



A BRAVE SPACE FOR COMMUNITY:  
BOLSTERING K-12 THEATRE EDUCATION  
FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

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Major paper submitted to the faculty of Goucher College in partial  
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## ABSTRACT

**Title of Thesis:** A BRAVE SPACE FOR COMMUNITY:  
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FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

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Changes in and enhanced access to K-12 theatre education can create greater long-term diversity, equity, and inclusion in American theatre. Recent data on theatre participation demonstrates audience participants to be primarily white, older, and highly educated. This group of participants is aging and decreasing their attendance. This paper explores how twentieth-century suburban growth, racial discrimination, and widening income inequality led to a system of Opportunity Hoarding. This opportunity for early arts-access, created predominantly for white Americans, aided their lifelong participation.

As America shifts to a majority-minority in 2045, classrooms will begin to become more racially and ethnically diverse beginning around 2020. The second part of this paper examines how practices of the twentieth century created a diversity gap in the classroom, failing to reflect today's students and communities. This gap hinders students from fully embracing lifelong participation in theatre. Findings of this paper demonstrate how professional theatres and community arts and cultural organizations, through a social justice lens for community engagement, can aid schools in eliminating bias within K-12

theatre education to build future participants. To combat widening income inequality, these arts and cultural leaders can work with students and communities to meet their needs in gaining access to live theatre.

Finally, with public schools focused on standardized tests and the charge to fill science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers by 2020, access to K-12 theatre education must be redefined to restore its place among core areas of study. The creation of a brave space for community building in schools for K-12 theatre education can aid in increasing test scores, developing social-emotional skills, re-engage civil discourse, and move STEM to STEAM. These changes can result in enhanced access to K-12 theatre education. This early exposure to theatre will build a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive American theatre.

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## FOREWORD

Growing up in a small rural community, access to formal K-12 theatre education was limited. Exposure was often through local community theatre. Reflecting back on those experiences, there was something transformational about the process of creating a production with community members of different ages and walks of life. A student actor was exposed to members of the community in new roles: a local receptionist with a passion for dance choreographed; a local merchant supplied the paint and built the set; a band teacher gathered students and adults to form a pit band; a local graphic artist designed the posters and program; and an English teacher with an underused theatre minor directed. All of this created an ecosystem where an introverted student, like myself, felt closer to my community, and later, felt closer to the audience who came out to see their fellow community members in a show.

Those community theatre productions inspired me to be a K-12 theatre education teacher. Limited by the recession of 2007, my career path would wander into a new direction, but for a decade, that teaching certification would be used to direct an extracurricular theatre program for a local high school. There, the goal was to bridge the values of a community theatre to a school program. Not always perfect, our heart was in creating an inclusive program where students were mentored by theatre professionals, community business owners, and cultural leaders. In the end, through the vehicle of theatre, a space was created for creative collaboration, dialogue, and empathy.

This paper is dedicated to my parents, who instilled in me a respect and hunger for all things creative, teachers who nourished that hunger, and my wife, who emboldens me to share my creativity with others. Finally, my daughter, may your creativity be shaped in a society that is more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

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Finally, I thank my wife, Katie, for keeping our family in order during this journey. Her true compass has led us through turbulent waters, and I look forward to us enjoying calmer seas ahead.

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## Introduction

“Nationally, predominantly white school districts...[receive] \$23 billion more than their nonwhite peers, despite serving a similar number of children” (“23 Billion”). The ramification of a \$23 billion difference is staggering. It demonstrates how there is inequality in educational funding and suggests generations of students in predominantly white schools had access to better-funded education. Theatre educators and practitioners need to understand the impact this funding difference has on arts education, in particular, access to K-12 theatre education and its classroom content. Arts administrators should question if this unbalanced funding led to current audience participation that is primarily white, highly educated, and older (“2017 Survey”). What impact does a \$23 billion disadvantage have on society with widening income disparity (Reich) and a changing American demographic? (Frey). A reversal in the funding disparity and recognition of the changing demographics suggests changes in and enhanced access to K-12 theatre arts can contribute to greater long-term diversity, equity, and inclusion in American theatre.

### Current Inequity of Access to K-12 Theatre Education

The current state of American public school access to K-12 theatre education is a challenge to assess, as much of the focus on educational data gathering has been placed on core areas like math, science, and English language arts (“National Core” 3). The last in-depth analysis to highlight the state of theatre in public schools was from the National

Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) report, *Arts Education in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools 1999-2000 and 2009-10*. The report highlights how theatre education respondent data was lacking due to “the small percentage of schools with [theatre] specialist on staff” (46), and demonstrates a large gap between theatre instruction compared to music and art (“National Core” 3). The report found 4% of public elementary schools offered theatre instruction in contrast to 94% offering music, and 83% visual arts (5). For secondary education, it found 45% of schools offered theatre instruction, in contrast to 91% music, and 89% visual arts (9). The most telling statistic found that students in a public school who qualified for free or reduced fee lunch had little to no access to K-12 theatre instruction (47, 49). Though older, the relevancy of this report “revealed extreme inequities in students’ access to arts education, indicating that arts education is not universally available, ...often limited to music and art, and is inconsistent across grade levels” (“National Core” 3).

This inequity in access to arts education hinders lifelong participation. In *Arts Education in America: What the declines mean for arts participation*, Nick Rabkin and E. C. Hedberg of the University of Chicago demonstrated the correlation of how early access to arts education leads to lifelong participation (9). Their data shows how participants “who took any lessons in a single art form during childhood...were twice as likely to attend...[an] arts event as those who had no arts education” (29). Creating and performing at a young age also showed participants were twice as likely to attend arts events (29).

Rabkin and Hedberg also determined how a decline in access to arts education began around the latter half of the twentieth century (14-15, 43), a period of rapid

widening of income inequality in America (Reich). This decline was not equal among all demographic groups (15, 47). “[T]he declines of...arts education [between 1982-2008] among white children is relatively insignificant, while the declines for African American and Hispanic children are quite substantial—49 percent for African American and 40 percent for Hispanic children” (15,47).

This unequal access to arts education will lead to a lack of diversity and inclusion in American theatre and theatre audience participation. An argument for enhanced access to K-12 theatre education is the purpose of this paper.

### Parameters and Limitations

Though findings of this paper could be used for other areas of arts education, in particular, access to music and visual arts, this paper is devoted exclusively to K-12 theatre education. Through this lens theatre participation among American theatre and public schools will be explored and K-12 theatre education will be examined.

### Defined Terms

Diversity, equity, and inclusion can be variously defined, undertaken, and achieved. For K-12 theatre education, borrowing from the La Jolla Playhouse, a theatre program should bring a “sense of community and public discussion... spark challenging conversations and help community-members explore different perspectives than their own. Diversity is critical for this process: through our differences, we are able to explore our communities” (“La Jolla”). Diversity, for K-12 theatre education, is fundamental to

the acknowledgement of the ways in which people, and groups are “different and the same” (“Facing Change” 8). All viewpoints can contribute to the conversation (8).

“It’s been over 60 years since the US Supreme Court declared education ‘a right which must be made available to all on equal terms’” (“Educational Equity” 1). With the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, equity in education has progressed to mean more than access to a school, but proper “resources and opportunities” to prepare students for life (1). Requiring equity in education recognizes that certain communities and individuals need additional resources to achieve success (1-2). For K-12 theatre education, equity builds upon diversity to acknowledge and create pathways for different means learners acquire, absorb, and retain knowledge—giving all students access to equality.

For the American Alliance of Museums, “[i]nclusion refers to the intentional, ongoing effort to ensure that diverse individuals fully participate in all aspects of ...work, including decision-making processes. It also refers to the ways that diverse participants are valued as respected members of ...[a] community” (“Facing Change” 8). K-12 theatre education should appreciate all individuals “regardless of race, socioeconomic class, color, national origin, religion, diverse perspectives, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, neurological or physical ability” (“Mission, Vision”). Through this full inclusion, K-12 theatre education can become a reflection of those in the classroom and community to build a cultural understanding and aid in greater democracy.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 continues to promote the ideals of the 1964 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, “designed to address problems of educational equity, particularly for high poverty students” (“National Core” 3). This act,

in various forms, has evolved over the decades to also become an accountability mechanism for funding. The 2015 version does address access to the arts as a benefit of a “well rounded” education (“Guide”). Ideal access could be defined as a fulltime certified theatre teacher within a school. The reality is that arts access, including K-12 theatre education, differs from state to state and school to school as more schools invest in areas measured by high-stakes testing, leaving few resources for the arts (“National Core” 3). With a focus on other core areas, access to K-12 theatre education, as will be explored, is one of integration and co-curricular production activity that supports current in-class learning and can be applied to out-of-classroom community-development.

## Chapter I

### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY HOARDING AND LINK TO THEATRE PARTICIPATION

#### Today's Theatre Audience

In the fall of 2018, the National Endowment for the Arts released *U.S. Trends in Arts Attendance and Literary Reading: 2002-2017*. This early report highlighted findings from “The 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA)” (“2017 Survey”). The SPPA demonstrates growth taking place in arts participation, yet for theatre participation this data does not show statistically significant growth. Between 2002 and 2017, musical play participation by the respondents decreased from 17.1% to 16.5%. Non-musical plays during this time saw a decrease in participation by the respondents from 12.3% to 9.4%. Both areas did see an increase in musical and nonmusical participation growth from the 2012 SPPA, but it was not found to be statistically significant (“2017 Survey”).

With this demonstrated decrease in audience participation, a closer look is needed to understand who was attending theatre in 2017. Of the respondents for musical plays, the largest racial group was white, with a participation rate of 20.2%, or double that of any other group, and the age group with the highest participation rate was age 65-74 (“2017 Survey”). Of the respondents for musical plays, those holding graduate or professional degrees had the highest participation rate at 34%. Racial minorities

demonstrated a slight increase in musical play participation over the 2012 study, but not enough of an increase to be statistically significant (“2017 Survey”).

Of the respondents for non-musical plays the largest racial group was white, with a participation rate of 11.6% (“2017 Survey”). The highest participation rate among age groups was 11.5% for those 65-74, and for education, 21.6% with graduate or professional degrees reported attendance. Again, racial minorities demonstrated a slight increase in participation from 2012. However, the only racial classification to show a statistically significant increase was white (“2017 Survey”).

The SPPA data seems to suggest theatre attendees are more likely to be white, highly educated, and older. The data further shows how the dominant group to participate in theatre has aged from 2012 to 2017 (“2017 Survey”) which likely led to the decline in overall participation. Though minority groups and younger audiences have seen a slight increase in theatre participation, substantial growth in participation among these groups will be needed to reverse these declines in overall participation. The 2017 SPPA theatre data shows the common factor among those who participate to be educational attainment.

*Arts Education in America: What the declines mean for arts participation*, has shown a link between arts education at a young age and adult participation at benchmark arts activities like theatre (Rabkin and Hedberg 9, 26). Other studies also demonstrate how parents exposed to higher education are inclined to make sure their children have access to arts education and activities (“When Going” 33). Yet all across America, there is great inequity in public schools with diverse communities often receiving fewer resources (Milner 13). To understand why today’s theatre audience is primarily white,

older, and educated, is to grasp how income inequality in the twentieth century, created a system of two societies and two schools.

### Twentieth-Century Creation of Two Societies and Two Schools

In 1848, Horace Mann declared education to be “the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance wheel of social machinery.” Mann, one of the original founders of the common school, envisioned an environment where students of all socioeconomic backgrounds would be guided by principles to collaborate and construct a developing young nation (“Deborah Meier”). Education would be void of religion and political influence. The purpose was not only to create an equal opportunity for all students to “discern truth from fiction” (Meier and Knoester 16) but to cultivate personal development and civic involvement to aid in democracy and economy (Mathis). Though Mann was writing at a time in America’s history where women did not have the right to vote, the south was economically sustained by slavery, and the industrial north was dominated by poor working conditions, the vision he set forth created the foundation of the American public education system (“Deborah Meier”).

For a majority of Americans, Mann’s declaration would be realized after World War II (Duncan and Murnane). The industrial engine created by the war, combined with the G.I. Bill, began to spark a large public investment in education (Vidani). America had evolved from an agricultural society to an industrial one. For economist Robert Reich, America was living in The Virtuous Cycle. Reich defines this cycle as government investing in more public infrastructure, like public schools, that led to the creation of an educated workforce. Between the 1940s and the late 1970s, higher education attainment

grew from 5.9% to 24% of the population (Reich). During this time, those at the bottom of the income ladder grew their income by 116% due to companies growing and paying more for the increasingly educated labor (Vidani). These wages allowed workers to buy more and contribute more tax revenue through higher marginal tax rates that would top out by the 1950s at 91% (Vidani). This tax revenue for the government allowed America to invest in its people. This cycle—through prosperity—was creating more for all (Reich).

Property tax revenue today, as in the post-World War II years, is the major generator for school development. More homeowners meant more tax revenue to invest in education, enrichment activities, and public services (Harper). As the middle-class grew, new members of the group sought to buy homes, leaving behind the urban environment for neighborhoods of suburbia (Reich). Taking resources with them, the American suburbs would become predominantly white and middle-class with little interaction with minorities (Rury and Saatcioglu 312). This mass exodus from urban environments would create an atmosphere where a majority of white students lived in suburbia. “By 1980, more than two out of three students lived in such communities...the suburbs had become the mainstream experience, even if these communities were hardly identical” (Rury and Saatcioglu 312).

The Virtuous Cycle did impact minority workers; however, income inequality (Reich) made homeownership a struggle. Urban schools, made up of predominantly minority or impoverished students, would begin to decay. Even with the passing of the 1968 Fair Housing Act, many minorities, often black, faced housing discrimination (Harper). Often, these families were directed by realtors to communities with fewer

resources and lower property values (Harper). This, coupled with high rent and renter turnover, created a depleted tax base to fund urban public education, leaving students with fewer resources and inexperienced teachers (Harper). In contrast, the established suburban middle-class, through higher housing prices, established education as a commodity to give their students a better start in life (Reeves 107).

From the 1970s forward, The Virtuous Cycle would become The Vicious Cycle (Reich). According to economist Robert Reich, during this time period, income inequality began to widen with inflation. Globalization and technological advances allowed companies to decrease the rate of growth in wages which led to wage stagnation, resulting in lower consumer spending. As a consequence, fewer homes were purchased and equity was pulled out by struggling families (Reich). Households relied on double incomes to combat inflation (Reich), leading to less time and money for children's learning activities. Also, at this time the top marginal tax rate fell to 35% (Vidani), allowing the top income earners to retain more of their gains. The government, with less tax revenue, cut investments in public services (Reich). Suburban schools, with an established tax base from strong homeownership, had an advantage over their urban counterparts in weathering this economic climate (Rury and Saatcioglu 309). The Vicious Cycle created an environment of educational inequality (Reeves 11; Reich; Rury and Saatcioglu 309).

Education as the great equalizer was no more. The income gap created in the twentieth century would be ingrained in the American education system. It permitted one class of Americans to hoard educational opportunity at the expense of others (Reeves 11).

## Educational Opportunity Hoarding

Inequality in education can be created by what sociologist Charles Tilly refers to as Opportunity Hoarding. For Tilly, inequality is created when one group manipulates and hoards for themselves all resources, services, and production (Reeves 100). The same group will then apply any gains from the productions to enforce a boundary between themselves and the outside world (Rury and Saatcioglu 309).

In *Dream Hoarders: How the American Upper Middle Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem, and What to Do about It*, author Richard Reeves takes Tilly's argument further to define how the American class structure has created educational opportunity hoarding. For Reeves, the dominant group will gather and protect an exclusive opportunity that aids an individual or group for lifelong success. The group will then distribute this opportunity in an "anti-competitive way amongst themselves" (101). According to Reeves, a classic example of this structure is how private schools limit students by charging high tuition rates—but may offer legacy scholarships to children of alumni. This financial aid perpetuates the cyclical nature of educational opportunity within the dominant group (107).

Applying Reeves' framework of educational opportunity hoarding to the mid-twentieth-century American public school system, it is clearly evident that middle- to upper-middle-class, predominantly white citizens benefited from a structure that permitted the hoarding and retention of benefits for themselves. The Virtuous Cycle that enabled a great majority of Americans to become homeowners also fueled some who wished to keep America segregated.

*Brown v. Board of Education*, the US Supreme Court ruling that broke down the practices of “separate but equal” for schooling (Scialabba), as a result, created a structure of “Spatial inequality, a system in which the dominant group creates unequal services and resources through zoning and tax allocation. Often, this spatial inequality barred lower income earners who could not afford certain taxes and kept the tax money earned to invest in better schools and community resources” (Rury and Saatcioglu 309). Spatial inequality allowed local government to create a boundary between its community and others. This process would be furthered by practices of “redlining” [which] excluded lower income earners—predominantly minorities—of access to better schools and resources” (Rury and Saatcioglu 309). Redlining, a tactic of increasing property prices to certain groups or neglecting to aid or lend money to different neighborhoods, began to stratify new, segregated communities (309). As the American Civil Rights Movement began to combat discrimination through legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, spatial inequality practices in parts of the country would fade; however, stratified communities were perpetuated through the transfer of wealth. The opportunity for better education through suburban housing and taxes was hoarded and passed on to the next generation (Pfeffer 1035).

From the time of The Vicious Cycle of the 1970s (Reich) through the early twenty-first century, the American suburbs secured better resources for education, and access to enrichment activities, like the arts, for their residents (Rury and Saatcioglu 330). This educational investment, combined with a stable family environment set the dominant group in place with economic and social mobility advantages (315). For Richard Reeves, this dominant group created “a ‘glass floor’ under [their children]... to

prevent them from falling down the chutes. Inequality and immobility thus became self-reinforcing” (10). These parents with inherited wealth could hoard opportunities to pass on, while others fell victim to an inequitable system (Milner 29). Wealthier parents could establish a system in which their children could succeed regardless of academic ability (Howard). They could afford access to tutors, cultural experiences, arts, test preparation, and off-campus study (Milner 29). Once educated, they could go out into the world to embrace a structured network built upon anti-competition. This structure includes scholarships, internships (Reeves 118), and professional networks created to further aid and hoard opportunity (Howard).

The twentieth century created a climate of educational opportunity hoarding for predominately white suburban neighborhoods (Rury and Saatcioglu 333). Through illegal and legal practices of discrimination, communities were able to create boundaries that bestowed those with higher property values with power. Inherited wealth continued this transfer of power with a system of resources tailored for predominantly white generations of students to succeed. Not only has opportunity hoarding impacted inequality in education, but it has also created a diversity gap in the classroom. This gap must be addressed in order to have a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive classroom that meets the needs of all students.

### Opportunity Hoarding Leads to Classroom Diversity Gap

The impact the twentieth century had on education created teachers and a classroom climate unprepared for diversity (Milner 5). The educational opportunity hoarding of the twentieth century prepared teachers and classrooms for a predominantly

singular perspective, that of white middle- to upper-middle-class families (Scialabba). In addition, income inequality has also challenged family involvement with their children's education (Duncan and Murnane). Combined, these factors created a diversity gap in the classroom.

Historically, the diversity gap began with the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education*. "As powerful as the ruling...was for breaking segregation, it also created an environment of discrimination against teachers of color when schools were combined" (Scialabba). As black teachers were pushed out of the classroom by white parents, white teachers were brought in to replace them (Scialabba). A 2014 study from the Center for American Progress found, "Over the past three years [2011-2014], the demographic divide between teachers and students of color has increased by 3 percentage points, and today, students of color make up almost half of the public-school population. But teachers of color are just 18 percent of the teaching profession" (Boser 2).

This deficit in teachers of color has created an atmosphere where white teachers, from predominantly middle-class backgrounds, lack the necessary social-cultural understanding between their students, the students' communities, and the connection to the classroom environment (Scialabba). This lack of appreciation and understanding of different cultures in the classroom has created a diversity gap in teachers and current educational approaches. Public K-12 education needs to first address the broader issue of the diversity gap in order to begin building a theatre classroom that embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion.

*Start Where You Are, But Don't Stay There*, H. Richard Milner IV, describes five key elements that have led to the creation of a diversity gap in the classroom: first, the

practice of colorblindness; second, teacher deficiency to address cultural conflict; third, myth of meritocracy; fourth, breaking of biases of student ability; and fifth, acceptance and understanding of a student's cultural ecosystem (14).

Colorblindness as an ideology was originally instituted as a mechanism to break down attitudes and racial treatment of past generations (Wingfield). The goal was to see people rather than color. In doing so, students of color lose their identity and do not see themselves in the current curriculum and teaching approaches (Milner 16). Teachers fail to see how race intersects with both learning and subject matter (14). Together, this fosters environments of missing empathy between students, teachers, and educational opportunity (17). An environment of colorblindness also creates a climate for "people to ignore manifestation of persistent discrimination" (Wingfield).

Some sociologists would argue that seeing color creates an opportunity for people to see divisions. It can create an environment of white nativism. This in return, can fuel macroaggressions, or large-scale hate towards others unlike themselves. This argument does not hold up to studies that have determined how "whites came to understand themselves as members of a racial group which enjoyed unearned privileges and benefits, ...[that] compelled them to forge a different sense of white identity built on antiracism rather than simply supporting the status quo" (Wingfield).

Culture conflict in the classroom exists when teachers fail or are unable to fully understand how their upbringing and learning process will differ from the perspective and environment of their students. These "...gap[s] can persist because educators' cultural ways of knowing, which are often grounded in Eurocentric cultural notions and ideologies, take precedence over those of their students" (Milner 14). Teachers will create

curriculum, lessons, and topics reflective of their learning styles and skillsets. Often, this leaves a diverse classroom to conform to the teacher's style, leaving little room for relevance to the students (17). Not only does culture conflict impact a student's learning, but it plays a direct role in how a student handles discipline and criticism. The social and cultural norms a student is exposed to can be reflected in their communication and learning styles in the classroom when confronting others (Lucas).

In a blog for The New Teacher Project (TNTP), teacher Veeko Lucas expresses how schools often place emphasis on cultural celebration rather than "...practical trainings (sic)... [to] support teachers to become more culturally literate with the particular student populations they serve...this level of training isn't just for white teachers...but wherever there are lines of difference" (Lucas). For Lucas, as teachers confront culture conflict, barriers can be broken to build stronger relationships. This environment allows for healthier and honest discussions around complex issues (Lucas).

Meritocracy in the classroom is a myth, but one ingrained into the American spirit (Milner 15). As the twentieth-century income inequality has shown, not all students have access to fair and equitable resources. Teachers and schools must begin to acknowledge how elements outside of a student's control can have an impact on their learning and advancement (15). With this realization, teachers and communities can begin to shape students' learning experiences to navigate inequality and overcome obstacles, placed upon them by their environment, to aid in their future success (32).

Often tied to meritocracy are preconceived notions of student ability. These notions can be tied to test scores, bias, or fear of setting a student up for failure (Milner 35). "At times, student assets are not appropriately used as anchors to make instructional

connections in the classroom, and educators continue teaching in ways that avoid or overlook the brilliance and talents that students possess” (35). By not engaging the strengths students bring to the classroom, teachers fail to make the content relevant, and in return, students do not find the value. This creates a failed classroom for fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Examining Milner’s key concepts towards the creation of a diversity gap through colorblindness, culture conflict, meritocracy, and preconceived student ability, it is the final one that ties them all together: the understanding of a student’s cultural ecosystem. For Milner, the breaking of context-neutral mindset, allows teachers to see the social context, or “...understand the differences, complexities, and nuances inherited in what it means to teach in urban, suburban, and rural environments” (41). Knowing a community through this context allows a teacher to build partnerships across a community to promote and enhance the education process, as well as grapple with possible limitations (44).

By fully embracing the social context, teachers can begin to see the gaps in their students’ cultural ecosystem, in particular, issues of race, diversity, and multicultural education in a predominantly white environment. As Milner argues, it is imperative for white students to understand these skills as well. This will prepare all students for a globalized economy, a vastly changing American demographic, and especially, students who will become future teachers (39-40). By appreciating the social context of the community, greater connections and relevancy can be made to change learning approaches that are tailored to the school, the students, and the community at large. This

can happen in the classroom, in particular, through K-12 theatre education. By doing so, students and teachers can create a space for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion.

### Educational Opportunity Hoarding and Link to Theatre Participation

The widening of income inequality in the twentieth century has impacted education through the creation of two societies and two schools. It has allowed predominantly white communities to develop systems to hoard opportunities, including education. This hoarding has built an environment in which wealth and knowledge are passed down from generation to generation, including participation in the arts (Rabkin and Hedberg 41, 46; “When Going” 33). Coming from a middle- to upper-middle-class community, today’s theatre audience had teachers, curriculum, and approaches tailored to their Eurocentric culture (Brewer).

As America’s demographics shift to a majority-minority in 2045 (Frey), it is imperative for schools to begin to address the diversity gap in their classrooms and activities. K-12 theatre or after school theatre programs often maintain bias, educational pedagogy, and productions from the twentieth century (Brewer; Murphy). These practices are harmful in creating diversity, equity, and inclusion for students who could become future participants. Studies have determined that minorities with little access to arts education often lead lives with little to no adult participation in the arts (Rabkin and Hedberg 9, 47-48).

Breaking the bonds of the twentieth-century bias will not only aid in building theatre participation, but it could also engage all students and audiences in new cultural

awareness. Through this process, the American principles of education can be restored and once again be “the balance wheel of social machinery” (“Deborah Meier”).

## Chapter II

### CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE IN K-12 THEATRE EDUCATION

#### American Demographic Shift and the Bonds of Twentieth-Century Bias

By 2045, the United States will begin to see a shift from a white-dominant society to a majority-minority one. This shift is led in part by an aging white population, coupled with a growing racial minority (Frey). In an article from the Brookings Institute, William H. Frey uses census projections to write about the demographic shift currently taking place. In the article, he describes how the aging, predominantly white society will become reliant upon the investment and consumer growth of a growing minority population. “This suggests the necessity for continued investments in the nation’s diverse youth and young adults as the population continues to grow” (Frey).

Using census data, Frey is able to project how the United States will look by 2045 with 49.7% of the population as white, 24.6 % Hispanic, 13.1% black, 7.9% Asian, and 3.8% multiracial (Frey). This shift has already begun to take shape in our schools. By 2020, these census projections show how the “under 18 post-millennial-population-minorities will outnumber whites” (Frey). This shift, coupled with a shortage of teachers of color (Boser 2), creates an atmosphere in which educators need to examine the content and approaches of their classrooms to reach all students.

As shown, the diversity gap created from income inequality, fueled by the outcome of opportunity hoarding led to an environment lacking diversity, equity, and

inclusion in many public schools. K-12 theatre education, like any classroom, is burdened with Eurocentric approaches and practices put in place during the twentieth century. These Eurocentric practices are ingrained into all teachers through methods learned in higher education (Brewer). It has created a classroom lacking multicultural approaches, furthering bias and stereotypes, with little room for the inclusion of gender fluidity, and varied sexual orientations (Brewer). In addition, the impacts of income inequality, have greatly challenged student's ability to have access to live theatre.

The limitations placed upon today's schools, teachers, and administrators can be daunting. Challenges may vary among states and districts depending on resources ("23 Billion"). Public schools cannot fully embrace the values of a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive K-12 theatre classroom without the commitment of their professional theatres, community arts, and cultural organizations—nonprofits whose futures depend on the involvement of young students to become future participants in their offerings. These organizations have the staff, community connections, and outside perspective to close the diversity gap taking place in K-12 theatre education while developing ways to make access to professional theatre attainable for all.

### Community Engagement to Address Diversity Gap

In March 2018, the Milwaukee Repertory Theater hosted the Intersections Summit, the first meeting of its kind to bring regional-theatre-community-engagement professionals together (Considine). During the summit, more than seventy-five different professional theatres came together to define community engagement best practices for building audiences, programs, and educational initiatives (Kaufman). The overarching

lesson of the summit came from the keynote speaker and founder of artEquity, Carmen Morgan, who expressed a new view of community engagement to be:

...more like community *justice*...to make sure that the work you are doing around community engagement is not transactional—that you’re not inviting people into your spaces trying to connect them to the things that you are doing, but instead centering them and their lives, their needs, and their issues at the core. (qtd. in Considine)

Through a social justice lens, professional theatres can engage and develop their communities along with their art (Considine). This will aid schools in defining access to K-12 theatre through an informed and outside perspective of professional arts and cultural leaders. In this process, students, parents, teachers, and school administrators can begin to form connections with each other and their local arts and community assets. This form of community engagement can build theatre participation, and in doing so, aid local public schools in the elimination of the diversity and educational gaps that exist. This engagement can create greater student access to live theatre in light of a system of income inequality.

### Conditions for Change

To understand the diversity gap, inequity, and lack of inclusion in K-12 theatre education, is to first understand implicit bias in the classroom. At its core, implicit bias is when the subconscious, “[judges] people by groups or general stereotypes” (“Implicit Bias”) by filtering the way the brain organizes and categorizes information. These groups lead to stereotypes around areas of gender, language, and socioeconomic background

(Arora). These judgments in the subconscious can contradict what a person outwardly expresses or believes. Over time, these stereotypes and judgments created through various forms of inequity and racist policies were ingrained in how different cultures view each other (Milner 22). Twentieth-century theatre and teaching approaches are ripe with implicit bias (Murphy; Brewer).

Annually, the Educational Theatre Association (ETA) releases a survey of the most produced high school musicals, full-length plays, and short plays. For 2018, over four thousand high schools responded (“Play Survey”). The most produced musicals in order were:

1. *Beauty and the Beast* (Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, Tim Rice, Linda Woolverton)
2. *The Addams Family* (Andrew Lippa, Marshall Brickman, Rick Elice)
3. *The Little Mermaid* (Alan Menken, Howard Ashman, Glenn Slater, Doug Wright)
4. *Into the Woods* (Stephen Sondheim, James Lapine)
5. *Cinderella* (Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Douglas Carter Beane)
6. *Shrek* (David Lindsay-Abaire, Jeanine Tesori)
7. *Seussical* (Stephen Flaherty, Lynn Ahrens)
8. *Little Shop of Horrors* (Alan Menken, Howard Ashman)
9. *The Wizard of Oz* (various, Tams-Witmark)
10. *Annie* (Charles Strouse, Martin Charnin, Thomas Meehan) (“Play Survey”)

The most produced full-length plays in order were:

1. *Almost, Maine* (John Cariani)
2. *Midsummer Night's Dream* (William Shakespeare)
3. *Peter and the Starcatcher* (Wayne Barker, Rick Elice)
4. *Alice in Wonderland* (various)
5. *Our Town* (Thornton Wilder)
6. *12 Angry Jurors* (Reginald Rose)
7. *The Crucible* (Arthur Miller)
8. *Arsenic and Old Lace* (Joseph Kesselring)
9. *A Christmas Carol* (various)
10. *Radium Girls* (D.W. Gregor) ("Play Survey")

The productions on these lists bring to light missing multicultural perspectives, reinforced stereotypes of diverse characters, a lack of material for diverse actors, and missing inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community. These conditions need to change in K-12 theatre education for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion. Professional theatres, community arts, and cultural organizations can aid schools in breaking these bonds of twentieth-century bias.

#### Lack of Multiculturalism

The first condition in need of change is for K-12 theatre education to begin to embrace a multicultural approach as opposed to the dominant Eurocentric practices of the past. As the most commonly produced productions show, even in 2018, American public schools still tend to produce shows lacking multicultural perspectives. Staunch supporters

of these shows would argue that they lend themselves to a category of universality, meaning they present themes, characters, and outcomes reflective of the human condition. For others, these shows continue to reinforce a past when a white-dominant theatre audience was willing to pay for shows that reflected their beliefs and ideals (Grady 14-15).

From the perspectives of many educational scholars, the past decades have created various approaches for the implementation and outcomes of multiculturalism in the classroom (Sarraj et al). In its broad scope, “multiculturalism involves attitudes, beliefs, values, and policies that affirm inclusivity of cultural and other life pattern differences, to the point of producing multicultural individuals” (Sarraj et al). It is through a multicultural lens that students can begin to understand each other, the world around them, and grow to appreciate those different from themselves.

In *Drama and Diversity*, Sharon Grady applies a pluralistic approach to theatre education and multiculturalism. She argues for students and teachers to not only grow and appreciate each other through a cultural lens but, more importantly, to examine how their own identity is shaped by how society sees them (xiv). It is crucial for students and teachers to understand the social context they bring to the classroom to aid in eliminating the diversity gap. For Grady, theatre offers an opportunity to work with students to understand the operation of bias, “...how privilege works, and how stereotypes wound” (xiv). Through this process, students can learn to approach theatre from a point of view of their own and others in the class rather than that of the so-called universal or traditional white, middle-class student (xv). This pluralistic viewpoint, ideally, creates a world of

“coexistence... [instilling] beliefs in equal opportunity and respect for human dignity” (Sarraj et al).

Many of the Eurocentric approaches found in theatre education often spring from the training teachers and practitioners receive through their education. In an article for *American Theatre*, Nicole Brewer of Howard University highlights many of the ways in which higher-education theatre students are not exposed to different cultural and historical contexts in theatre; rather, the trend is towards “European and Euro-American theatre history” (Brewer). She argues how the focus is on the teaching of traditional white acting methods, studies of plays by predominantly white-male playwrights, and the teaching of a “General American” dialect (Brewer). What Brewer points out for higher education is also seen in K-12 theatre education.

Considering the most commonly produced productions for high schools, European influence is greatly present; *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Into the Woods*, *Cinderella*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Christmas Carol* all come from a long tradition of European folk tales and stories. It is worth noting that the most commonly produced productions are predominantly written by male, white writers. The presentation of these works creates a gap in which students of color do not see themselves, their stories, or hear their voice on stage. This gap does not prepare students of color for a theatre job market which becomes a motivating factor for them to leave theatre (Brewer).

Brewer, working with a Cross-Cultural Collaborative Committee, has created conscientious training using the fundamental aspects of theatre training with a Cross-Cultural Collaborative Curriculum. Through this approach, college students use theatre

techniques from other countries and explore those countries' "values, rituals, and practices" (Brewer). This broadens a college student's ability to learn theatre through multicultural approaches. Coupled with study abroad and guest teaching artists from different countries, students can begin to form authentic performances and break traditional western approaches (Brewer). This process develops students and theatre professionals who are "culturally aware... [and] who know the difference between cultural appreciation and appropriation" (Brewer). This kind of approach at the higher education level can directly impact teacher training for a multicultural K-12 theatre classroom.

Professional theatres can also aid K-12 schools in closing the diversity gap through the creation and touring of more multicultural, educational productions and curriculum. Teatro Milagro in Portland, Oregon, is known for its national touring bilingual educational programs and plays (Ignacio). Being one of the earliest Hispanic theatres, Milagro has a foundation of creating and developing bilingual artists and bilingual theatre education programs over the past thirty years (Ignacio). Education programs for Milagro are described as "cradle to career approach[es] in arts education ("Arts Education at Milagro"). Its UNIDAD Curriculum with science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM), confronts cultural issues around "socioeconomic disparities, racism, environment, and health" ("Arts Education at Milagro"). Through its workshops and plays, Milagro has proven that bilingual theatre can enthuse English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students while building cultural awareness and empathy skills of non-Spanish speaking students (Ignacio).

When applied, forms of multiculturalism, like Teatro Milagro, have been proven to have a positive impact on a classroom in a variety of ways for all ages. Some of the outcomes include students developing curiosity and empathy while breaking the bonds of twentieth-century preconceptions they may have had of others (Sarraj et al).

### Stereotypes and Diversity

The second condition to explore within the most commonly produced productions is the reinforcement of stereotypes and lack of characters of color. Many of these shows reflect a tradition of white European protagonists and storylines. In *Drama and Diversity*, Sharon Grady writes how white privilege, since America's founding, has impacted mainstream culture and crept in among "customs, beliefs, and attitudes" (26-27). This dominance has created a culture that values the "nuclear family...European vision of beauty...individual achievement" among "universal European values" (27). Many of these plays and musicals reinforce a vision of white characters in heteronormative relationships, families, and situations—leaving little room for actors of color.

Diverse characters are often portrayed in a stereotypical way or from a historical perspective that continues to replicate and form bias among students and audiences (Grady 31). Reviewing the list of most commonly produced high school productions, one of the most popular, *The Addams Family*, recreates the traditional TV family with a new spin, giving the family a Latinx culture. Even on Broadway, white actor Nathan Lane starred as Gomez Addams, with a thick stereotypical accent. Students are able to witness these biases. Much of the canon of scripts, as found in books students read in class, is often written by white males (Gilmore 20). In *Saying What We Don't Mean*,

Barry Gilmore writes about the implicit and explicit bias often found in young adult literature. With a focus group made up of diverse middle school students, Gilmore demonstrated how students were able to point out the cultural and social context authors lacked when creating diverse characters. To the students, it felt as though diverse characters were originally written as white, and turned into a minority character in the final version (Gilmore 18-19).

Characters of color written from a historical perspective are a challenge, even for today's Broadway. In the recent adaption of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, playwright Aaron Sorkin discussed the challenges he faced as a white male bringing to life the two main African American characters from the novel. "In this story about racial tension, Jim Crow, injustice in the south, the only two African American characters have nothing to say on the matter... We understand now in 2018 that using African American characters as atmosphere in a story is offensive. Also, in this story, it's a wasted opportunity" (qtd. in Farmer). Sorkin further describes how past productions of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, including the film, reinforce the idea of the "white savior" and the perception that only white men can solve racial problems (Farmer). The lack of hero protagonists of color is evident in the most commonly produced productions, and in the overall canon of materials available for K-12 theatre education.

In 1991, The Kennedy Center realized the canon of theatre for young audiences (TYA) was lacking, and not evolving with society. To confront this gap, they created the New Visions New Voices program, "a week-long biennial workshop/festival for playwrights and theaters to stimulate and support the creation of new plays and musicals for young audiences and families" ("Kennedy Center Education"). Professional theatres

and universities are able to submit a director and playwright submission of a full script or idea for a production to be considered for the biennial festival (“Fact Sheet”). Once selected, the Kennedy Center casts diverse Equity actors “from...[the] Washington, DC area ...experience[d] and gifted in new play development” (“Fact Sheet”). These actors, through workshops, develop the play and idea with the director and playwright. After being workshopped with Kennedy Center resources, it is presented to a community of “theatre professionals...[and] educators” (“Kennedy Center Education”). To date, the program has created a new canon of “111...plays, musicals, and operas from 97 playwrights and 38 composers, working with 61 US and 12 international theater companies” (“Kennedy Center Education”). More importantly, the program has helped launch a higher educational niche in playwrighting programs for TYA (“Susan Zeder”).

Utilizing a program such as New Visions New Voices is one of the strongest ways to fill the diversity gap in K-12 theatre education and build a canon of new, diverse, and inclusive productions for all students. It can break the bonds of twentieth-century stereotypes and bring to life voices for actors of color written and directed by diverse artists. This program also bolsters the need for professional theatres to annually produce and develop new works to aid in creating this new canon.

### Gender and Sexual Orientation

The third condition in need of change is the recognition of gender stereotypes, gender fluidity, and sexual orientation. The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus (LGBTQ+) perspective from all cultures is often lacking in K-12 theatre education. Many of the most commonly produced productions create an explicit bias by not

addressing LGBTQ+ stories, relationships, and viewpoints. This lack of recognition furthers the misconception that these identities and relationships are wrong (Hartman 80) and, more importantly, leaves these students without a voice on stage.

Traditionally, gender has been seen as binary male and female, according to the biological organs found at birth. Within this traditional binary lens of gender are “assumptions about abilities and expectations that are socially constructed” (Grady 83), and over time have created gender roles, meaning ideas of “femininity and masculinity” (83). These roles have created gender stereotypes, as found in many of the most commonly produced productions. Women are often beautiful and young, homemakers or princesses, as found in *Beauty and The Beast*, *Cinderella*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. All of these women are dominated by males. Men are often older and handsome, brave nobleman or tycoons, who solve the problems. They reinforce the ideal of masculinity as found in *The Crucible*, *12 Angry Jurors*, and *Annie*. These gender roles and socially constructed definitions of male and female, often highlighted in twentieth-century theatre, create an environment in which sexism is reinforced and understood to be normal.

As these most commonly produced productions normalize sexism, they also sustain a culture that promotes and highlights stories of cisgender, meaning characters with biological organs that align with their psychological views of their gender (Cade-White). This reinforcement of the body and mind of two defined genders leaves little room for questioning and transgender people—inhibiting inclusion in K-12 theatre education. Like the traditional definition of sexism, in which one gender holds superiority

over another, cissexism is when transgendered individuals are seen as less authentic or substandard to cisgender individuals (Johnson 138).

Promotion of cisgender in school theatre also finds its way among the portrayal of sexual orientation. Considering the list of most commonly produced productions, a majority of them promote patterns of relationships based upon attraction between a binary defined man and woman in a twentieth-century view of a heterosexual relationship. Belle and the Beast from *Beauty and The Beast*, Seymour and Audrey from *Little Shop of Horrors*, Shrek and Fiona from *Shrek*, all show a binary relationship. When this idea is reinforced as a social norm, it is defined as heteronormative (Dinkins and Englert 392) and suppresses recognition and appreciation of other non-binary relationships. This bias impacts LGBTQ+ students and classrooms (Hartman 80). All of this creates an atmosphere of cisgender privilege, which implicitly and explicitly promotes discrimination of the LGBTQ+ community (Johnson 138).

There are a variety of external social, religious, and cultural factors that make it a challenge for schools to focus on and produce theatre around LGBTQ+ themes (Grady 106-107). Internally, teachers often struggle with the correct responses, pronoun usage, educational approaches, and materials to highlight LGBTQ+ issues and perspectives (Hartman 89). Many teachers have been educated and raised with a twentieth-century lens that valued a heterosexual society. As Paul Hartman writes in *A Queer Approach to Addressing Gender and Sexuality through Literature Discussions with Second Graders*, “Some students may not have had positive exposure to non-normative gender and sexual identities, which may have elucidated oppressive and restrictive comments and understandings” (88). As Hartman points out, without witnessing a caring non-binary

relationship, many students, parents, and communities apply implicit or explicit biases to the ideas of LGBTQ+ themes in education and society. As Sharon Grady writes,

The reason to address these [themes] has nothing to do with sex. Instead, adopting a pluralistic perspective in our work demands that we concern ourselves with finding ways to help young people appreciate and respect diverse kinds of relationships, to question bias and the kinds of discrimination that can surface when people do not respect or appreciate others, and to realize how discrimination can affect real people. (114)

For many theatre educators, there is real empathy to promote LGBTQ+ perspectives in their classrooms and for their community audiences; however, they find a lack of materials for school-aged students (Murphy). Paul Hartman demonstrates the successes and challenges of using Queer Theory to highlight and break heteronormative assumptions in children's literature (82), which could be applied to theatre approaches. Queer Theory is the practice of deconstructing how society has created and promoted a defined set of social norms around gender and sexuality. Queer theorists use this understanding to find ways to confront this binary bias (81). As Hartman discovered with literacy approaches and discussion, there is a wealth of material for even elementary students to discuss gender and break down heteronormative thought (81-82).

Scripts depicting LGBTQ+ perspectives can be a challenge for educators to find and produce. Community arts groups can aid in filling this diversity gap by working with schools on the creation of self-written work for more inclusion of LGBTQ+ students and perspectives. Proud Theater, founded in 1999 in Madison, Wisconsin, has created a network of troupes across the state of Wisconsin focused on helping schools and

communities explore LGBTQ+ perspectives. These troupes are made up of “young people age 13 to 19 who identify as...[LGBTQ+], or who are the children of LGBTQ[+] parents, or allies of the LGBTQ[+] community at large” (“About Proud Theater”).

Through a devising theatre approach, Proud Theater fosters student self-written work. This theatre approach is a relevant and collaborative way to find and create materials appropriate for any K-12 theatre classroom to break the bonds of twentieth-century views on gender and sexuality. Through devising, theatre students create scripts and performances based upon their own experiences while being mentored by theatre educators (“About Proud Theater”). They often create performances that are showcased throughout the year at schools and community locations. Breaking down barriers for participants, as well as audiences, has shown how Proud Theater is “a strong voice that helps educate the community about LGBTQ[+] issues...embodies the best of grassroots activism but never loses sight of what constitutes quality, original theater” (“About Proud Theater”).

#### Access to Live Theatre

The fourth condition to change is creating increased access for students to professional theatre. Comparing and contrasting the most commonly produced high school plays and musicals to those professional theatres produced in 2018, it is clear that students are missing opportunities to experience diverse and inclusive shows (Tran). For 2018, the *American Theatre* magazine released the top ten (added eleven to accommodate for a tie) most produced shows for 2018:

1. *A Doll's House, Part 2* (Lucas Hnath)

2. *Sweat* (Lynn Nottage)
3. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (adapted by Simon Stephens)
4. *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* (Lauren Gunderson, Margot Melcon)
5. *The Wolves* (Sarah DeLappe)
6. *Fun Home* (Lisa Kron, Jeanine Tesori)
7. *Indecent* (Paula Vogel)
8. *Native Gardens* (Karen Zacarías)
9. *Skeleton Crew* (Dominique Morisseau)
10. *Once* (Enda Walsh, Glen Hansard, Markéta Irglová)
11. *Pride and Prejudice* (Kate Hamill) (Tran)

Many of these shows reflect aspects of the three conditions in need of change. They incorporate aspects of multiculturalism, create relevant and authentic stories for actors of color, and include different perspectives on gender and sexuality. More importantly, these shows introduce students to diverse and inclusive voices from a professional American theatre, one moving towards more equitable approaches. For 2018, “[the] 11 most-produced plays include work by 9 female playwrights (and 2 female composers)...a historic margin for this list” (Tran). Looking further, the top twenty most produced playwrights for 2018, “includes 11 women, 9 men...[of that] 6 playwrights of color...the most diverse it’s ever been” (Tran). This transition creates an opportunity for encountering perspectives lacking in the commonly produced high school plays and musicals.

For the majority of American students, the opportunity hoarding of the twentieth century, as demonstrated, has created income inequality that has placed barriers to access live theatre. For Oskar Eustis of the Public Theater, in New York City, New York, one of the biggest barriers for professional theatre to confront is “how can we turn theatre from being a commodity, an object, back into what it really is—a set of relationships among people?” (Eustis 07:31). To further diversity, equity, and inclusion in professional theatre in light of ticket pricing, some theatres and cultural organizations have found ways to address income inequality. These organizations aim to ensure that all people, in particular students, have access to the power of live theatre.

The smash hit *Hamilton* is a perfect example of what a powerful Broadway musical can create when embracing and incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion. With mega success also comes the creation of Eustis’ ideas on commoditizing theatre. In 2017, premium tickets for *Hamilton* reached new heights at \$900-\$1,050 a seat, with limited availability of average tickets in the \$200 range (“‘Hamilton’ Ticket”).

To combat the barrier of pricing, a unique partnership was formed to subsidize tickets as well as create educational curriculum around *Hamilton*. Lin-Manuel Miranda, with the Rockefeller Foundation and the Gilder Lehrman Institute for American History, created a \$1.5 million program for Title I urban city youth—later expanded nationally with an additional \$6 million—to attend special matinees of the musical for \$10 at the nearest performance venue (“Rockefeller”). To support even greater access, the curriculum created allowed student representatives to perform, on stage, their own music, dances, poetry or rap based on the integrated curriculum (“Hamilton Education”). There is no doubt, *Hamilton* is an oddity for Broadway with its unique subsidized ticket

partnership and tailored curriculum. The collaboration between the production, philanthropy, and a private educational advocacy group shows how access to live theatre can be created in light of income inequality.

Though many schools will not have access to Broadway or touring productions in their communities, local regional and minority theatres will still be a strong option for students and communities to be exposed to the power of live professional theatre—and, often—more diverse and inclusive material (Tran). These theatres, are even taking a stronger stance to make ticket prices more affordable. The Ubuntu Theatre Project in the San Francisco Bay Area converted its pay-what-you-can single ticket model, to a pay-what-you-can- season subscriber model (Lee). With this change, Ubuntu’s subscriber base grew substantially and increased its earned revenue, as some attendees chose to pay more (Lee).

The impact and reality of income inequality on many professional theatres, community arts, and cultural organizations will have long-term consequences. As these community engagement programs show, diversity, equity, and inclusion can occur when there is a greater motivation to build audiences by building community and creating access for all people. Closing the diversity gap that exists in American classrooms will eliminate the bonds of the white-dominated twentieth century. This is the first step in contributing to long-term diversity, equity, and inclusion in American theatre.

Any theatre educator or practitioner recognizes this as a daunting challenge. No particular production, teaching approach, or community engagement program can combat all of these conditions; at its foundation, change can occur when the emphasis is placed on actively seeking and deconstructing the bonds of bias that persists in K-12 theatre

education. These biases should be used as an opportunity to engage students in addressing and understanding bias from different perspectives (Murphy), contrasting twentieth-century voices to new ones of minority authors or a student's written work.

These changes will reflect today's students, be responsive to emerging demographic and value shifts, and will begin to rebuild theatre participation for generations to come. With the diversity gap addressed, access to K-12 theatre education needs to embrace a new integral definition—within public education—in order to find value, and garner public support in the twenty-first century.

### Chapter III

## THE CASE FOR ENHANCED ACCESS TO K-12 THEATRE EDUCATION

### A New Definition for Access to K-12 Theatre Education

Education in the twentieth century was often based upon a passive model where students sat at their desks, listened to lectures, and learned through repetition (Lazarus 28). This was to condition them toward entering an industrialized workforce as found under The Virtuous Cycle (Reich). Today, in a post-industrialized America, technology, globalization, and increasing diversity creates a climate in which education needs to transition toward a student-centered approach (Lazarus 29). This approach enables students to think critically, work collaboratively, and develop skill sets to adapt their abilities to a constantly changing society and economy (29).

In 2015, President Barack Obama signed into law the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or, as the 2015 version is known, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The main goal of ESSA is to give “states more flexibility on annual testing, accountability and school improvements” over the previous education act, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Parker). With this flexibility, it also allows states to determine the best way to assess their students, though many states have resorted back to the standardized testing practices of NCLB (“Look”). Content standards are still focused around NCLB math, reading, and science, leaving room for other content to be

determined by a state's higher education or technical education acceptance requirements ("Look").

The success of these tests is often placed upon teachers who are greatly undervalued and underpaid (Bruno). These tests demonstrate an achievement gap taking place across American education (Bruno). This gap often leads to more focus on teaching toward the test to garner state and national funding, while leaving little to no time for enrichment activities like the arts (Lazarus 32). Yet ESSA calls for government funds and support of schools to "offer [a] well-rounded educational experience for all students" which includes fine arts (Parker). It also highlights the potential the arts can have in developing twenty-first-century skills, combined with "constructive student engagement, problem-solving and conflict resolution" (Parker). All of these skills, with potential after school activities, foster a twenty-first-century learning community (Parker). Access to K-12 theatre education can aid students in the development of these twenty-first-century skills while contributing to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom and society.

In *Signs of Change: New Directions in Theatre Education*, Joan Lazarus interviews theatre teachers across the country on new approaches and practices in theatre education. As she confronts the inequities in access and quality of theatre education, she also encounters a new trend and direction emerging, where "theatre education [is] facilitated by teachers who understand the power of theatre to give voice to young people's concerns and ideas while connecting them to real and fictional figures through time" (32).

For Lazarus, theatre education begins around the students. This learner-centered practice or student-centered approach is inquiry based where a problem, situation, or

issue is explored from different angles. Teacher and students work side by side through “shared decision making” (35). Together, and individually, students and teachers take risks and investigate possible outcomes or creations (35).

Within this process, theatre is both an art form to learn and a vehicle to use in examining local and national issues impacting a student’s community, nation, and society as a whole (35). “The program is physically, academically, and socially accessible to all students in the school regardless of age, race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical ability, or disability” (35). Through access to K-12 theatre education, teachers, students, and communities can begin to develop a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse society.

Using aspects of the Discipline-Based Arts Education model (DBAE), founded by the Getty Education Institute for the Arts, Lazarus sees the process of this kind of educational theatre as all-inclusive, giving students the chance to explore different facets of theatre from “actor, director, playwright, designer, technician, critic, researcher, and audience” (35). Like DBAE, the emphasis is placed upon both “the process and context” of theatre (“Discipline Based”). Students garner skill sets to create, historically contextualize, evaluate, and understand the aesthetic principals of various theatre approaches (“Discipline Based”). For Lazarus, though, creating greater access requires “[i]ntegration of theatre study and practice...across arts... disciplines, in other subjects, ...in the school and community” (35). She argues for a scaffold approach, where students build their skill sets with each lesson by using theatre as a means to aid and develop curriculum and co-curricular projects (35), rather than an afterschool extracurricular activity.

Through this new definition of theatre education, greater access can be created through existing programs or redeveloping an extracurricular activity into an integrated discipline. This approach creates an atmosphere open to embracing diversity and inclusion in theatre education. This definition of theatre education comes with great responsibility for the creation of a learning community open to respectful discussion and dialogue. This community creates a place to learn others' perspectives while developing empathy skills, breaking down barriers, and resolving conflicts. Skills that not only foster greater learning but contribute to our democratic society.

### A Brave Space for Community

For August Boal,

[t]heatre is a language through which human beings can engage in active dialogue on what is important to them. It allows individuals to create a safe space that they may inhabit in groups and use to explore the interactions which make up their lives. It is a lab for problem solving, for seeking options, and for practicing solutions. (Rohd xix)

When applied to K-12 theatre education, the safe space that Boal describes allows for an inclusive learning community, one that embraces diversity and treats the audience, actor, and teacher in an equitable fashion. Building upon a safe space and borrowing from higher education, a brave space is one in which varied points of view are not only examined but encouraged (Ali 3-4). Through a brave space, students and teachers create an environment to constructively challenge points of view, while understanding both meaning and impression of how language can “affect the emotional well-being of another

person” (Ali 3). In this environment, students may enter into or exit out of a powerful conversation with respect to others and refrain from personal attacks (Ali 4). This environment allows students to build a community that fosters conflict resolution and social discourse. It allows teachers, students, and community to learn each other’s cultural, social context in which to understand one another and further bridge the diversity gap of the twentieth century.

The creation of a brave space is a perfect avenue for theatre programs of any size to incorporate pedagogy toward Conflict Resolution Education (CRE). The foundation of CRE is one in which all individuals who participate are in an environment free from harm, feel safe mentally and physically, and recognize the “diversity of the school’s population [is]... respected and celebrated” (Crawford and Bodine 1). Multiple approaches have been developed to aid K-12 classrooms in this regard (Cromwell). In this environment, teachers, students, and parents begin to foster skills to “[eliminate] verbal and physical violence” (Cromwell). Theatre, being one of many expressive arts, can aid in CRE as it readily includes “opportunities for conflict discovery—a process of reflection and increasing awareness about one’s orientations to and reactions to conflict” (“Expressive Arts Programs”).

In *Theatre for Community, Conflict & Dialogue*, Michael Rohd develops a manual for theatre approaches which could aid in the growth of building a brave space and foster an environment for CRE. In his book, Rohd articulates “the act of expression is an act of connection through it we become positive, active participants in our lives and in our communities” (xix). Using a variety of techniques from August Boal combined with theater games of Viola Spolin, Rohd has developed a program in which students and

teacher work as an ensemble to discuss, examine, and solve problems through interactive theatre workshops within their communities (1-3). In this process, the teacher and community advocates from nonprofits or service groups are trained to facilitate these interactive approaches (1). Through inquiry practices, topics are explored to reflect the group's interests. As valuable as the culminating production is for the community to bear witness, the process and dialogue of examining the issue at hand have greater value (3). Rohd's approaches are geared towards theatre to confront relevant day-to-day conflicts, to break down barriers, and bring communities together. Incorporating CRE in a brave space for theatre also allows for an environment to engage students, schools, and communities in civil discourse.

### Civil Discourse

Twenty-first-century students are exposed to conflict through society, constant technology, and a changing classroom. These students have access to twenty-four-hour news outlets with varied or poor practices of civil discourse (Shuster 2). They are exposed to social media, falling victim to trolling (Schulten) and outright bullying by fellow students. As American demographics shift, these students are overlooked in classrooms by a majority of white teachers who lack the skills and cultural understanding to communicate with different cultures (Schuster 4). All of these struggles for twenty-first-century students hinder the American education's foundation of building a nation of strong citizens ("Teaching Civil Discourse") who create a check and balance of democracy in their local community and nation (Meier and Knoester 19).

Many teachers and schools shy away from difficult conversations or find little time to incorporate civil discourse within curriculum planning (Shuster 20). *Civil Discourse in The Classroom*, by Kate Shuster, co-director of the international Middle School Public Debate Program, highlights how today's American schools are, in essence, anti-democratic by failing to incorporate civil discourse (2) and acknowledging the "intersections of [how] race, class and gender...affect student's communication habits" (4). An environment embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion needs to encompass and teach the democratic value of civil discourse where conversation "supports, rather than undermines, the societal good [while] ...respect[ing]...each other" (Shuster 3). A brave space for theatre can teach these skills for students to view ideas objectively (Harper), analyze, and develop organized arguments to improve reading and writing skills (Schuster 5), which help to achieve higher test scores.

Theatre, civil discourse, and democracy have always fused together. For Oskar Eustis, the artistic director of the Public Theater, in New York City, New York, "Theater matters because democracy matters. Theater is the essential art form of democracy... because they were born in the same city" (Eustis 00:13). It is in Athens, as Eustis teaches, that Thespis created dialogue (00:26):

Thespis thought of this—I just shift 90 degrees to the left, and I talk to another person onstage with me? Everything changes, because at that moment, I'm not the possessor of truth; I'm a guy with an opinion. And I'm talking to somebody else. And you know what? That other person has an opinion too, and its drama, remember, conflict—they disagree with me. There's a conflict between two points of view. And the thesis of that is that the truth can only emerge in the conflict of

different points of view. It's not the possession of any one person. And if you believe in democracy, you have to believe that. (01:28-02:28)

Within a brave space, theatre is a powerful tool to teach civil discourse, both through the dialogue of the medium, as well as the observation and hearing of how others dispute, solve, and discover the truth of an issue. Theatre, with its direct roots to democracy, can give K-12 students the skills to confront conflict and the dialogue to respectfully build community on a democratic foundation.

Embracing CRE and civil discourse within our schools can create a brave space for K-12 theatre education, one open to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In order to build future theatre participation in our changing society, learning must also happen outside of the classroom.

### Power of Empathy and Live Productions

Lacking resources in education (Clarke-Vivier and Lee 57), combined with a focus to teach toward improvements on standardized tests, schools often lack time to provide opportunities for a student to engage in outside learning (Clarke-Vivier and Lee 56; Greene 55). Access to K-12 theatre education for students is not only about creating a brave space in which to build inclusion, diversity, and equity, but also about witnessing such a space on stage. Through this process, the power of theatre access can greatly aid a student. Live theatre can trigger mirror neurons to build empathy (Kinney-Petrucha), aid in literacy retention (Greene 55, 58), and bolster both academic and social skills (Clarke-Vivier and Lee 61). These things combined, have demonstrated increased student test scores (Clarke-Vivier and Lee 56).

One of the most powerful tools of live theatre is its ability to build empathy and tolerance (Greene 55). Cognitive neuroscientist Simon Baron-Cohen of Cambridge University describes empathy as divided between two areas:

Cognitive empathy is the ability to put yourself into someone else's shoes and to imagine their thoughts and feelings. It is the recognition element. Affective empathy is the drive to respond with an appropriate emotion to someone else's thoughts and feelings. It is the response element. One without the other is not really empathy... you need both elements. ("Exchange")

Live theatre creates an environment in which actors can be placed in different roles, embrace different lives, while audiences can witness these interactions and learn from a protagonist's response (Arengé). Neuroscientists theorize that these responses are created by an individual's mirror neuron system (Marsh). These special cells replicate appropriate responses in the brain based upon observed or mirrored behavior (Marsh). At its basic function, "[t]hese neurons fire not just when witnessing physical behavior, but through auditory description as well" (Kinney-Petrucha). When the audience feels the rush of a character getting hurt on stage, or delights in the sight of a first kiss, these reactions are their own mirror neurons sending signals to their brain, reinforcing a past similar experience.

Theatre can act as an "empathy machine" in building the cognitive and affective areas of empathy while developing the nervous system (Kinney-Petrucha). For Baron-Cohen, social and biological factors create in individuals varied levels of empathy; he argues that there is an empathy bell curve ("Exchange"). Theatre has been proven to build empathy skills among students who perform and attend live performance (Goldstein

and Winner 19). In essence, theatre can move students along the empathy bell curve. Part of the success of live theatre in generating and building empathy is contributed to how “all action happens in real time, and the world of the story and its viewers exist in the same space” (Kinney-Petrucha). The intimacy of actor and audience together, creates a barrier-free environment in which energy is shared, something harder to reproduce in other forms of performance media (Greene 61) or reading (Kinney-Petrucha).

Access to live theatre has been proven to show an increase in literacy and vocabulary retention. In the report, *Learning from Live Theater*, Jay P. Greene, professor of education reform at the University of Arkansas, completed a study of students to see if attending a live theatre performance would alter literacy skills and retention, as opposed to simply reading the text or watching a film version in class. Using 670 students from seventh to twelfth grade, roughly divided in half, 63% showed stronger plot and vocabulary retention after the live performance over those who watched the movie or read without a live performance (57). Gains were also observed in students’ ability of deduction for multiple choice questions (57). Greene also noted a correlation with teachers of students chosen to see the live performances taking a strong stance at preparing students in advance (57) to garner more from the opportunity of the out-of-school activity.

Similar research has been conducted with the Milwaukee Repertory Theater’s Reading Residency program in partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The “Reading Residency program uses theater to teach literacy skills by engaging students in classroom activities developed around a specific production from [the Milwaukee Repertory’s season]” that culminates in students seeing the live production

(“Reading Residency”). In its 2018 season, 405 middle school students who participated in the Milwaukee Repertory’s Reading Residency program saw a 55% increase from pre- to post-testing on reading comprehension. For high school, 101 students saw a 44% increase in reading retention (“Reading Residency”).

Both research studies also demonstrated growth in the tolerance of ideas (Greene et al 58) and improved social and emotional learning (“Reading Residency”). As Greene’s research has shown, “enriching field trips are broadening experiences that expose students to a diverse world populated with different people and ideas, making [the students] more aware and accepting of those differences” (58). Learning can happen out of a classroom, the impact of access to theatre can be assessed and measured (61). For this learning to take place, greater emphasis must be placed on teacher preparation (Clarke-Vivier and Lee 69). This preparation must include ways for educators to advocate for the value of these trips, to learn to develop pre and post-curriculum to align with standards and assessment, and to aid in developing channels for outside advocacy (Clarke-Vivier and Lee 69).

### STEAM and Twenty-First-Century Skills

Almost two decades into the twenty-first century, the debate continues on how best to incorporate authentic education or real-world experience within the classroom. Authentic learning is about taking “real-world issues, problems, and applications” for students to solve in a setting reflective of today’s real-world careers or college classrooms (“Authentic Learning”). The goal is to give students opportunities to develop

the skills they will need to go directly into the workforce or prepare them for higher education.

Authentic learning is often combined with the principles of twenty-first-century skills, the ideal proficiencies employers (“STEAM”) are looking for in a post-industrialized world. These skills, often include areas of “collaboration, critical thinking, and communication” (“ARTSEDGE”), all to aid in the inquiry and analysis of our data-rich century (“21st Century Skills”). These skills also foster an embracing and understanding of “[g]lobal...multicultural literacy” (“21st Century Skills”) to aid in a globalized economy and the demographic shift taking place. In light of these skills, NCLB created an atmosphere for many schools to lean toward a dominant focus upon science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) to answer the rallying call of companies (Whitacre) in the anticipated shortage of STEM workers by 2020 (“STEAM”). These are also areas within public education in which the private sector is willing to invest (“STEM Education”) and to which many states direct their assessment progress for increased grants and funding (“States Incorporating”).

A brave space for theatre with a focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion embraces many of these twenty-first-century skills. However, educational theatre teachers and practitioners who are fortunate to have facilities, equipment, and a network of trained professionals need to find ways to advocate for a new definition of access for K-12 theatre education. They must include in this definition applied, authentic skills to prepare students for the workforce or higher education. Organizations like the National Endowment for the Arts, Americans for the Arts, and the Ovation Foundation, are working to move STEM, to incorporate the arts, and become STEAM (Edger 1;

“ARTSEdge”). STEAM can lead to creative innovation, hallmarks of companies like Apple and Tesla (Whitacre). This creative innovation allows students to become “social visionar[ies] who can make...products [that] truly improve lives and ...companies [net] worth” (Whitacre).

Theatre has a rich tradition of embracing STEM skills and is a natural fit to aid in the creation of STEAM. From its original Greek founding, scholars like Julius Pollux, have documented early theatrical devices that aided the movement of flying sets and scenery (“STEAM”). The Middle Ages began to add special effects of “belching fire” and sounds of “thunder and lightning” (“STEAM”). By the Renaissance, famous artist, inventor, and scientist, Leonardo Da Vinci, was known to produce fantastical theatre productions with special machines, costumes, and sets for the Duke of Milan (Isaacson 44-46). By the twentieth century, these innovations, combined with electricity and sound engineering, created a demand for “theatrical realism” which today is furthered with “projection, animation”, and computer design tools (“STEAM”).

Access to theatre education with STEAM creates a reciprocal environment where both the sciences and the arts further each other. “Both are about exploration of ideas and possibilities. Both have a ‘process’ and a ‘product’ aspect to them...both require students to engage in creative and critical thinking that supports collaborative learning” (“ARTSEdge”). These benefits all aid in achieving higher test scores and a well-rounded education. This form of arts integration can happen at any school with any socioeconomic level of funding. By creating a world of STEAM, schools can begin to see areas in which the National Core Art Standards may overlap with state standards, as in the case of Everett, Massachusetts (Mackin et al.).

In 2013, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the Everett school district worked with “SmART Schools, a national arts-in-education program” (Mackin et al.). Under its guidance, a tailored summer program was created to provide technical resources in curriculum planning, and more importantly, teachers were mentored by “master teaching artists in visual art, music, and theatre” (Mackin et al.). Everett was able to create an integrated-arts and cross-curricular approach to be taught by co-teachers. Through this integration, student improvement in test scores moved to “[l]evel one status...the state’s highest designation for proficiency and growth...only earned by 29% of [Massachusetts] schools [in 2016]” (Mackin et al.).

To fully transition from STEM to STEAM, or to integrate arts in general within a curriculum, creates great challenges with time and resources if not effectively planned (Mackin et al.). Most teachers and art advocates see the merging of these two avenues as creating a richer learning experience for all students (“ARTSEDGE”). Teachers also are found to be invigorated by students’ excitement towards hands-on learning (Mackin et al.). STEAM allows teachers to break from the monotony of teaching toward standardized testing and form more authentic practices of differentiation of lessons to meet all learners’ needs (“Movement”). STEAM creates an inclusive environment, in which all students’ skills, backgrounds, and interests are developed through problem-solving and critical analysis to prepare them to act and think globally as people—and as innovative workers (“Movement”). All are skills which can be measured and assessed to build rigor and success at any school.

A brave space for access to K-12 theatre education is one in which students have exposure to STEAM skills to aid them in career and college preparation. This space

enables students to develop skills in design and creation through the powers of engineering, technical education, science, and math. All of these elements can be integrated into a cross-curriculum approach to build technical skills for all levels of learners—in an inclusive and diverse environment.

With a new definition of K-12 theatre as a brave space for a learning community, new value can be placed upon the importance and impact access to theatre can have on developing a twenty-first-century learner. This learner can empathize with others, create a civilized dialogue to inform critical thoughts, analyze, and solve problems: in other words, a learner who can embrace the skills needed in a globalized economy. This brave space for access to K-12 theatre education can aid as an opportunity for diversity, equity, and inclusion for future generations of theatre innovators and participants. More importantly, it engages our current society with tools and approaches to unite citizens—rather than divide them.

## Conclusion

Opportunity hoarding in the twentieth century aided predominately white and wealthier students (Reeves 11) with access to enrichment experiences, like arts education, at an earlier age (Harper). This early access helped build a foundation for life-long participation in the arts (Rabkin 9, 26). However, that audience participation is shrinking and its remaining members aging (“2017 Survey”). The face of America and society is changing (Frey). The Eurocentric approaches created to cater to predominately white students no longer apply (Brewer) and have resulted in a diversity gap in our classrooms (Milner 5).

Changes in and enhanced access to K-12 theatre arts can contribute to greater long-term diversity, equity, and inclusion in American theatre. With the help of professional theatres, community arts and cultural organizations can help eliminate the diversity gap taking place in our classrooms. These professional and community organizations can advocate for the eradication of twentieth-century bias within K-12 theatre education approaches and productions. These organizations, when coming together, can find ways to create access to live theatre despite income inequality. With enhanced access to K-12 theatre education, the power of theatre will not only build a brave space for students but a place for community. Not only will these changes have a direct impact on the future of American theatre but could bring about a more civil society

through the powerful lens of empathy, collaboration, and creativity. As Joan Lazarus summarizes,

I have just glimpsed the possibilities of theatre education that respects students as co-learners and collaborators, one that engages a wide cross section of students in respectful practices and study of the art form. This is theatre education that is relevant, integrated, challenging and comprehensive. It is not a destination but a journey...where young people are engaged in active learning, inquiry, and artmaking, and where the potential of theatre can be realized. (40)

#### To Further Bolster Access to K-12 Theatre Arts

In order to build a more diverse and inclusive American theatre, great efforts need to be put forth to ensure equal access to K-12 theatre education. Only when all students have access to theatre education will there be true diversity, equity, and inclusion to enable greater participation leading to lifelong involvement in theatre. To begin, school funding models must break away from the regional or district property tax funding system currently in place. Wealthy schools are governed locally by parents, with the power to direct how education dollars are spent (“23 Billion”). Impoverished schools, often rich in diversity, depend on property tax revenue and more on state funding that is determined by legislators who may not reflect the school’s demographics or understand its needs (“23 Billion”). This is why it is crucial to re-engage the link of democracy to education, to teach students, parents, administrators—and their communities—the cognitive and social power the arts can have on a community.

Professional theatre, arts, and cultural leaders must do more to advocate and create access to K-12 theatre education in public schools. Leaders in these fields must sit on school boards to help budget and aid policy direction towards arts-integration like STEAM. These same leaders must also work with local teachers in developing learning standards and curriculum design. They can help schools determine the access that is essential based upon the schools' limited resources and community assets available. These leaders can fill educational and diversity gaps for a more equitable and inclusive school. These leaders can open their doors to Place-Based Education, in which their theatre space, resources, and connections can become out-of-the-classroom learning labs.

The rising cost of higher education tuition coupled with low salaries will most likely deter many students from entering the teaching or nonprofit profession. Similar to healthcare and social work fields, student-loan forgiveness, endowed restricted scholarships, and grants are possible avenues to aid students in pursuing these teaching and nonprofit professions. Student teachers need to be paid like the lucrative internship opportunities often associated with their peers in other careers.

Teacher training programs need to prepare future teachers with the skills to integrate, advocate, and implement arts like theatre in the classroom and their communities. Teach all teachers to embrace STEAM. This will not only engage and enhance learning but contribute to the rich legacy of theatre technology and innovation. It will also aid in outside private and public funding. For ongoing teacher training, the Partner in Education certification for local regional theatres, as created by The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, is a great model. This artist-in-residency model

for theatres allows professionals to conduct onsite development for teachers and schools in the creation of access to K-12 theatre education (“In-School Programs”).

There must be the continued investment in female playwrights and playwrights of color to write educational scripts and productions to meet our changing demographics. In addition, theatre educators and practitioners need to embrace and value more student- and community-driven work to foster inclusion and intercultural competency. Through this process, students can begin to examine community issues around diversity, gender, and sexuality in the language, themes, and social context of their community. This process should also be aided and emboldened by local arts and cultural groups.

With blockbusters like *Hamilton*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, *The Prom*, and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, Broadway and regional theatres across the nation have begun to present more diverse and inclusive work (“Record Diversity”). However, equity gaps persist in pay, casting, and work for females and people of color (Greene). This hinders students from seeing diversity, equity, and inclusion on stage as they embrace the power of live theatre. All students deserve to see these actors and hear their stories. Likewise, all actors deserve equal pay and opportunity. Elimination of this pay and casting gap must take place on the American stage (Greene).

There are classrooms out there, brave spaces, where teachers and students engage in issues relevant to them and their community. Coming together with local professional and nonprofit leaders, they learn together and are exposed to different points of view. Knowledge is deepened by authentic practices and dialogue that is civil and just. Collaborative work is created by all voices and all expressions. Through these brave

spaces with enhanced access to K-12 theatre arts, greater diversity, equity, and inclusion will contribute to America and her theatre.

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