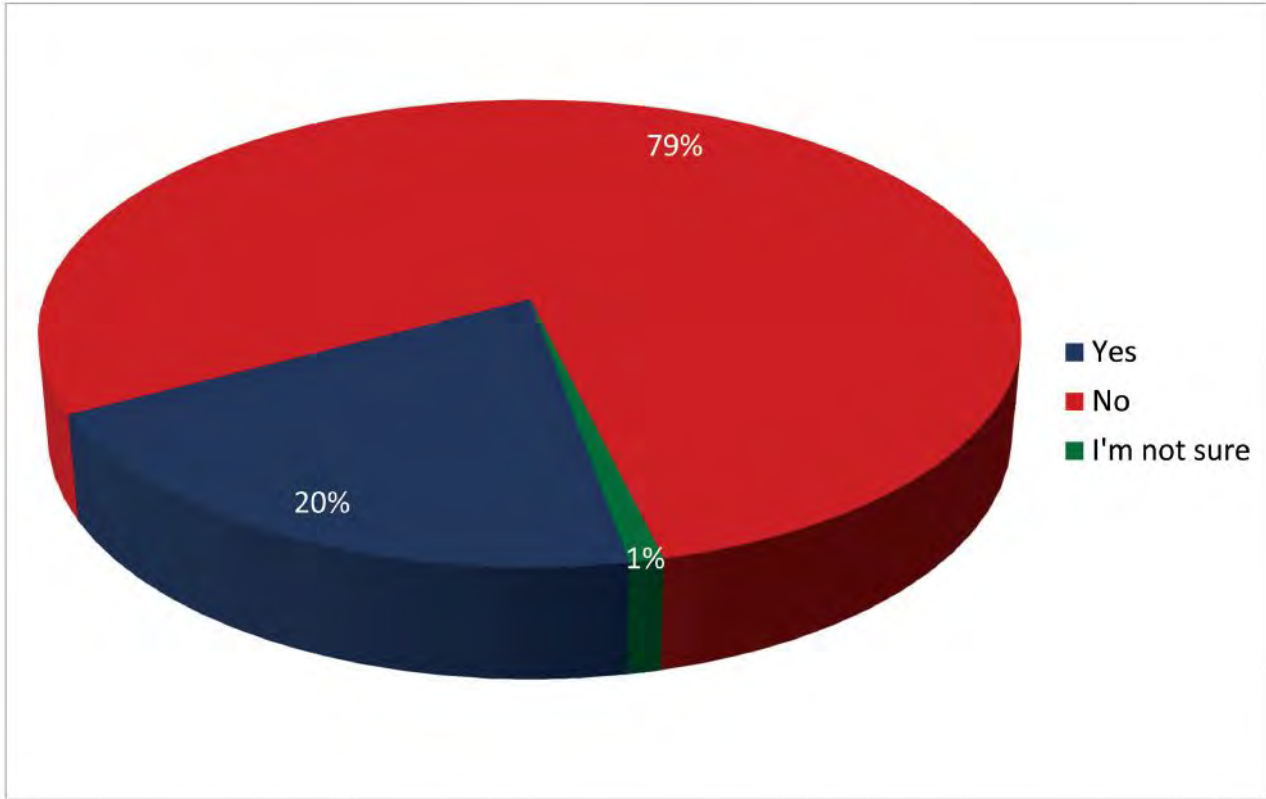
Data drawn from Peluso (1970), Seidel (1991), and 2011-12 teacher surveys (n=902). The studies drew from different populations of schools; comparisons over time should be made with caution.

**Chart 8: "How important do you personally feel each of these job duties is for your schools' theatre educators?"**



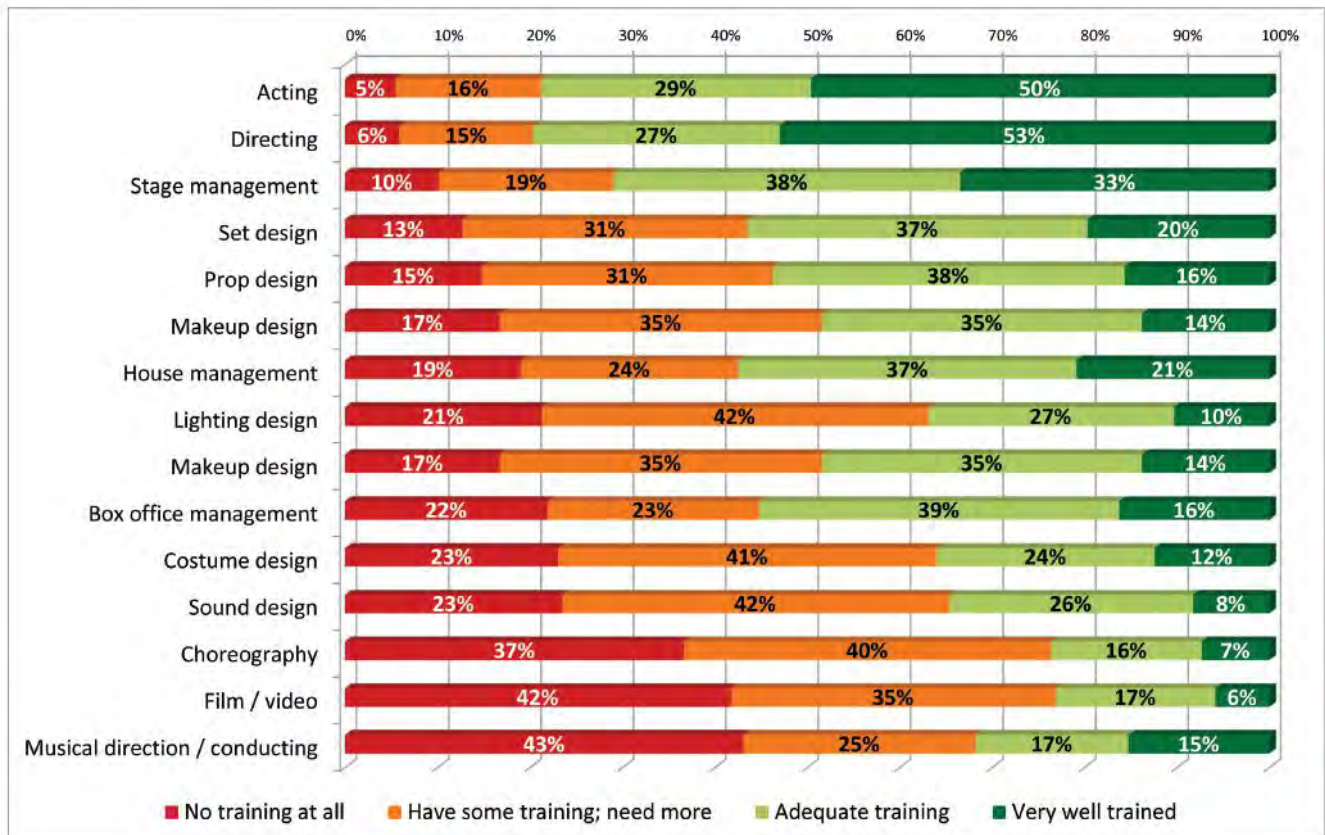
Comparison of percentage of administrators' and teachers' ratings for each factor were created using a 4-point scale. Respondents indicating that theatre educators at their school do not perform any given duty were excluded from analysis for that variable.

**Chart 9: "Is theatre teacher evaluation linked at least in part to test scores or other assessments of student achievement?"**



Data is drawn from 2011-12 administrator survey (n=829).

**Chart 10: "How well trained do you feel you are in each of the following areas (based on education and experience)?"**



Percentage of teachers selecting each response on a four-point scale. Data drawn from teacher surveys (n≈890).

(3 percent) or student-assessment of teachers (less than 2 percent).

Twenty-one percent of administrators reported that theatre teacher assessment was based at least in part on test scores or other measures of student achievement. While this figure may seem relatively low, it is worth noting that only 2 percent of theatre teachers were assessed this way in 1991; even though the studies drew from somewhat different populations, this sizeable difference suggests the use of tests and other measures of student achievement<sup>27</sup> to assess theatre teachers has increased dramatically over the last twenty years (Chart 9).

When asked to self-assess their own training in various areas, teachers re-

sponded similarly to participants in the 1991 study, indicating that they felt well-trained as directors and performers, were somewhat comfortable with stage management, front-of-house operations, and set/prop design; less trained in lighting, sound, and costume/makeup design, and relatively untrained in the areas of musical direction/conducting, choreography, and film/video (Chart 10).

### Teaching artists

In addition to questions about regular faculty/staff, administrators were asked if their school usually hired teaching artists (theatre professionals who teach at a school on a visiting basis) to work with theatre students at least once each academic year. About

twenty-five percent indicated that they did hire teaching artists regularly, 71 percent indicated that they did not, and the remaining administrators were unsure.

When asked if they wanted more access to outside teaching artists to work with their schools, 49 percent of administrators indicated that they did, 21 percent indicated that they did not, and 30 percent were unsure. The level of uncertainty regarding questions about teaching artists may indicate that professional theatre artists need to work with schools to build broader understanding of the type of work they do, as it seems likely that many administrators are unfamiliar with the role of teaching artists.

## PART FOUR



# Theatre Arts Curricula

STUDY PARTICIPANTS painted a picture of a diverse landscape of theatre education curricula in the U.S. today, ranging from non-existent to robust. This section describes the in-school, credit-based theatre arts programming that students can participate in during regular school hours. Although there was sometimes overlap between courses and productions, most data related to play production is presented in the next section on extracurricular theatre activities.

### Types of courses offered

The 79 percent of participating schools that offered at least one theatre course were asked which (if any) of nine specialized topics they offered discrete courses in. Schools most frequently offered specialized courses in tech/

design and acting, with 29 percent and 27 percent indicating the availability of discrete<sup>28</sup> courses in these areas, respectively.<sup>29</sup> Fourteen percent of participating schools offered musical theatre classes, and several schools offered courses in directing, literature/history, playwriting, stage management, and theatre management.

### Student involvement

Teachers were asked if the majority of students in their theatre program were offered theatre classes and/or school-related theatre experience prior to high school. Twenty-nine percent of teachers indicated that students had access to such opportunities at the middle school level, and 7 percent indicated that theatre programs were available to most of their students in elementary

school. Thirty-three percent of teachers reported that most of their students did *not* have access to such programs at either level, and 8 percent were unsure if their students had the opportunity to participate in theatre prior to high school.<sup>30</sup>

It is difficult to determine the precise number or percentage of students from participating schools who were involved in theatre arts courses. As indicated earlier, the average of administrator estimates suggests that 23 percent of students take at least one course in theatre over during their enrollment. Data from teachers suggests that approximately nine percent of students were enrolled in theatre courses during the 2011-12 school year.<sup>31</sup>

It is similarly difficult to compare the demographics of students who partici-

pated in theatre courses to total school populations, as official records of such information do not exist at many schools or would be extremely difficult to obtain for a study of this size. Rather than repeat the unreliable use of teacher perspective to determine race used in the 1991 survey, this study omitted such questions.<sup>32</sup> However, teachers were asked if any students with disabilities participated in their theatre programs, as such official information is often available to teachers about the special needs of their students. Seventy-nine percent of teachers indicated students with disabilities were involved in their theatre programs.

Beyond coursework and play production, teachers noted the availability of several other theatre programs at schools. Forty-eight percent of teachers indicated that their students participated in high school theatre competitions almost every year, while sixteen percent participated on a less regular basis, and 36 percent never did. Approximately 36 percent of teachers reported that their school sponsored a chapter of the International Thespian Society, and about 7 percent reported that their school offered another theatre honor group. The diversity of programs suggests that, at least in some school theatre programs, efforts are made to serve a variety of different student needs, ranging from social activities to competitive events, to the many opportunities involved in play production.

### **Student assessment**

Given the increasing emphasis on student assessment as a diagnostic of teacher quality, it is interesting to consider the ways in which teachers are already assessing their students' accomplishments. The most commonly employed method for assessing students' acting, directing, playwriting, and technical theatre skills, as well as students' self-confidence/personal growth, was performance/practical demonstration. Written exams were used most frequently for assessing knowledge of

theatre history and literature. Teachers rarely used portfolios or oral exams to assess student achievement in any area.

Both teachers and administrators rated how effective the theatre program's assessment methods were in each area using a three-point scale:

Poor: The assessment methods do not adequately reveal students' true performance.

Fair: The assessment methods give a general idea of students' performance.

Excellent: The assessment methods reveal students' true performance.

In general respondents felt that their assessment methods in acting and history/literature were most likely to reveal students' true performance, and were least confident in their playwriting assessments. Teachers consistently believed that the assessment methods they used were more effective than administrators from their schools believed they were.

The primary person responsible for assessing students' coursework at 98 percent of the surveyed schools was the theatre teacher. Theatre programs also relied heavily on student self-assessment (70 percent) and peer-assessment (62 percent), while a limited number of schools brought in outside adjudicators (13 percent) to review students' coursework.

Unfortunately, despite the major role that teachers play in assessing student work, only 28 percent of the participating educators indicated that they received assessment training specific to theatre education as part of their college coursework. About 67 percent of respondents indicated that they did *not* receive any such training, while approximately 4 percent of respondents were unsure if they received any training related to assessing theatre work.

### **Textbooks and state standards**

Many theatre teachers reported that their choice of texts was subject to approval from other parties, and more than half of the respondents indicated

that they were required to use a particular text as part of their theatre course offerings. In most cases where approval was required, the school district (61 percent) or individual school (51 percent) decided what texts were approved for use in the classroom. Some teachers indicated that texts had to be approved by their state department of education (22 percent).<sup>33</sup>

Fewer teachers reported that any of these bodies *required* them to use any particular texts, but 33 percent indicated that their school required the use of particular books, while 35 percent were required to use texts designated by their district, and 17 percent received approved titles from their state department of education. When asked how often they used any books required or recommended by any of the agencies above, less than 25 percent of teachers indicated that they used the books "often" or "almost always." Twenty-three percent rarely used required or recommended texts and 12 percent never used them. This may suggest that many teachers perceive their current theatre textbooks to be of little or no value, pointing to a need to develop new, more engaging educational materials for high school theatre students.

Teachers generally held fairly positive views of their state theatre education standards, though not without some dissent. Fifty-three percent indicated that they found their standards "somewhat" useful, with 22 percent identifying their standards as "very" useful, and 25 percent finding their standards "not very" or "not at all" useful. Regardless of the level of standards buy-in, most theatre teachers indicated that their curriculum was aligned with their state standards. Two thirds said that their curriculum was "very" aligned with the standards, while 31 percent indicated their curriculum was only "somewhat" aligned. Less than 4 percent said that their curriculum was "not very" or "not at all" aligned with the standards.<sup>34</sup>



## Play Production

MOST SCHOOLS (93 percent) indicated that some form of extracurricular theatre activity was available for students. Theatre teachers were asked to provide details regarding the frequency with which their schools produced faculty and/or student-directed productions of various types each year.<sup>35</sup> The results indicate a wide variety of production programs (**Chart 11**).

The average (median) number of total faculty- and/or student-directed productions mounted by all participating schools producing at least one show annually was five.<sup>36</sup> When productions were weighted to count one-act shows and the presentation of scenes/cuttings as only 0.5 productions, the revised median was 4; many schools produced more of these productions than they did full-length shows.<sup>37</sup>

### Factors influencing play selection

Teachers were asked to rate how important each of twelve potential factors was when selecting a play for production for the general public (**Chart 12**). The factor receiving the highest average score was the quality of the script (3.8/4.0).<sup>38</sup> The next four highest factors (with mean scores between 3.8-3.4) were related to the students the teachers worked with, including practicalities such as cast size (overall and by gender breakdown) and the availability of student talent, as well as whether the play was within the students' range of understanding. Other important factors (with average scores between 2.3-3.0) concerned the likely approval of the play by school administrators and the

local community and the play's potential to teach about the power of theatre or social issues. The lowest-rated factors (with mean scores below 3.0) included a show's potential to influence/expand audience taste and factors related to finances (cost of royalties and potential for profit/large audiences).

### Program finances

In many respects, the high school theatre programs included in this study were in relatively sound financial health. The low mean scores related to production costs are particularly interesting when cross-referenced with the average spending on productions. Schools reported spending considerably more on both musical and non-musical productions (in constant, inflation-adjusted dollars) than schools in prior studies. Despite the economic downturn that began around 2008, spending on high school theatre productions remains relatively high. On average, schools reported spending \$7,510<sup>39</sup> on musical productions and \$2,701 on full-length non-musicals.<sup>40</sup>

Although 65 percent of school administrators indicated that their total school budget had decreased over the past three academic years, only 32 percent of theatre teachers at those same schools reported decreases in their program budgets during that time period. Conversely, while only 7 percent of participating schools experienced an overall increase in their budgets over the past three years, 12 percent of theatre teachers from the same schools indicated that their program budgets had

increased. These figures suggest that many schools safeguarded their theatre programs from larger economic issues, or that theatre programs were able to replenish lost school funding with support from other sources.

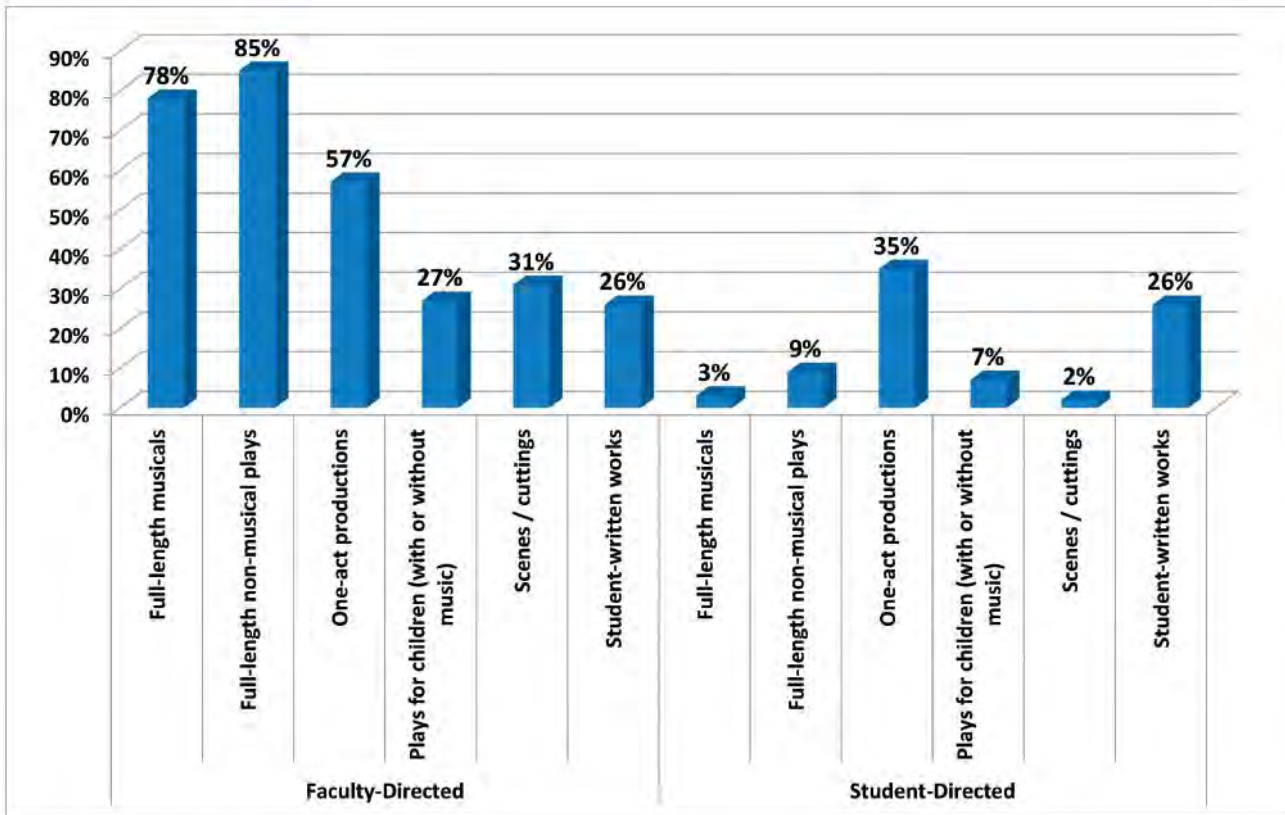
When asked what happened to net profits (if any) from performances to which admission is charged, only 6 percent of teachers indicated funds went to non-theatre accounts as determined by administrators. Most teachers indicated that any profits earned remained in theatre accounts for future productions, supplies, or general program use. At the same time, when asked if their theatre programs were required to make up for any deficits they might have at the end of the year, only 38 percent of teachers indicated that they were, while 22 percent indicated that they were not. However, about 40 percent of teachers were not sure if they would be required to make up a deficit, perhaps suggesting that their programs have not yet encountered such a situation. In sum, the theatre programs under consideration in this study generally seemed to enjoy healthy relationships with their schools and communities in terms of funding.

### Sources of program funding

Teachers were asked to indicate how much funding their program received from various sources using a four-point scale:

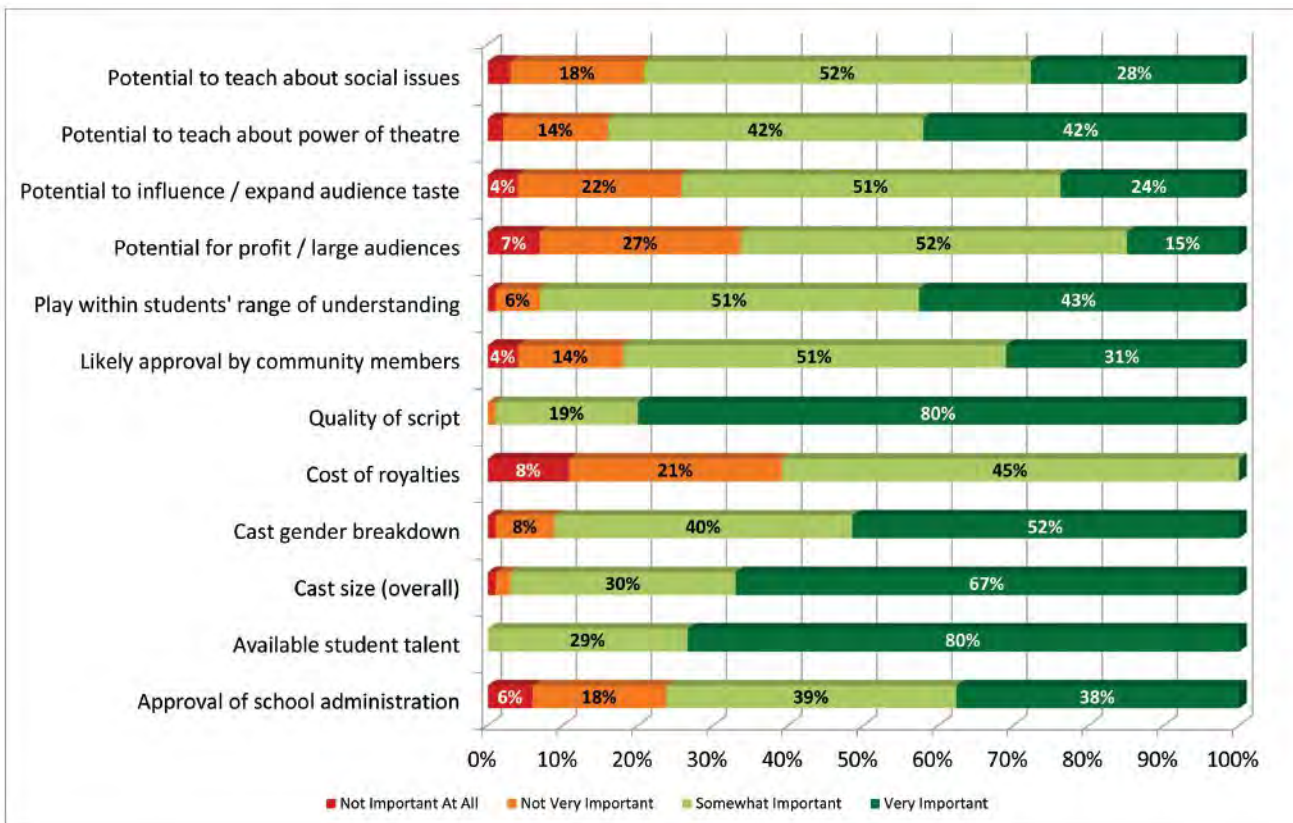
- None: The program has never received support from this source.
- Occasional: The program sometimes receives support from this source,

**Chart 11: Percentages of schools producing various types of plays for public audiences (not including class exercises).**



Data drawn from teacher surveys for schools that produce plays and the specified the number of each type of play produced. Schools not offering any plays or not specifying the type of plays produced were excluded (n=864).

**Chart 12: "How important is each of the factors below when selecting a play for production for the general public/community?"**



Data drawn from teacher surveys from schools that produce plays (n≈860).



but less than once a year. Less than 25 percent of the budget comes from this source.

- Regular: The program receives support from this source annually. Less than 25 percent of the budget comes from this source.

- Substantial: The program regularly receives more than 25 percent of its budget from this source.

The only funding source from which most schools received regular or substantial support was ticket sales, with 89 percent of teachers indicating they received this revenue from box office receipts. Only 4 percent of teachers reported earning no ticket revenue.

Seventy-five percent of schools held fundraising events for theatre at least occasionally, though only 38 percent of schools received regular or substantial funding through such events. Just over half of schools received occasional support for theatre from school budgets, but this support was only characterized as regular or substantial by about one third. Just under a third of respondents received regular or substantial support from their district budgets.

No other funding source was identified as offering regular or substantial support by at least a third of respondents. Relatively few schools received support from grants offered by government agencies or corporations/foundations (26 and 16 percent, respectively). A modest number of schools did report regular or substantial income from such programs (5 percent and 2 percent, respectively). Other common sources of occasional support came from individual donors (75 percent), advertising in production programs and elsewhere (56 percent), parent booster clubs/support groups (46 percent), or rental of a school's theatre space to outside groups (16 percent). About 19 percent of schools charged students a fee to participate in theatre productions or similar activities.

### **Parent involvement and support**

Teachers were asked if and how parents and/or other adult volunteers participated in their theatre programs. Almost all teachers (99.8 percent) indicated that parents attended theatre productions at least some of the time, with 90 percent

of teachers indicating that parents did so often or very often. Teachers said that parents were least likely to participate in booster clubs or similar activities, with 35 percent reporting that parents never participated in such clubs, and only 24 percent indicating that they did so often or very often.<sup>41</sup> Eighty-three percent of teachers indicated that parents sometimes donated money to their theatre programs, though only 21 percent indicated that parents did so often or very often. Similarly, 76 percent indicated that parents sometimes donated in-kind contributions, but only 17 percent indicated that parents did so often or very often.

Most teachers said that parents exerted a positive influence on school administrators (91 percent) and/or school board members (82 percent) at times, though fewer teachers indicated that this occurred often or very often (34 percent and 23 percent, respectively). Parents were far more likely to offer positive reinforcement to theatre students (nearly 99 percent) and teachers (98 percent), and in most instances did so often or very often (79 percent and 65 percent of the time to students and teachers, respectively). Most teachers also indicated that parents were sometimes directly involved with productions (76 percent), but only 24 percent said that parents did so often or very often.

### **Administrator support**

If a school's theatre program involved play production, its administrators were asked how valuable they felt the productions were to various groups of people using a four-point scale ranging from "not at all valuable" to "very valuable." Administrators consistently reported that play productions were "very valuable" to the students directly involved (97 percent selected this option), while less than 1 percent indicated play production was "not at all valuable" to the students involved. Most administrators also believed that their school's play productions were "very valuable" for parents of the students directly involved (82 percent), while less than 2 percent indicated they were not very or not at all valuable.

A majority of administrators (58 percent) believed their schools' play productions were either somewhat (58

percent) or very (31 percent) valuable for other students in the school (not directly involved in the production).

Eleven percent felt that the productions were not very or not at all valuable for any other group, including parents and the community at large. Approximately one-half of a percent of administrators believed their productions had no value to the community. Several administrators who stated the productions were "not at all valuable" to the students directly involved indicated that they *were* of at least some value to the broader community (even if they were *not very* valuable), which raises questions about the various types of "value" theatre productions might be perceived to offer. Overall, 94 percent of administrators believed the productions were either somewhat or very valuable to their communities at large.

Since simply being present at performances may signify the relative value of play production to administrators, both they and theatre teachers were asked how frequently school principals and other administrators attended their schools' theatre productions. Using a five-point scale ranging from "never" to "almost always," most administrators (87 percent) said that they "almost always" attended productions, while 8 percent indicated that they attended "often." However, only 45 percent of the participating teachers believed administrators attended "very often," while 28 percent indicated their administrators attended "often." Eight percent of teachers indicated that administrators rarely or never attended productions, though only 1 percent of administrators reported that this was the case. While the level of support administrators offered varied greatly by school, and though they often saw their production attendance as more frequent than did teachers, most administrators seemed to support their theatre programs both ideologically (indicating that they were of value to most school and community stakeholders) and practically, through production attendance and school-level financial support.



## Concluding Thoughts

AS PRELIMINARY RESULTS from this study were shared with theatre educators, researchers, and school administrators, many commented on the salient themes—both surprising and mundane—that the data revealed. Much seems to have changed since 1970: diverse program models abound, many of which focus exclusively on theatre and invest significant financial and personnel resources in play production; programs that combine theatre, speech, and forensics seem less prevalent, and though many schools carry on with minimal financial support, such programs are less common.

Meanwhile, the objectives of many programs remain identical to those of four decades ago: mainly, developing student self-confidence and other inter/intra-personal skills. The collective body of teachers seems unchanged in several respects, from how well trained they feel in different areas to their collective demographics, despite significant shifts in the student body makeup over time.

The study's findings also raise many questions for future study. At present, the differing responses from teachers and administrators are being analyzed to determine when these parties' perspectives converge, and how any significant differences in responses might be addressed. Variables that might play a role in shaping a school's theatre program (such as the types of degrees and certifications teachers hold and school administrators' involvement in

theatre when they were students) are being evaluated, as are the potential relationships between theatre offerings and overall measures of school success (such as graduation rates and test scores). Future publications will address these topics.

Other questions cannot be answered by survey data. *Why*, for example, do theatre teacher demographics seem to have changed so little over time? What types of students actually enroll in theatre courses when they are offered? How do other stakeholders (students, parents, community members) view their local high school theatre programs, and why might their views matter? If theatre education effectively develops students' creative capacities and interpersonal skills, how does this impact them as students? Does it influence their success in college or the workforce? If so, how? If not, why? The field would greatly benefit from a variety of in-depth case studies of particular program models as well as longitudinal research that tracks student involvement with arts education experiences literally from birth through their adulthood to explore any long-term impacts theatre and drama experiences might have.

### An invitation to learn more

While this article has shared details gleaned from several areas addressed by the survey project, much more is available online at [Schooltheatre.org](http://Schooltheatre.org), including:

- Data related to the role of new media and technology in theatre classrooms and production programs.
- Teacher and administrator perceptions of the types of social issues that should (and should not) be addressed through theatre productions, including details regarding challenges teachers have faced when trying to produce particular content, and how conflicts between teacher/directors and administrators have been resolved.
- Data regarding the availability and quality of production tools and performance facilities.
- Technical details related to the study design and other methodological issues.
- A look at ongoing projects related to the survey that will be released in the future.

### Acknowledgements

This study was made possible by funding from the Educational Theatre Association, with additional support from Utah State University's Caine College of the Arts and Department of Theatre Arts. Sincere appreciation is extended to Drs. Thalia Goldstein (Yale University) and Cathy Maahs-Fleitham (USU) for lending their significant statistical expertise to the project, and to student researchers Machaela Burt, Millie Struve, Tori Benson, Julianne Bailey, and Alissa Aguilar, who dedicated countless hours to the distribution, collection, and processing of data from participating schools.

## Endnotes

1. Joseph Peluso, *A Survey of the Status of Theatre in United States High Schools: Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1970), ERIC, ED 053117.

2. Kent Seidel, *Theatre Education in United States High Schools: A Survey Report, Teaching Theatre* 3.1 (1991): 1-20.

3. The principal investigator for the present study was Dr. Matt Omasta, assistant professor of theatre arts and director of the theatre education program at USU. Address correspondence to USU Department of Theatre Arts, 4025 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-4025.

4. While the three studies have much in common, they were not identical, and they drew from different populations of schools using different methods of data collection and analysis. Any attempts to compare data over time must be made with caution. Please refer to the methodology section of this article online for additional details.

5. The data reported in this study is descriptive in nature and limited to the actual schools that participated. As discussed in the methodology section of this study (available online), the schools that opted to participate in this study are not necessarily representative of the total population of U.S. public high schools; no inferences regarding population parameters should be drawn from the study statistics at this time. Additional analysis, including assessment of non-response bias and other factors influencing the interpretation of this data, will be available online in the coming months.

6. Schools were identified using the U.S. Department of Education Institute for Education Sciences Common Core of Data, which is publicly available online at <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>. All schools classified by school level as "high schools" and by school type as "regular schools," with a total enrollment of at least 200 students, which were in operation during the 2009-10 academic year (the most recent year for which CCD data was available when the study began), were invited to participate in the study. This included public charter and magnet schools, but excluded special education schools, vocational schools, and alternative schools (such as adult education centers and educational programs located in correctional institutions), and privately funded or faith-based schools.

7. Unless otherwise noted, the term "average" in this article refers to the arithmetic mean (e.g. the sum of data in a set divided by the number of data in that set). When informative for a particular analysis, the median and mode are also included, usually in the endnotes.

8. Most administrators (58%) indicated that the figures they provided were estimates/best

guesses rather than official figures, and ~0.5% of administrators indicated they were unsure if arts courses were required; readers should exercise appropriate interpretive caution.

9. The finding that theatre course availability has increased over time is discordant with data from the most recent U.S. Department of Education "Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools" report, conducted during the 2009-10 school year. The DOE study focused primarily on music and visual arts education (it did not survey teachers of theatre and dance), but did include some questions related to theatre on its administrator survey. Only 45% of high school administrators participating in the DOE study reported that their schools offered theatre courses during the day. [See Basmart Parsad & Maura Spiegelman, *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools: 1999-2000 and 2009-2010*. NCES 2012-014. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).]

It is difficult for any one study to paint a complete picture of the status of the field, as all studies have limitations. While the present study would likely overestimate the percentage of schools offering theatre and drama if treated as a representative sample, the DOE's Fast Response Survey System (FRSS) report may underestimate these figures. For example, schools participating in the present study tended to enroll students with relatively higher socioeconomic status than the national population of schools. Furthermore, the data suggest a slight, positive correlation between student SES and the likelihood of offering theatre programs. Given these factors, it is likely that the percentage of schools reporting theatre activity in this study is higher than the percentage of schools nationwide that offer such activity. At the same time, the DOE study surveyed only school principals, music teachers, and visual arts specialists; it did not survey theatre arts teachers. Data from the present study suggest this may have led the DOE study to underestimate the availability of theatre courses available nationwide. We found in the 2012 study that administrators sometimes reported that their schools did not offer any theatre courses, but nevertheless received completed surveys from teachers at those same schools who taught theatre courses and provided detailed information about those courses. This may suggest that some school administrators are unfamiliar with the arts education programs in place at their schools; this may have led some administrators to incorrectly indicate that their school lacked such activities when completing the DOE survey. Furthermore, a number of administrators indicated that they were "not sure" if their school offered theatre activities. The DOE study questionnaire did not appear to allow for administrators to select a "not sure" option; as such, some "unsure" administrators may have opted to indicate their school had no such activities.

10. Only 13.4% of participating administrators indicated that they provided official figures for this question; the remainder indicated that the figures were estimates/best guesses. Responses should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

11. It is difficult to compare extracurricular theatre activity between this study and the DOE study, which combined extracurricular theatre with other performance activities. That study asked administrators if their schools offered "arts instructional activities outside of regular school hours" that were guided by a curriculum; such as "school performances or presentations in the arts (e.g. concerts, plays, art shows)." Respondents were explicitly instructed not to include extracurricular activities "such as drama clubs." It is unclear how exactly administrators determined if a play production was "extracurricular" or "guided by a curriculum" given the inherently pedagogical nature of student/teacher interaction that takes place during play production.

12. See Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice* (New York, Basic Books, 2012).

13. 93% of teacher respondents to this study were white, 63% were women, 53% were in their 30s or 40s, and 72% were married or in domestic partnerships. In 1991, 97% of participating teachers were white, 58% were female, 66% were in their 30s or 40s, and 68% were married (the phrase "or in a domestic partnership" was not included in the response options in 1991). For comparative purposes, the U.S. DOE reports that in 2007-08 (the most recent school year for which data is available), 76% of public school teachers nationwide were female, 44% were under age 40, and 83% were white. [See Ashley Keigher, *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results from the 2008-09 Follow-Up Survey*. NCES 2010-353. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).]

14. The 1991 study reported that 97% of teachers indicated "white" as their race; however, that study classified all participants as members of a single race, whereas the present study permitted respondents to select two or more races. Of the teachers who selected multiple races in this year's study (and were therefore categorized as "two or more races") all but one respondent selected "white, non-Hispanic" as one of the races they identified as. Had these individuals only been able to select one race, and had they identified only as "white, non-Hispanic," the revised total percentage of white teachers in the current study would increase to 96%.

15. Mean=54, median=55, mode=60, n=792, after adjusting for outliers beyond three standard deviations from the mean.

16. Mean=35, median=40, mode=50, n=77, after adjusting for outliers beyond three standard deviations from the mean.

17. National average data from: National Education Association, *Rankings & Estimates: Rankings of the States 2010 and Estimates of School Statistics 2011* (Atlanta, National Education Association, 2010).

18. mean=\$2,739, median=\$2,100, mode=\$1,000, n=696

19. mean=\$2,060, median=\$1,800, mode=\$2,000, n=174

20. Because this article presents analysis of the data at the national level, it does not account for variables such as whether any given administrator worked in a state that offered and/or required certification in theatre. Additional analysis is forthcoming in future publications.

21. This figure should be interpreted with caution, as the percentage of teachers holding certification varied immensely between states and with regard to the licensure requirements. In some areas over 90% of teachers were licensed; in others the figure neared 0%.

22. School Theatre was defined as “grades 7-12 student-based productions at your own or other school.” mean=26, median=16, mode=4, n=890

23. Community Theatre was defined as “non-profit theatre company where actors and other staff are usually unpaid.” mean=4.8, median=2, mode=0, n=661

24. University Theatre was defined as “college/university productions not including productions when you were a student.” mean=1.4, median=0, mode=0, n=524

25. Professional Theatre was defined as “non-profit or commercial theatre work for which you were paid, and all actors, designers, and other staff were paid wages at or near union minimums.” mean=1.5, median=0, mode=0, n=521

26. Figures indicate the percentage of study participants holding each type of degree. Percent-

ages do not sum to 100%, as some participants held multiple undergraduate degrees.

27. Given the multitude of state, district, and school-level tests employed throughout the country, administrators were not asked to specify which tests were used to assess theatre teacher achievement.

28. Meaning courses specializing exclusively in each area, not including general courses such as “Drama I” or “Advanced Theatre.”

29. Excluding those schools which did not offer any courses in theatre/drama. n=982 for all percentages reported in this section.

30. n=868. Percentages do not sum to 100; teachers were able to select multiple (or no) responses for this question.

31. Participating teachers estimated the number of students involved in theatre classes during the 2011-12 academic year; it is not yet possible to compare these figures with the total enrollment for any school as the DOE has not yet released that data. To calculate a rough guess as to the percentage of students enrolled, the total number of students that teachers indicated were involved in theatre activities was divided by the total number of students enrolled at participating schools during the 2009-10 academic year (resulting in the 9% figure). This calculation relies on assumptions that are nearly certainly false (e.g. that enrollment remained constant for two years), and should be interpreted with significant caution, but a more precise estimate is not possible at this time.

32. In 1991, the study authors suggested that the students involved with theatre activities tended to be more affluent than their peers and were more likely to be white, of non-Hispanic backgrounds. However, the study relied exclusively on teacher and administrator estimates of enrollment and required participants to judge the racial and ethnic backgrounds of students. Given the unreliable nature of such data, teachers were not asked

to estimate their students' relative socioeconomic status or race as part of the 2012 study.

33. Many participants who indicated that texts were approved/required indicated that more than one entity played a role in the approval process; as such, figures do not sum to 100%.

34. Given that standards vary widely state-by-state, this national-level data should be interpreted with caution. Future analysis may explore teacher perceptions on a state-by-state basis when this is possible.

35. For the purposes of these questions, teachers were asked to provide data only about productions that were produced for a public audience, not including any productions that resulted from class exercises. The number of productions at any given school would likely be higher if class-based performance were included. Schools that did not offer theatre productions (and which would reduce the mean significantly by introducing 0 values) are not included in this score.

36. n=864. mode=2. mean=6.1

37. n=860. mode=2. mean=4.75

38. n varied slightly (between 855-860), as some teachers did not rate some factors; non-responses were treated as missing values and were excluded on a factor-by-factor basis.

39. N=730, median=\$5,000, mode=\$5,000, in unadjusted 2011-12 U.S. dollars.

40. N=765, median=\$1,500, mode=\$1,000, in unadjusted 2011-12 U.S. dollars.

41. It is possible that the relatively high percentage of parents never engaged in such activities is due to a lack of such programs at any given school; teachers were not asked if such clubs existed for their program.



# Research matters

Theatre education needs more than opinions

BY JAMES PALMARINI

WHEN THE EDUCATIONAL Theatre Association conducted its 1991 survey, it was a monumental accomplishment for both theatre education and the organization. It gave the field the first new look at its practitioners and students in twenty years, and gave EdTA a level of heightened credibility. The survey was also a leap for the then-fledgling *Teaching Theatre*; for the first time, the journal (volume three, number one) was printed in a two-color format. Fittingly, this issue also marks a technological breakthrough: the journal, like its sister publication *Dramatics*, is now available online in a digital format. *Teaching Theatre Digital* is a member benefit, available to all EdTA adult members. Because of the widespread interest in the 2012 survey, the digital edition of this issue will be open to anyone who logs on.

Twenty years (plus) is a long time to wait for an updated family portrait. But the *2012 Survey of*

*Theatre Education in United States High Schools*, a fresh snapshot of theatre teachers, their students, and school administrators, was worth the wait. It's a picture that both affirms what we suspected was true, and offers some new and sometimes surprising facts and figures about the state of our field. In other words, the study does what you expect reliable research to do: confirm or dispel what we think we know about a particular practice, belief, or issue and prompt new questions for future study.

The often quoted remark of visionary education theorist Sir Ken Robinson is worth mentioning here: "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion." In the waning months of 2012, when educators and schools in America are under increasing pressure to do more with less, there are lots of opinions on how to ensure that students' learning and opportunities don't suffer. Like every

other subject area at risk in schools today, theatre needs data that affirms its value as a curricular subject in the well-rounded education of every student.

The challenges and the issues are many for all of arts education. At this writing, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)—the law authorizing federally funded education programs that are administered by the states—has been stalled in Congress for five years (it expired in 2007). The arts are listed as a core subject area under ESEA, a crucial designation for advocates seeking funding, staffing, and curricular time. A focus on testing in math, science and English and a new commitment to the Common Core standards in math and English by most states has prompted districts to re-allocate resources, often at the expense of subject areas (such as the arts) that are not tested.

There are good things happening as well. Most notably, the 1994

Arts Education Standards are currently being revised by a broad coalition of arts professional organizations (including EdTA) and other arts-committed partners. The 2013 National Core Arts Standards, expected to be completed early next year, will be web-based and feature a strong assessment component that will clearly measure what students know and know how to do. These new standards will give arts advocates, teachers, and others new tools that can help validate the disciplines and the learning curve of students.

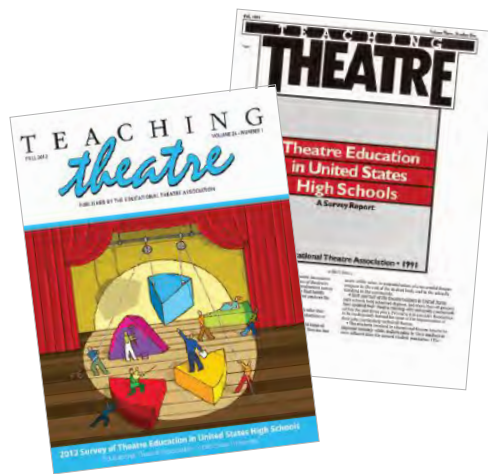
While theatre is an equal partner in the standards revision, it's *not* on a par with music and visual arts in terms of availability and student access, especially at the elementary-school level. The numbers in the 2012 survey confirm that theatre education is widely available for *some* high school students, but that availability is not necessarily reflective of all students everywhere, as lead researcher Matt Omasta notes.

Earlier this year, at the release of the Department of Education's own survey, the FRSS report *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools 1999-2000 and 2009-10*, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called the lack of access to arts education "an equity and civil rights issue." Indeed, his remark was particularly telling given the report's numbers on the percentage of elementary school children who have regular access to theatre (4 percent in 2009-10, compared to 20 percent in 1999-2000), and theatre opportunities for students in low- versus high-poverty schools (56 percent for low poverty schools, and 28 percent for high-poverty schools).

It is also unsettling that the Department of Education's study (focusing on eighth-grade educators) did not survey teachers of theatre (or dance), though they did ask some theatre-specific questions to administrators. It can be argued that, from a statistical perspective, it would have been a challenge to find *enough* middle school theatre educators to create a valid sample, and that it would not have been a sound financial choice to survey a subject area that is not widely available in our

country's fourteen thousand school districts. But when the federal government makes such a choice, it also can have the effect of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy: if they don't survey the subject area perhaps some decision makers will believe that theatre education is not important enough to budget time, staffing, and financial resources towards.

This 2012 survey is *not* the silver bullet that states, beyond all doubt, that every student should take at least one curricular theatre course before they graduate from high school. But it does offer data that will help researchers begin asking some specific questions—



the kind of inquiry that Omasta suggests in his narrative overview, and that Dawn Ellis poses in her analysis (page 31) of the survey data.

The 1991 EdTA survey was the standard in the field for twenty years, used by researchers, graduate students, teachers, and others to help them shape their studies and conclusions about the theatre education field. We think this survey will serve in the same capacity. And, again, we need the data if theatre education is going to be recognized as a legitimate curricular subject area, with a canon of measureable knowledge and skills that must be taught by well-trained professionals. Certainly there has been strong research that has validated theatre: *Champions for Change* (Arts Education Partnership, 1999), *Critical Links* (Arts Education Partnership, 2002), and James Catterall's *Doing Well and Doing Good by Doing Art: A 12-Year*

*Longitudinal Study* (I-Group Books, 2009). And the Washington, D.C.-based Arts Education Partnership's recently launched ArtsEdSearch website features a broad list of recognized research studies on PreK-12 theatre and other arts.

But for both practical and political reasons, theatre education must have more clarity about who is teaching what and why and who the students being taught are. And there is this: every teacher (and probably student) who has ever been involved in the creation of a theatrical performance—as a director, performer, or backstage technician—has a story they can tell about themselves or someone they know. That story has a lot of variations, but at the core of each tale is a theatre experience that was transformative; it made a difference to the person who experienced it. Maybe it just made them laugh or cry, but perhaps it prompted something more meaningful and resonant: a life changed or even saved.

Without those stories, our allies—parents, decision makers, and arts advocates—have only *half* the evidence they need to make the case for a theatre program. Between research like that contained in this survey and the stories we all know, theatre education's champions can help shape methodology, training, public policy, and more. Ultimately, it is students who stand to benefit the most. And that is why we do what we do.

*This study could not have been possible without the support and hard work of many individuals: Matt Omasta and his Utah State University graduate students; past and present EdTA Executive Directors Michael Peitz and Julie Woffington; the EdTA Board of Directors; and publications staff members Julie York Coppens, Don Corathers, Susan Doremus, and Harper Lee.*

*A special thanks to Joe Burnsworth, Dawn Ellis, Johnny Saldaña, and Jay Seller for their thoughtful analysis of the study data and participation in the survey presentation at the 2012 EdTA Conference.*



# Good news, bad news

What the survey results might say to the students we hope to reach

BY DAWN M. ELLIS

THIS 2012 LANDSCAPE survey of theatre education led by Matt Omasta and his colleagues captures the current state of public high school theatre education in America. Nearly a tenth of America's high schools with more than two hundred students weighed in on the state of theatre education in their schools. This large group of over twelve hundred schools has a similar distribution to that of magnet and charter schools in the country, and it represents the geographic regions fairly well. In the study, we hear the voices of school administrators as well as theatre educators. Their candid self-assessments speak of strengths, new challenges, and opportunities in the work of theatre education. We can't freely generalize all the findings of the Omasta study, particularly in areas of under- or overrepresentation in survey response rates, but the large size, scope, and distribution of the response group give us enough information to raise issues, point at priorities, and encounter trends that are worth exploring more deeply.

I had the privilege of looking over Omasta's shoulder as he completed the initial survey analysis, serving as a critical friend during the examination of this data. I approach these results as someone who studies arts education, school district systems, and professional development, but also as a youth advocate, educator, theatrical performer, and parent. My commentary here addresses the survey findings that I find particularly relevant for the theatre and arts education fields.

Since all this work is, at heart, about our students and their learning opportunities, I'd like to frame the results from *their* point of view. I'll open each new topic with questions I imagine I'd ask if I were a teenager in love with theatre, or at least curious about it, and eager to know how all these facts and figures translate into real-life experience for me and my classmates, on stage and off, during the school day and beyond.

## 'What's the story here?'

The Omasta study paints a picture of active theatre education in the majority of public high schools—that's good news. Budgets for the field trend up over the last forty years, using inflation-adjusted figures, remaining resilient even as school budgets fell during recessionary times. Many schools responding to the survey offer courses and extracurricular opportunities. Around one-fifth of the student body takes a theatre course before graduating, according to administrators, out of a total of 70 to 80 percent who take an arts course, depending on the region. Administrators value theatre in and out of the classroom. Theatre teachers as a workforce have a more seasoned tenure than twenty years ago and are more involved in national networks than in 1991 (Seidel, 1991) or 1970 (Peluso, 1970). Theatre in high school teaches a variety of social issues.

At the same time, theatre education has begun to lag in key areas that affect its relevance to the next generations.



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The facilities are old. The teaching workforce remains mostly white, female, and middle-aged while the student body continues to diversify. More work needs to be done to support the emerging artistic voices from classrooms and communities to better portray the broad spectrum of people who comprise the American perspective. As Ben Cameron of the Doris Duke Charitable Trust noted in a speech at the 2012 Educational Theatre Association Conference, there's been a revolution that democratizes both the mechanics and distribution of art-making through the Internet and digital media. Actors, storytellers, performers, designers, and directors play key roles in the artistic crafting of plays, film, video, and virtual worlds. Yet, the study shows teachers rating these same areas as the ones they are least prepared to teach, often acquiring what they can of the knowledge and skills needed through professional development and on-the-job learning. This may be a particular challenge for the great many who move into the subject area without a degreed background in theatre or theatre education. Regarding freedom of expression, when a conflict arises over content, rather than catalyzing a teachable moment for a larger community, we find censorship raising its head, and the show pays the price two-thirds of the time.

So, the field shows signs of health, but must be vigilant not to yield to stagnation. The creativity applied to show direction needs to be brought to bear on other theatre education areas, such as professional development, partnership building, educator collaboration, and peer support networks. The field can harness new networks and media to exponentially increase the opportunities for students to do innovative creative work. Even as the chosen handful of students perform the fall show, any number of other students could participate in theatrical projects that intersect with digital media or occur in nontraditional spaces through community partnerships. With the strength of the field, the presence of the programs, and the commitment and dedication of the faculty apparent in



the study, I believe that theatre education can steer the course to stay strong in tomorrow's educational landscape.

### 'What's there for me?'

The 2012 Omasta survey investigates what kind of theatre high schools offer, including curricular and extra-curricular learning opportunities.

*Three-quarters of responding high schools offer specialized theatre courses, usually more than two.* If my hypothetical student wants to know, "Can I take a theatre class?," most of the time the answer is "Yes!," according to the Omasta survey.<sup>1</sup> Around three-quarters

of responding schools report offering one or more specialized theatre education courses beyond something general, like 'Drama I.' In those 742 schools, 42 percent comprise an "exposure" group, offering one to two courses. An even bigger group—the 47 percent of schools in the "choices" group—list three to six courses. At the high end, 11 percent of the schools in this "diverse offerings" group provide a range of seven to twelve different courses. For advocates, it's heartening to see that there's a healthy middle range, with 31 percent of schools offering four to six different theatre classes. But, access matters. In one-quarter of

the schools participating in the survey, the students go without.

*Specialized theatre courses offered most likely cover technical theatre/design or acting.* According to the survey, tech/design (24.8 percent) and acting (23.7 percent) rate as the most commonly available courses. It's no surprise that acting is near the top, but the availability of technical theatre as number one may surprise some. After acting come musical theatre (12.1 percent) and film/video (10.3 percent). While it's only offered in around one-fifth of responding schools with theatre courses, musical theatre sits third in the ranks. Here, we



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see a potential link to the popularity of musicals in school productions (and their resurgence in popular culture). Likewise, spending on musicals has shot up since the 1991 and 1970 theatre education surveys. The study offers mixed signals about film/video, which is a close fourth in the rankings, perhaps reflecting the difficulty in tracking newer subjects that often fall under different departments from school to school. Directing (8 percent), literature/history (7.1 percent), and playwriting (6.3 percent) come in at low levels, with less than a tenth of schools providing theatre courses in these areas. So, a student wanting to study theatre in high school may find it easiest to study the actor's craft or technical theatre, arguably the most fundamental theatre skill sets. But, it's much harder to study the creator skills of theatre, such as directing and playwriting.

#### **'What kinds of shows can I do?'**

*High schools are most likely to produce full-length non-musicals or musicals.* The Omasta survey finds a sprinkling of extracurricular show genres, including both faculty- and student-directed productions. The big play comes in first: around 85 percent of schools responding stated they do at least one faculty-directed, full-length, non-musical production on average once a year. Next, around 77 percent of these schools report doing faculty-directed musicals. About one-half of producing schools report offering annual faculty-directed one-acts.

*One-acts and student-written plays provide top student creative leadership opportunities.* If my imaginary student wants a leadership role in theatre off the stage, he might ask, "Can I direct a show? Could I get my play produced?" According to the survey, some schools might answer, "Yes, you could be one of the lucky ones." Around a third of schools producing shows say they offer student-directed one-acts. Also, around a quarter doing shows report offering faculty-directed student-written plays (24.5 percent) and/or producing student-directed student-written plays (24.8 percent). So, in at least a third of

the schools that do shows, at least a few student directors can try their hand at a short piece, and some student writers can see their original works produced. In addition, a variety of schools note that their students direct other types of material, including scenes/cuttings (20.5 percent), full-length non-musicals (8.8 percent), plays for children (7 percent), and for the intrepid few, full-length musicals (3 percent). For advocates, it's a time to celebrate the opportunities provided for these students, as well as strategize ways to expand that access.

#### **'Will my school even offer theatre?'**

According to the Omasta study<sup>2</sup>, the answer is, "It depends." While three-quarters of responding schools report theatre coursework, one-quarter do not.

*Racially mixed schools most often report curricular and quite frequently report extracurricular theatre programs.* Based on the study's analyses at the time it was presented during the 2012 EdTA Conference, the schools most balanced between students of color and white students are most likely to report theatre course offerings. They are also among those most likely to report offering extracurricular productions. And yet, in general education, researchers find a trend of re-segregation across American communities and their schools, as noted by education researcher Gary Orfield (Orfield, 2009), co-director of University of California, Los Angeles's Civil Rights Project. In that light, this is a particularly fascinating finding. While we don't know from this study which students participate in the theatre programs, it points towards the need for further study. It makes me wonder what insights these racially integrated schools can provide the field, given multiple theatre learning opportunities in diverse education communities.

*Fewer racially homogeneous schools offer theatre courses.* Schools with homogenous, segregated populations are less likely to report offering theatre courses than more integrated schools.

In a somewhat surprising finding, the scatterplot of schools offering coursework declined dramatically in nearly all-white student bodies (around 96 percent white and higher). At the other end of the spectrum for highly segregated schools of color (around 93 percent students of color and higher), it also trended down, though not quite as consistently or as much. When controlling for student socioeconomic status (SES)—that’s when you eliminate such factors as a family’s education, income, and occupation—there’s still a statistically significant difference. Further analysis can investigate other potential relationships that could affect this racial-theatre course trend, such as geography, presence of an extracurricular program, and school size.

*Most suburban and city high schools offer theatre courses.* In the same data, over 85 percent of city and suburban schools offer theatre courses. This declines by 20 percent in the smaller geographic categories, as only around two-thirds of town and rural area high schools report theatre coursework.

Overall, across these findings, homogeneous schools and less densely populated areas miss out on curricular opportunities for students to learn theatre. But, coursework during the school day may be the best way to provide theatre education access to *all* students, since extracurricular productions may only be available to those who have the after-school time, their parents’ support, and the director’s favor, since casting may determine participation.

*Most schools offer after-school productions, less so in schools predominantly of color or with few financial resources.* Extracurricular theatre appears strong in this study. With a higher school participation rate than for theatre courses, most schools (89 percent) report having after-school theatre opportunities. We find a particularly high proportion of extracurricular participation among responding suburban schools (93.8 percent) and schools in the Northeast (95 percent). With so many involved, who’s left out? Across the study’s

schools, students are more likely to miss out on extracurricular theatre opportunities in schools serving primarily children of color. You’re a little less likely to have school productions if you go to school in an urban area.

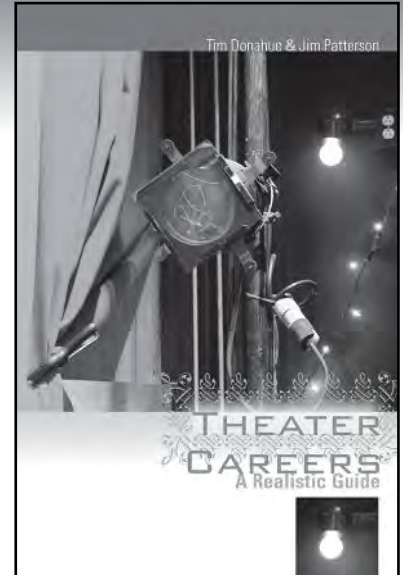
These findings highlight some very obvious gaps. The very white schools reporting low theatre coursework are also among the highest in extracurricular theatre activity. In other words, they’re not doing theatre in class, but they do produce plays. While theatre’s not completely accessible to everyone, it’s available to some. But in the segregated schools primarily of color, there is no corresponding increase in extracurricular availability. Courses aren’t widespread, and after-school access simply does not close the gap. Similarly, we find extracurricular theatre production in over 90 percent of responding schools in schools serving mostly lower-middle to upper income families. But, when the schools tip towards families with fewer financial resources, with more than 50 percent of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch, school extracurricular production drops 12 percent or more. Omasta finds a difference is still there and still statistically significant, even when you control for student race and ethnicity. That’s a money gap, where a community with higher income, education, and job status has more production opportunities in its schools. So far in the analysis, that’s correlation, not causation, but it points to access discrepancies.

### ‘Why should I do theatre?’

The survey asks theatre educators and administrators to rate various rationales for offering theatre in their high school. A student might ask, “What’s in it for me?”

“Soft skills” are the top rationale for theatre in the curriculum. Both administrators and teachers place the highest value on how theatre helps students learn to interact with people and ideas. This area includes teaching self-confidence and self-understanding, as well as developing interpersonal skills and creativity (all rating high threes on a four-point scale). The parent involve-

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ment Omasta data indicates parents of theatre students also support these skills with a high level of positive reinforcement and attendance. Education in these areas, dubbed “soft skills” by economics researchers Richard Murnane and Frank Levy (Murnane and Levy, 1996), represents the kind of learning promoted in the *21st Century Arts Skills Map* (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011) which touts the four C's of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity, among other career and life skills.

One way to look at this is that the study gathers over nine hundred schools with principals and theatre educators weighing in on the question: “Why offer theatre education?” With that in mind, this finding may help advocates looking to make the case for theatre education as they translate what's learned in theatre to a value system of people not currently involved in the arts. It also may point to areas ripe for continued research to further uncover what students learn by studying theatre.

*Theatre education for theatre's sake is also valued.* In the Omasta survey, both administrators and theatre educators rate various theatre-specific skills as significant, as well. The four quadrants of value are these: the soft skills in the top quadrant; “provide students with theatrical experiences” in the second quadrant; “develop an understanding or appreciation of theatre” and “identify and develop student talent in theatre” in the third; and “theatre's value for helping with social behavioral issues” in the fourth quadrant. This suggests these educators *do* value theatre education for theatre's sake, but that they see reasons beyond teaching young people to perform capably and become an intelligent audience.

**‘Who will teach me?’**

The Omasta survey provides a window into the background, strengths, and needs of theatre educators. One limitation is that it often focuses on the individual theatre educator responding to the survey rather than a theatre department. But, with schools employing, on

average, one full-time theatre faculty member, the glimpse may be quite telling of the field.

*Nearly half of responding high school theatre teachers majored in areas outside of theatre.* About one-half of high school theatre educators majored in theatre or theatre education in college. Common other degrees include English, at the undergraduate level; nearly 40 percent possess education degrees at the graduate level. Sixty-two percent of this highly educated group have earned master's degrees or higher. Combining the theatre and theatre education degrees, about a half of responding teachers specialized in theatre at the graduate level. So, for a sizable portion of high school theatre teachers, theatre was not the primary content focus of their higher education study. One could surmise that they may continue to hone the theatre specialty by doing it on the job, by getting involved in the community, or through professional development. Further mining of the Omasta data and separate research into theatre educators could inform this premise.

*Teachers report their best preparation in acting and directing, with needs in technical and interdisciplinary areas.* Theatre teachers rate acting and directing as the areas they feel best prepared to teach (on average, around 3.2 on a four-point scale). In the middle range, they highlight various technical theatre areas and front-of-house skills as places where they could benefit from additional training. At the low end, educators report a serious lack of training in interdisciplinary skills needed to teach film or musical theatre's dance and music components. While it's possible that some teachers are being overly self-critical, I think these candid reflections offer a road map for professional development and useful information for theatre teacher preparatory programs.

*Administrators hire the teacher first, the credentials and content second.* School administrators rate “strong interest/desire to teach theatre” as the most frequently selected (70.8 percent)

minimum requirement for theatre positions in their hiring decisions. Just below this, they rate “effective overall teaching abilities” as a second priority (68.7 percent). These are attributes one might hope to have in a motivated, interested, effective teacher. Dropping a notch, “experience teaching theatre” comes in third (61.4 percent). The ratings drop off around 15 to 30 percent before we begin to find any other areas, including certification, theatre degrees, and experience in theatre. Such hiring practices seem to highlight energy first, education second, and theatre content third. These priorities match the backgrounds of the theatre teachers responding to the Omasta survey. It’s worth discussion within the field about the strengths and weaknesses of this approach, weighing benefits of passion and interest in teaching against those of deep content knowledge or the credentials of certification.

*Theatre educators learn directing from school shows rather than in the community.* Educators also self-report that most of their theatre directing experience comes from K-12 theatre, and very little from university, community, or professional theatre experiences. Theatre teachers indicate they work, on average, over fifty hours a week to complete their job requirements, including directing or overseeing shows on nights and weekends. This doesn’t leave much time during the school year to become involved in external shows. Further research could probe how various categories of theatre educators spend their summers, when there might be more time to do community or professional theatre.

*Most theatre departments include one full-time faculty member and moderate part-time help.* Nearly all of the schools offering theatre (93.6 percent) also report at least one associated teacher. On average, these high schools employ one full-time theatre educator<sup>3</sup> with one to two educators spending a part-time amount working in the subject area. Across the group, full-time faculty report working 53.88 hours a week on all tasks related to the position, with

part-timers clocking on average 35.33 hours and volunteers, 41.83 hours.

Omasta also finds a steady increase in the percentage of responding teachers who report belonging to national theatre associations over the forty years of longitudinal data. The theatre teachers of the 2012 survey indicate they average almost fourteen years teaching experience, about twice as much tenure as the 1991 average. Just over half of the full-time paid theatre teachers

responding to the survey (57.7 percent) report possessing theatre teacher certification, which has been unevenly available in various states over the last couple of decades. This certified number drops to two-fifths of part-time teachers.

*The predominant lead teacher model suggests opportunities for vision and consistency.* Looking through the averages, I see the outlines of a story about



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a full-time theatre faculty member who serves as the rock of the high school theatre program. While most faculty, on average, have other primary responsibilities, the lead theatre educator may be the heart, soul, energy, and direction of the program: there during the day and the off hours. An educational gatekeeper, she, like her arts counterparts, may work with students throughout the grades and be a con-

sistent, guiding presence in the theatre students' educational experience. This glimpse reminds me of the key district arts education leaders I encountered while studying school districts across the U.S. with strong arts systems (President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities & Arts Education Partnership, 1999). Extremely involved, fierce advocates, and highly networked, they kept the art in arts education, navigat-

ing schools, administration, and community to support and strengthen programs. The Omasta data doesn't fill out the picture at this level of detail. But based on the averages of one and the range of expectations, courses, and responsibilities, it does point towards a position *sine qua non*, a teacher without whom there is no department or vision in the school.

On one hand, a single lead faculty department has strengths. With the breadth of her drama student familiarity, the lead teacher may informally gauge progress and development across the student body. She can informally allow that knowledge to infuse teaching and program development. She can say to the student, "I know you. I know how you did last year, so I know how to challenge you now." In another benefit, these seasoned lead teachers bring wisdom of more than a decade in the classroom, past the challenging "revolving door" period in the early years, as characterized by education researchers such as Richard Ingersoll (Ingersoll, 2001). The one to two part-time or partially involved faculty may help fill out the theatre curricular expertise, such as technical theatre or film, but it is the lead teacher whose vision and expertise truly shape the learning of the program's students.

*The sole full-time theatre educator norm leaves a department precarious.*

A single lead faculty program resting on one person's shoulders also puts the school's theatre program at risk. If she leaves, the history, continuity, networks, and stability may walk out the door with her, and the program must begin to build anew. Moreover, a single personality driving the program can create imbalance due to personality conflicts, leaving some students without an ally or foil, and making it difficult should the program and the administration disagree about a show with controversial social issues. It may also be harder for one full-time faculty member to fend off a script challenge. Multiple full-time theatre faculty members could provide departmental resilience and allow for more substantial curricular collaboration, while a

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departmental chair could provide that visionary leadership. More analysis may reveal to what extent background and content expertise broadens through a combination of the full-time and part-time theatre personnel.

*Students have diversified over the past twenty years, but theatre teachers remain mostly white women.* The Omasta survey finds the responding educators report themselves as overwhelmingly white (93 percent), generally female (63 percent), and middle aged. This represents a three percent more ethnically diverse faculty than in 1991, although this could be due to changes in reporting around race and ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> The corresponding student body has changed much more dramatically, with around 76 percent of students in the 1991 survey categorized as white, down to 61 percent of responding school students in the Omasta 2012 survey, while nearly 40 percent of the students hail from a variety of other ethnic backgrounds. The result is that the teachers look less and less like the students of their schools, on average. More analysis is needed to offer comparisons with demographic disconnects in other discipline areas and to understand to what extent the high school theatrical canon includes voices and perspectives from a range of ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Teacher recruitment and diversification of the canon jump out as longer-term ways to address this demographic disconnect. Certainly, pre-service teacher programs have the opportunity to both attract and adapt, serving as a bridge for more students of color to intersect with the profession. There are also ways the teachers and schools of today can help connect and be relevant to their changing school populations, including:

- Pre-service recruitment of hybrid theatre educators involved in emerging areas of learning.
- Cultivation of diverse, emerging theatre artist voices in the class content and on stage.
- Guest artists exposing students to new perspectives or providing alternate role models.

### 'Will this be on the test?'

Various questions in the 2012 landscape theatre survey address assessment, both of students and teachers.

*Few theatre teachers studied theatre assessment in college.* Interestingly, while the surveyed theatre educators report that they assess student work in courses and on productions more than 90 percent of the time, less than one-third of teachers report studying how to do theatre education assessment in college. Since the average teacher has had around fourteen years of teaching experience, it may in part relate to the curriculum taught when this age demographic came through school. Further analysis could probe whether this trend relates to years in the profession, potentially with newer programs in theatre education offering such assessment coursework.

*Teachers report using multiple perspectives to assess student work.* The

responding educators also report employing a wide array of assessment techniques in their current evaluation practices. As part of a constellation of assessment practices, teachers list using student self-assessment in over half of the schools to assess productions and more than two-thirds of schools to assess coursework. This speaks to the majority of the responding schools giving students an active invitation to reflect on their work. Teachers also list peer-to-peer assessment as a way they measure student learning, with over 60 percent reporting peer assessment to assess productions and around 40 percent using peer assessment in coursework evaluation. Depending on how it's taught, this could be a positive finding about the role of formative assessment in the theatre education classroom. Both self-assessment and peer assessment use student reflection on the work to guide the collective understanding of progress. Inclusion of young people



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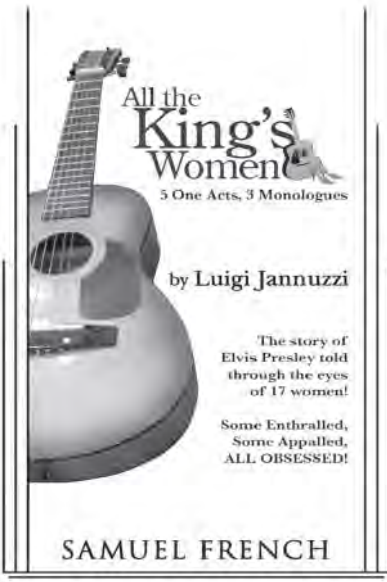
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in the assessment process can empower their critical eye. Moreover, when students have the exposure, language, and experience to bring context to the evaluation, it can provide multiple, valuable perspectives to the student generating the work.

### 'Will we do plays that matter?'

A section of the Omasta survey explores teacher and administrator perspectives on offerings, priorities, and challenges when shows and scripts deal with social issues. These tough projects could be ones that inspire students most.

*When pressed on a show choice, two-thirds of theatre educators dropped or changed the show.* Almost one-fifth of the Omasta survey educators report experiencing an administrative or community challenge to a show selection. Of these, only one-third produced the show as written. Just over a third dropped the show al-

together. Not quite a third report producing it with changes, a particularly problematic development given intellectual property restraints. With *The Laramie Project* at the top of the most-challenged-scripts list, two of the top three named in the Omasta survey address some aspect of sexual orientation. It seems it's not so easy to take a nationally renowned script and bring it to a high school stage in a community where a majority may not share the same perspectives as the playwright and his or her community.

Theatre has tremendous potential to help actors and audiences walk in the shoes of characters with different life choices, struggles, and assumptions. As such, the 2012 landscape survey asks questions about "social issues" addressed by theatre education, both in courses and productions. Bullying, multiculturalism, drug/alcohol abuse, and violence fill out the top of the list. Gender orientation appears in the middle of the frequency ratings.

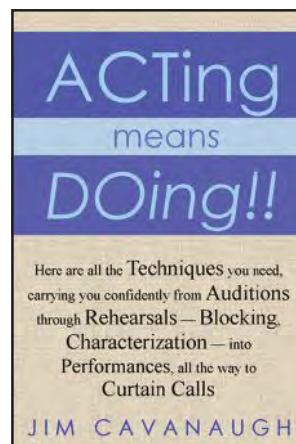
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## 'What about film and video—aren't they theatre, too?'

Selected questions in the Omasta survey probe the intersection of theatre and drama with film and video.

*While the explosion of tools and audiences through the Internet democratizes theatre in film, video, and media, theatre education has yet to broadly assert its connections to these areas.*

In the findings and analysis so far, we find glimmers of the digital revolution. In teaching and/or production, around a third of teachers report using video-based websites or social media. About a sixth include smart phones/flip cameras or SmartBoards. But more than half wrangle with access restrictions in their own use of the Internet, with over 80 percent working around access restrictions for their students. So, there are real, systemic barriers to the full adoption of these tools. Also, the questions on film are not designed to capture deep insights into the student filming, posting, commenting, and networking characterized by the digital revolution. Still, we see very few echoes of the digital revolution in the structures, teachers, and programs that

characterize theatre education today. That may be changing right now, as new national arts education standards include media arts as a discrete discipline and other arts areas grapple with how to imbed digital and media arts and professional development into their own artistic processes.

In the Omasta study, fifty-eight percent of surveyed administrators say their schools are offering film or video courses. That's a majority, so it's really beginning to show up in what schools teach. However, theatre teachers say they are least of all prepared to teach film and video in their self-assessment of their own training. Given that schools report that only seven percent of theatre departments house film and video, they are far from the only ones involved with film and video. Instead, it appears to have a wide range of "owners," everything from visual arts/fine arts (16 percent), to business/career/technology (21 percent), to English (20 percent) and communications/journalism (6 percent). It's everywhere. And the students are way ahead in this.

Theatre should not sit back and yield its connection to this world. Just

ask those students who do go on to work in the film and video field using their theatre backgrounds. Actors, designers, directors, playwrights turned screenwriters, storytellers, performance artists, and managers use their craft to tell moving image stories. Their works of art, filtered through screens, tablets, and phones, are now encountered by many more people than attend their live counterparts in theatres. Those with grounding in live performance can feel tension in these developments. But the theatre education of today (and tomorrow) can embrace the possibilities of the new media even as it celebrates the brilliant, active moment of a live theatrical experience. Performance links us to ancient civilizations and has persisted, and the live experience can continue to offer us connection in a world relying on increasingly virtual interaction. For students to navigate both invites intersections and creative innovations not yet apparent in the educational mainstream.

## 'Can you make school theatre stronger for everyone?'

The 2012 Omasta landscape study of theatre education covers much more

## More questions

I'VE ALREADY POSED some questions students might ask when looking at these survey results. Now it's your turn. How can we take this important work of inquiry even further? What else do we need to know before tackling the challenges the Omasta survey implies? Here are a few queries to begin:

- How can we strengthen theatre's interdisciplinary connections to literature, music, dance, and other subjects? How might we restructure classes or school itself to make students' cross-curricular learning more seamless?
- How can we broaden our teaching beyond acting and technical theatre, the most frequently offered theatre courses, and provide

more opportunities to our student writers, directors, filmmakers, and other creative types? What might theatre education look like to optimize student learning in both traditional and emerging/experimental theatre areas?

- When a school has either extra-curricular or curricular theatre, but not both, how could one be used to leverage the development of the other? What might high school production approaches learn from today's professional theatre, in such areas as audience development, community partnerships, social media, and technology?
- Look at who's involved in theatre in your school. Who's there, and who's missing? What would an education system look like that gave every

child full access to the arts, and the opportunity to explore deeply and develop high proficiency in at least one arts discipline? Does your community support that vision, and if not, why?

- In a perfect world, what would the high school drama department faculty look like? Do we really expect one person to know and teach it all at the high school level?
- What natural allies do theatre educators have within a school district? How can they better negotiate the educational system and community influences affecting them?
- What other fields have grappled with censorship issues? What can we learn from them?

—D.M.E.

## Marching orders

THE OMASTA SURVEY reveals areas in which we are doing well, and points to places where we need to do better. Not all the solutions are obvious, and none will happen overnight. But we can make a start. Here are some of the most critical action steps suggested by the survey, in my view:

- Expand breadth in theatre courses through advocacy and collaboration. Celebrate the prevalence of extracurricular theatre. Acknowledge fiscal and access barriers.

Double down on efforts to expand theatre education access within the school day and in least-served communities.

- Probe the integrated schools with strong in- and out-of-school theatre. Look for expansion opportunities using partnerships, peer networks, and advocacy efforts to assist communities with limited or no access.

- When it comes to the whys of theatre education, move beyond the old dichotomy of intrinsic (theatre for theatre's sake) versus extrinsic (side-effect) benefits. Make sure advocates understand and articulate all that students gain from a strong theatre education.

- Deepen and expand professional development opportunities for theatre teachers to broaden their

content capacity, which helps the field. Consider on-the-job coaching from niche content experts, sustained theatre-specific learning communities linked to resources, or supported time to shadow in a professional theatre setting. Strategic hiring, intradepartmental collaboration, and external partnerships can also help cover existing gap areas such as film/video, technical theatre, and inter-disciplinary performing.

- Examine those programs where assessment works—i.e., is authentic, transparent, student-centered, and embraced by everyone with a stake in student progress—and find ways to apply those best practices more widely and consistently across the field.

- Develop the capacity of theatre educators to choose scripts that educate and provoke thought and conversation in the larger communities—and support their ability to stage challenging works without losing the teachable moment to censorship or community outrage

- Address the demographic disconnect through more aggressive teacher recruitment and diversification of the canon. Bring more diverse and emerging theatre artist voices to our classrooms, stages, and communities.

—D.M.E.

than I've addressed here. The wide array of data should provide food for thought and spur articles and subsequent, finer-grained research over the next couple of years. This survey makes us wonder about equity between geographic regions: some have strong extracurricular programs, others may have strong curricular ones. Is that good enough? The data raise questions about areas of disagreement between teachers and administrators. Are theatre teachers primarily play directors, or should their focus be on student learning? Other questions come to mind as

well—for instance, what professional development can help in educational systems where administrators admit they don't know what courses they offer, how they assess theatre teachers, what the arts graduation requirements are, or even what teaching artists do? Or, what do we think of the fact so many programs derive funding from ticket sales? Is that an asset that could be better leveraged? Is it an access liability?

In total, the Omasta research and its charts are a gold mine for the theatre education community. It tells of health,

wealth, and wonder. It inspires us with a story of hard-working theatre educators, sticking with it, taking risks, and continuing to learn and develop themselves over time. In part, perhaps all the groundwork around advocacy and mobilization and research are paying off. At the same time, it points to gaps in access, demographics, and content knowledge. It reveals a time warp that should not be ignored. And, it reminds us that America is large and varied. Theatre education can help us navigate the nexus of those varied perspectives. But, to do so well and consistently will take more help, attention, and support; more proactive visionary work on behalf of the field. Since this is what theatre educators do in their classrooms and on their stages, I have no doubt the field can creatively rise to the challenges.

*Dawn M. Ellis is president and founder of DME and Associates, a consultancy organization that seeks to improve public good work through research, creativity, and technical assistance. Ellis has more than twenty years of experience working in national and state public policy, education, community development, humanities, arts and culture, human services, and inclusion. She served as the staff researcher for the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH) during the late 1990s with the Clinton Administration.*

## Endnotes

1. The most recent U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics Fast Response Survey System (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) on arts education in the U.S. surveyed a nationally representative sample from the 2008-2009 academic year. It reports 45 percent of responding schools offer "arts instruction" in theatre. The FRSS and the Omasta study are not directly comparable, as the Omasta study focused on regular public high schools with 200 students or more; the FRSS study focused on "secondary schools" which includes both junior high schools and small schools. The surveys word their questions on instruction differently.

2. Omasta refers to the Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

3. Omasta 2012 administrator survey question: "How many (if any) theatre faculty/staff does your school employ? Full-Time faculty/staff dedi-

cated primarily to theatre/drama." Range:0-14; mean=1.03, median=1, mode=1.

4. The census categories for race have changed in this time, so that people can mark multiple racial/ethnic categories.

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# Theatre Finds a Way

Questions and some answers about the 2012 survey

BY JOHNNY SALDAÑA

IN THIS SHORT PIECE, I won't attempt a thorough analysis of Matt Omasta's outstanding data collection and report of theatre education-related statistics. Instead, I'll focus on those patterns and themes that stand out in his report, guided by ethnographers Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater's three-question rubric for fieldwork: What intrigues me? What surprises me? What disturbs me?

## The data

Survey research standards have changed with the times, and this study's response and representation rate—approximately 10 percent—is nowadays considered excellent. According to several social scientists, a minimum of two hundred survey responses is needed before researchers can even begin to generalize their findings; this particular survey generated more than a thousand responses, a solid base for statistical interpretation.

While I appreciate this survey's attention to detail, I would not put much stock in response rates by state: state officials themselves could give teachers a better handle on what's happening regarding arts education. But aggregating these response rates by four major national regions is an excellent way to pool the data and to spot trends, for there's much to be said about regional influence and affect on school theatre programs. Geographic proximity—within districts, states, even parts of the country—naturally leads to certain commonalities.

Moreover, the impulse to compare data state-to-state might yield some interesting demographic information but not much utility when it comes to theatre curriculum, production, programming, and educational policy. As the saying goes, "All politics is local," and that's certainly true of educational theatrical politics. Every teacher, every community, every district funding decision is unique, and only a careful study of all the local variables can tell you how the art might fare (for now).

## The programs

The respondents' answers to the question, "Does your school offer courses in theatre/drama for credit during the regular school day?" didn't surprise me, but I was struck by a certain proportional model. We used to have the 20/80 rule, as in the adage that 20 percent of the people give you 80 percent of the problems. It seems to me that breakdowns of 25/75, or even one-third to two-thirds, are becoming more common, in all kinds of contexts, for all kinds of reasons; you can see the phenomenon in census numbers showing, for instance, the shrinking gap between what we used to think of as "majority" and "minority" populations. It's simply a pattern I noticed in these survey's results, not a precise or consistent finding—but it does suggest more complexity out there and greater variability in the ways things are done these days.

Looking at how theatre teachers perceive their duties, I see a strong focus on *people* and *processes*. It's no surprise yet very comforting to note how theatre teachers indeed make students their first priority. It's what we do. At the same time, we're looking out for our programs, making sure that infrastructure will stand year after year, as the load inevitably increases.

Like the dinosaurs in the film *Jurassic Park* ("Life finds a way..."), theatre somehow manages to avoid extinction. Look, for instance, at how lower percentages of theatre classes during the school day, as reported in some areas of the United States and more specifically in the Town and Rural categories, tend to be compensated by higher percentages of extracurricular play production activity. Theatre finds a way in these sites to survive. (Charter schools seem to maintain an even percentage, incidentally, while magnets soar in both types of offerings.)

I'm a bit suspicious, though, of the seemingly robust responses to the question, "What percentage of the students who attend your school take at least one course in theatre/drama/the arts (e.g. music, theatre, visual art, film, or dance) during their enrollment?" I wonder if some variable interpretations might be at play here, but if these data are accurate and suggest high participation in theatre courses, this is very good news for our art form in the schools.

### The teachers

This survey reinforces the truism that a good teacher is a good teacher is a good teacher. When it comes to the administrators' minimum qualifications for hiring theatre teachers, content knowledge takes second place to general educational experience. I assume theatre teachers would value their own qualifications somewhat differently, perhaps putting artistry first—but this finding supports my own previous research on non-specialist drama educators at the elementary level: good teachers find a way to make good theatre happen.

The faculty demographics reflect a field that I call "alarmingly white"—not as any slight against white people, but because it is alarming how few people of

color are either pursuing theatre education as a career or landing jobs. A look back at the 1991 *Teaching Theatre* report describes virtually the same demographic profiles more than twenty years ago. Our student ethnic distributions, however, have changed greatly. College and university programs need to mobilize and recruit more future theatre teachers of color. School districts also need to consider how a more diverse workforce of artist-educators can be employed. And white theatre teachers must do more to acquaint themselves with the canons of dramatic literature from playwrights of color—otherwise, as University of North Texas teacher educator Lorenzo Garcia wisely observed, students of color may think, "If theatre's not about me, then maybe it's not for me."

The average number of years of teaching experience (13.5 years mean and 11 years median) speaks very well to the retention of theatre faculty in school programs, especially when you consider conventional wisdom estimates that approximately half of the teaching force leaves after five years in the profession. Teacher burnout is a particular hazard among theatre educators, given the long hours they put into their classes and play productions. So, what keeps theatre teachers in their jobs? Why do they stay? I assert (but have no documented evidence to back me up on this) that theatre teacher longevity has a lot to do with the nature of the art form we teach each day that feeds us in intrinsic ways. The pure, raw humanity of what we venture into keeps us alive and thriving. The opportunities for artistic expression through play production feed our souls, and the communities we establish with our students and peers make us feel like an important part of the tribe. When people ask me why I teach theatre, I'll often say, "Because I can't imagine myself doing anything else and being happy." I believe other theatre teachers share this view, and that it gets them through some bad days.

Given how much we share as theatre educators, I am disappointed by the low percentages of state and national organization membership. But generally, the theatre teaching force appears

solidly well educated and committed to professional development. In fact, that is one of the most striking positive trends I've noticed in my thirty-plus years as a teacher educator: the field, thanks primarily to EdTA, has grown tremendously in terms of professional development, networking, and conferencing. Theatre teachers have enhanced their own artistic and educational professionalism. They have found a way.

It was interesting for me to learn that a fair number of theatre teachers backed into the job, as it were—just as we have students who enter theatre for a variety of reasons, at various stages of their lives. It's somewhat discomforting that nearly half the teachers hold no state certification in theatre, but I acknowledge some U.S. states do not offer such a credential, and some school administrators may not require theatre certification for teaching the subject area.

Typically, only about half the courses a theatre teacher teaches are in her art form, which reinforces my earlier suspicion about the accuracy of self-reporting the high percentage of students in a school who take a theatre course. (Who's teaching all those courses?) Nevertheless, I am impressed with the variety of course offerings related to theatre *and* film. Technical theatre is comparable to acting in importance, and there is a significant rise in musical theatre and film courses. From my own university vantage point, looking down the road at the kinds of opportunities awaiting future graduates, I would advise a stronger emphasis at the high school level on film appreciation and, as resources permit, even more on film and media production.

### The shows

As in past surveys, the production budget figures suggest that school theatre programs must sustain themselves financially through ticket sales and other earned income—a model, by the way, that not many professional theatre companies these days can follow. The average stipends paid to teachers for play production, though not exorbitant, aren't bad, either.

The production program repertoire does not seem to have changed for fac-

ulty directors since the 1991 *Teaching Theatre* report: the standard school season includes one full-length play, one musical, a one-act, a play for young audiences, and a general assortment of scenes throughout the academic year. If this is an accurate average, it's a manageable yet still rigorous schedule. But perhaps as no surprise, theatre teachers devote a large number of hours weekly to their jobs. Maybe it's part of the culture of theatre that we cannot escape—or it's a call to work smarter, not harder, perhaps handing off more high-level responsibilities to senior students.

When it comes to social issues in play productions, I am not surprised to see the statistical range of topics, or to find *The Laramie Project* among those productions most often raising red flags of controversy in some school communities. But I hadn't realized how many high school theatre programs were at least attempting to stage two very sophisticated and challenging contemporary musicals, *Urinetown* and *Rent*,

and often succeeding despite interference. One of my own survey projects found that former high school students wished they'd had more opportunities during those years to tackle plays dealing with important social issues. The range of topics in this survey, from bullying to sexual identity, attests to theatre teachers' credo that the student comes first. The social issues addressed in the plays we produce excites me: we've grown up as an art form at the secondary-school level. Teachers have become more brave and socially conscious (as have at least a few administrators, school boards, and parent organizations). It's interesting to note that in theatre classroom work, every issue is still addressed, but at a higher percentage. Perhaps the safety, intimacy, and relative privacy of the theatre classroom permit that kind of exploration.

### The big picture

So, theatre finds a way to survive—and since 1991, we've not just survived, but evolved in some significant ways. Four major themes stand out to me from this study:

First: theatre teachers need to embrace the new technology. We are no longer just about live theatre; we are also now about filmmaking and media in all its forms.

Second: I think theatre teachers could school the general education field when it comes to sustainability, adaptability, and longevity. We know something they don't. We have something they don't. We should examine our unique ways of doing things, extract the best principles and practices for our non-theatre colleagues, and offer them at pre- and in-service professional development classes and workshops.

Third: look at the elephants in the room, particularly when it comes to play production culture. *Must* the show go on? Is bigger really better? What else are we doing or taking for granted as "givens" in our practice that might be doing ourselves and the students we serve more harm than good? What new ways, what untried methods might keep us thriving and growing as an art form? I personally recommend more

applied theatre, devised theatre, and theatre for social change.

And fourth: it's ironic that more than 95 percent of theatre teachers identify themselves as the primary assessors of their coursework and productions, yet only 28 percent of them feel they were adequately prepared in their teacher education to take on that role. Clearly, theatre teacher education programs need to address this gap, and more in-service and professional development programs are needed fill it. Though a few national forums have focused on arts and theatre assessment, and we have some intriguing local models that work well, we are still wrestling with assessment dilemmas for our art form. Perhaps it's time to commission the experts from the wider education field to offer guidance, and to assemble the best practitioners from the EdTA membership to provide the rest of us with specific and innovative assessment ideas.

This 2012 survey of theatre education was a massive undertaking. EdTA, Omasta, and the rest of the team deserve our congratulations for capturing the state of our art in the schools. Theatre's presence is noticeable and influential for thousands of young people every year, and those lessons will never be forgotten (see "Theatre Teachers Matter," about a study I co-authored with Laura A. McCammon, in the Winter 2012 issue of *Teaching Theatre*).

Despite the sometimes gloomy climate around us, when tight economic times, education-bashing, and a technological revolution rattle the security of what we do on stage, we're still here, aren't we? Every time some media-saturated drone describes theatre as a dying art form, I smile and think to myself: theatre finds a way.

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