

CENTER THEATRE GROUP
EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Theatre Educators Fellowship: 2011 Fellows Compendium



CENTER THEATRE GROUP'S MISSION


Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

VISION

Center Theatre Group enjoys a deep and interactive relationship with its patrons, and offers multiple points of entry and engagement for theatre-goers of all ages, backgrounds and prior experience. Through a wide range of classes, workshops, seminars, events, discussions and resources, our audience members gain a heightened awareness, understanding and appreciation of the art of theatre. Center Theatre Group is a leading investor in the personal and artistic development of young artists, arts professionals and audience members. Young people regularly work alongside Center Theatre Group professionals to learn the art, craft and business of theatre. Young people are integrated throughout our work as interns, apprentices, mentees, colleagues and advisors. Center Theatre Group cultivates relationships with a network of educators and targets key communities for in-depth educational partnerships. Identifying and maximizing opportunities for learning and participation are a basic part of Center Theatre Group's culture and daily work.



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CTG's 2011 Theatre Educators Fellows (L TO R) Krista Carson Elhai, Susan Franklin Tanner, CTG Director of Education and Community Partnerships Leslie K. Johnson, Helen A. Papadopoulos, and Aileen Gendrano.

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CENTER THEATRE GROUP (CTG) VALUES EDUCATORS AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS, change-agents, artists and theatre lovers. As a fundamental part of our mission, we work to ensure that young people have the opportunity to experience the power of the theatre arts as a basic part of their K-12 education. We want students to regularly see theatre, but also to read, study, create and discuss theatre throughout their academic careers and beyond. For us, a key to realizing this ideal is supporting and nurturing theatre teachers throughout Los Angeles County. The Theatre Educators Fellowship Program, supported by Chase, is one way that CTG is investing in teachers' professional growth, by giving educators the opportunity and resources to explore innovative ideas about the ways that they teach theatre and integrate theatre into other subjects.

The Fellowship Program is an action research model. The program design is based on the notion that improvement of professional practice comes through continual learning and progressive problem solving; and that professional development should be deeply personal and highly inspirational. Action research is a process of deep inquiry into one's practices in service of moving towards an envisioned future.* And as you will discover in the following reflections from the 2011 Fellows, each embarked on a program of personal, professional growth based on a key research question as unique as each teacher herself.

As researchers, our Fellows examined their own practices, articulated focused inquiries, and sought new sources of input and inspiration. Through this process, each teacher, in her own way, synthesized new information and chronicled her "learning journey" over the summer of 2011. Their white papers include thoughts and ideas about their experiences - the people they encountered, the aha! moments, and the lessons learned - both planned and unplanned.

Action research is also a highly reflective study, a chance to examine our work, outline opportunities for improvement and ask new, ever-deepening questions. Our Fellows have done this as well. Their writings include meaningful new reflections on teaching and integrating theatre, as each Fellow begins formulating new plans of action for making theatre integral to learning in their classrooms.

Finally, action research often extends its "arena of change" to a continually widening group of stakeholders. And that is the goal of this compendium: To share with our community these teachers' efforts and discoveries. Our hope in producing this publication is that we can help contribute to our expanding, collective understanding of how to support high quality theatre instruction, and the factors that result in positive personal and professional change for theatre educators.

We hope you enjoy reading about our Fellows research.



Leslie K. Johnson
Director of Education and Community Partnership Center Theatre Group

*Margaret Riel, "Understanding Action Research," Center for Collaborative Action Research, 2006-2011, Pepperdine University

About the Theatre Educators Fellowship

Through its professional development initiative, *Advancing the Practice of Teaching Theatre*, Center Theatre Group offers a suite of complimentary professional development programs for educators that provide a range of opportunities to develop knowledge and skills; investigate new approaches and share best practices; take risks and innovate; connect deeply with the art of theatre and personal creativity; network and build a professional learning community with peers and fellow practitioners.

While there exists a range of professional development opportunities for educators that address skills development and classroom practicalities, few programs are designed to support individual needs, and rejuvenate the creative and intellectual spirit that initially brings so many to teaching.

The Theatre Educators Fellowship focuses on two unique and critical areas:



Address critical professional development needs and support the artistic revitalization of dedicated educators in Los Angeles County



Provide opportunities for learning that are transformational and inspire new ways of approaching students and the practice of teaching theatre

Educators design individualized courses of study that provide immersion in their own creative work, the opportunity to interact with other professional theatre artists and educators and the ability to stay current with new teaching practices and resources. This approach to professional development enhances the effectiveness of teachers and directly benefits the young people they teach.

As educators have the opportunity to reconnect deeply with their artistic disciplines; engage with other artists and colleagues outside the daily demands of the workplace; and explore new artistic terrain, challenging themselves in complex ways, they will return to the classroom reinvigorated, inspired to introduce fresh content, and armed with new perspectives on effective teaching methodologies. By becoming stronger artists, teachers will become more effective educators, thereby impacting student learning and achievement.



2011 THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

Aileen Gendrano

Key Research Questions:

In which ways can being formally trained in body movement, character analysis, and scene study contribute to my students' post secondary school success? How can the students utilize these theatre arts skills as tools for self-empowerment?

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THEATRE IS TRULY LIBERATING! Augusto Boal states in *Games for Actors and Nonactors*, "Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, instead of just waiting for it." This quote was both an exciting and intimidating concept for me at the start of my fellowship journey, but by the end of the summer, it had become my life. In just two summer months, I was liberated from my old notions of what theatre is or should be and immediately began to develop new strategies to transform my own classroom.

To answer my initial research question — *In which ways can being formally trained in body movement, character analysis, and scene study contribute to my students' post secondary school success? How can the students utilize these theatre arts skills as tools for self-empowerment?* — I decided to draw on the teachings of both Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Augusto Boal, founder of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), to help guide my fellowship studies. Their ideas are rooted in the themes of social justice, community, and empowerment. I had read Freire in graduate school, but studying Boal's work was a new endeavor for me. Since my main concern as an educator is to always provide meaningful and effective classroom instruction, this was a perfect fit. My students come from disadvantaged communities, so finding ways of empowering them is vital to their success now and after high school.

I was both extremely excited, and also very nervous to be a student again. On my way to my first class, I felt like my own students asking myself silly

questions: What are the other students going to be like? Is it going to be hard? I wonder if I'm going to look dumb? What is he going to make us do? What should I bring? It had been a while since I took a college class, but in the end, I don't know why I was so nervous. The Introduction to TO course at NYU was a small intimate class of about 18 easy-going, theatre lovers/activists/educator-students just like me! We played games and dialogued about the origins of TO and the meaning of oppression. Julian Boal, the instructor and son of Augusto Boal, shared amazing stories about their experiences doing this type of work all over the world.

"Before this workshop, I never thought of theatre, or art in general, as interactive, but now I can see how meaningful it can be when it involves the audience."

From the first day, I was completely inspired. We rehearsed and performed our own forum theatre scenes. Our specific scene was a short, but highly complex piece about a young woman teaching sex education in a small village in Africa. The antagonist bullies and threatens her because she is a woman, as well as an outsider who is teaching the children what he deems is "white" or "western" ways. The scene was beautiful in that it required the audience (spec-actors) to think about sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, and the role of education in the span of ten minutes. It reminded me of the power of theatre — being precise and concise with our words and actions. For this particular scene I did not play the antagonist or the protagonist, but rather one of the students in the classroom. It was great to be able to act again, since it had been so long! It was also interesting for me to want the spec-actors to replace my role as a bystander, because that is the role most people identify with even though I know it's most effective when the protagonist is replaced. This was

my first time seeing and participating in TO, and it was definitely memorable.

Before this workshop, I never thought of theatre, or art in general, as interactive, but now I can see how meaningful it can be when it involves the audience. I would never dismiss more traditional forms of theatre, but this class definitely expanded my knowledge about what art is and how it can be used for different functions. It doesn't matter how many times I read the activities in *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* by Augusto Boal— nothing really beats participating in it firsthand. You learn best by doing, right?

The second leg of my journey took place at the Pedagogy and Theatre of Oppressed Conference (PTO) in Chicago, Illinois. What an amazing experience! The theme, "We are each other's Harvest," resonated with me throughout my stay there. I attended different workshops and heard

many students have trouble expressing how they feel. I believe that using TO techniques will give these young people a new and different medium to respond to.

All the keynote speakers at the conference were incredible, but the one that stood out the most to me was Omi Osun Joni L Jones. In her speech, "The Role of Allies in 2011," she shared with us some of her key ideas such as, "be loud, so we don't have to" and "being liberal is not enough." Her speech made me reflect on my actions not only as a teacher, but also as a human being. Do I turn a blind eye when put in an uncomfortable situation? Do I speak up enough for those who have no voice? It inspired me to be more mindful of my actions and more conscious about the struggle of others. It may be hard for me to voice my opinion at times, but for others it may be even harder.



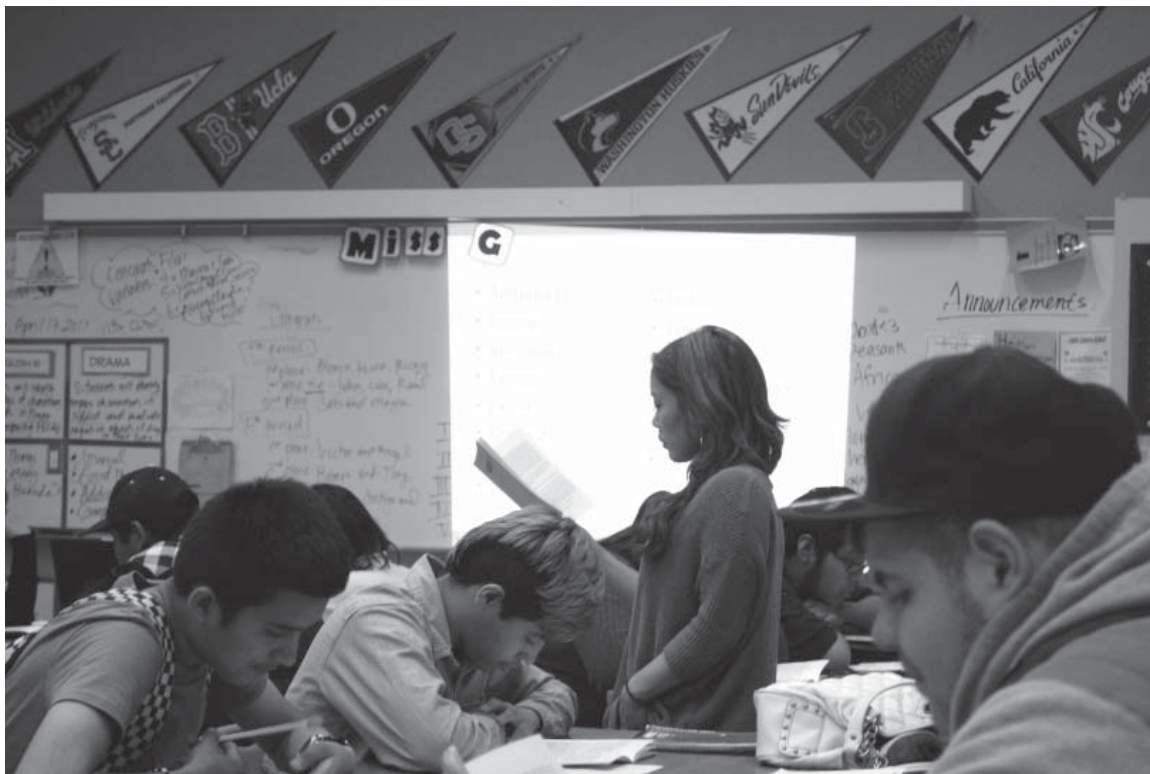
Aileen Gendrano with students at the Cartonera Workshop

Another extraordinary experience I had at the conference was a workshop by Maggie Guntren, called "Cartonera Project: Human Rights, Literacy, Arts, and Engagement." Based on her experience in Argentina, one part of the workshop focused on creating "cartoneras," which are books made from old boxes. Argentineans learned to recycle "trash" as a way to give voices to unknown authors and create a work force to combat their growing trash problem. After constructing our own

remarkable, accomplished keynote speakers. One of my most favorite workshops was led by Mr. Alex Santiago from the Forum Project in New York. The workshop was titled "Queer Concientizacao: Foundations for Understanding Anti-Queer Oppression." We engaged in a discussion about Queer terminology, we learned how to accept and combat homophobia with Theatre of the Oppressed activities like Sculpting and creating a group Tableau. By the end of the workshop, I had a solid understanding of what activities I can and should use with my students who struggle with identity. Whether or not a student is gay or straight,

books, the facilitator had us read and respond to a story using modified TO techniques. We stopped throughout the story to create alternative plot scenarios that may better suit the protagonist, similar to the way forum theatre is performed. Although I wasn't looking to find English Language Arts techniques related to TO, I'm glad I did! It is the perfect way to engage my students in the process of forum theatre before they have to perform it.

Overall, the PTO conference was by far the best conference I have ever attended. Honestly! It was not only because of the content, philosophy,



Aileen Gendrano with students at Mendez Learning Center, LAUSD, Local District T

and location, but also the people that made this experience incredibly worthwhile. Being around like-minded individuals truly invigorates me! I met so many amazing people— teachers, facilitators, community organizers— that I know I will keep in touch with. I also enjoyed the diversity of the workshops. It was not only solely focused on TO, but also other human rights topics related to social justice and/or theatre. Many workshops utilized TO activities and icebreakers, while others were more discussion or dialogue based. One session I attended was a screening of a documentary entitled “Arna’s Children,” which highlighted the efforts of a mother and son to use theatre and art as a way of engaging the children caught in the middle of the Palestinian and Israeli conflict.

This past summer was both overwhelming and exciting. For me, being able to take time away from the chaos of the educational system in Los Angeles was very important, as it allowed me to truly reflect on my practice as an educator. I went into teaching bright-eyed, ready to change the world, but over the last four years I have found it an uphill battle having to deal with the existing politics and complexities that they don’t teach you about in graduate school. These experiences have made me stronger and wiser,

but I know I still have a long way to go. Attending the class and conference reminded me that no matter how difficult the fight may seem, it is a cause worth fighting for. Theatre of the Oppressed is most certainly a “weapon” that I didn’t know I needed, but I am glad I had the opportunity to find it. My students will benefit from this experience, because I will continue to provide them with the necessary tools for self-empowerment that are useful for their secondary school success and beyond. ●

Aileen Gendrano teaches English and theatre at Roosevelt High School in LAUSD, Local District T. She has always been passionate about reading, writing, and theatre which are continuously strengthened with the work that is done in her classroom.



2011 THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

Helen Papadopoulos

Key Research Questions:

How do I develop an effective and powerful theatre program for my students? How do I continue to develop new and innovative lessons to enrich my math classes by integrating performing arts activities? How do I teach my students about the inner-workings of the theatre? (Lights, sound, make-up, etc.)

MATH AND THEATRE ARE THE PERFECT COMBINATION!

Whenever I tell people that I teach theatre and math the first thing they say is, "That's strange. Those two subjects don't go together at all!" Before beginning my fellowship journey I would have been hard-pressed not to agree, but now, I see things in a different light. The goals of my fellowship were to gain the knowledge I needed to create a dynamic theatre program as well as further enhance and energize my math program through the use of performing arts activities and differentiated instruction. I wanted to obtain an instructional base that could be applied in both my theatre and math classes.

With teaching math, it is important to have the background knowledge of where formulas and algorithms come from and how they were developed. I find that the same is true with teaching theatre; I needed to know the history, foundation, and practical applications before I could begin asking my students to truly appreciate the study of performing arts. Since most of my knowledge of theatre comes from "learning by doing" and "trial and error," my professional development goals were tied to obtaining formal training.

The Differentiated Instruction Conference was an amazing and energizing experience for me. My mindset was to go in and gather ideas on ways to integrate the arts into my mathematics curriculum. Although I was able to gather a wealth of ideas, I also learned new ways to integrate technology into my theatre curriculum. I discovered ways to have my students make videos of themselves and was directed to a website where they can do character studies and write their own short plays. My UCLA courses provided me with the background

knowledge in both straight theatre and musical theatre that I need to effectively teach my students. I learned how to really "read" a play as well as developed a new vocabulary that I can now use when teaching my students.

Possibly the most valuable experience I had during this time came from the most unexpected place; a tour of the "Phantom Theatre." I decided to take the tour because I thought it would be an interesting experience, but little did I know that I would get much more than I had bargained for. There were only six people on the two-hour tour and the participants were the ones who decided what would be seen. I learned how the props were made, how some of the set pieces were constructed, and most importantly, how they made the magic happen. Through my discussion with the crew members at the "Phantom Theatre" and picking the brains of experienced theatre teachers and theatre technicians, I am now able to better understand the technical aspects of my theatre program. This fellowship has provided me with an invaluable experience and has really taught me that the more I thought I knew, the more I realized I had to learn.

"There is much talk about educating our students for 21st century jobs and the importance that creativity and expression will play in those jobs. I can't think of a better way to expose our students to these concepts than by incorporating the arts into our curriculum."

There have been many articles written and studies done on the importance of integrating the arts across the curriculum. For some content areas like language arts and social studies, teachers find it easy to do just this. In the areas of math and science, however, it appears to be a bit more difficult. Getting our students to "perform" in front of an audience, whether on stage or in front of the class, is



Helen Papadopoulos and her daughter Mariann with Ian Jon Bourg who played Phantom

an important step in preparing our students for the next steps they will be taking on their journey. There is much talk about educating our students for 21st century jobs and the importance that creativity and expression will play in those jobs. I can't think of a better way to expose our students to these concepts than by incorporating the arts into our curriculum.

In the past, I've asked my students to develop and perform skits to explain mathematical properties; sing as a group to help remember how to solve equations; and change the lyrics to well-known songs to teach and reinforce math concepts. Since taking my online courses and attending the conference, I've created a lesson asking students to write a poem about their feelings regarding algebra and geometry. This will be a creative way to let me know what my students' attitudes are towards the content. Their rubric sheet will ask them to present their poem to the class. I will make sure that our classroom environment is a safe place for students to "perform" as we discuss the importance of being a good and supportive audience. Yes, I'm still talking about my math class! After doing a variety of these activities throughout the year, both individually and in groups, the culminating activity will be for groups of students in each class to select a concept and present a scene, a song, or a rap explaining the concept.

My drama students, as a kind of "diagnostic test," will perform a monologue for the class. I won't give them any instruction on how to perform a monologue and the only thing I will tell them is that it has to be 2-3 minutes long and it has to be "school appropriate." Afterward, we'll discuss character traits, the difference between acting like the character and "being" the character, and how we can convince an audience that a 12-year-old actor is actually a 40-year-old man. This particular method of instruction is one that I use often when I'm teaching problem solving skills in my math classes

and I know it will prove to be just as effective in my theatre class.

As I continued to explore the similarities between teaching theatre and math I found one glaring example of where the instruction in my math class was lacking; the "warm-up." We always ask our athletes, musicians, singers, and actors to warm up, but we don't ask the same of our students. What better way to wake-up the brain and get those creative juices flowing than to have my math students do some "mental exercises" before we get into our lesson.

I read once, "Not only does theatre serve as a bridge that connects to the other fine arts disciplines of dance, music, and painting, but also into such areas as history, literature, science, math, psychology, home economics, drafting, industrial arts, marketing, computer science, and others. Theatre also stimulates creativity and problem-solving skills. Involvement in theatre builds confidence in students, and it embraces students' abilities to work in groups toward a common goal. Theatre helps students develop self-discipline and encourages commitment to a cause." For me, this put the entire fellowship into perspective; theatre is more important than we can even imagine. ●



Helen Papadopoulos with students at Suzanne Middle School

Helen A. Papadopoulos teaches math and theatre at Suzanne Middle School in the Walnut Unified School District. Ms. Papadopoulos has been working with the math program at Suzanne for the past 27 years and this is her second year teaching a theatre class. She is a National Board Certified teacher and a 2007 California Teacher of the year.



2011 THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

Krista Carson Elhai

Key Research Question:

How can I develop professional theatre workshops that engage and enhance my students' creative, collaborative, critical thinking and communication skills, preparing them for the 21st Century World?

DURING MY 28-YEAR TEACHING CAREER, with the last 18 being at Claremont High School (CHS), my theatre students and I have encountered many changes to the world in which we live. Students now have unprecedented access to information, research, and multiple types of media; theatre production at large has evolved as a field to incorporate technology and content that appeals to a wider base of audiences; and CHS student demographics have transformed into a diverse population that models society at large, including special-needs students, Advanced Placement (AP) / International Baccalaureate (IB) students, and students who go directly into the workforce after high school.

My initial training and subsequent professional development did not prepare me for these changes. The 21st Century Skills Map for the Arts shows ways that students acquire 21st Century Learning Skills through arts study (e.g., visual arts, dance, music, theatre). It is crucial that we prepare our students to be creative, curious, and communicative; to learn how to understand and evaluate data, information, media and technology; and to be flexible, by learning to understand other people's perspectives. The Arts Map provides key terms such as interconnections, analyze, synthesize, articulate, flexibility, collaborative, diverse perspectives, demonstrate, communicate, evaluate, adapt, work effectively, prioritize, cultural differences, work ethic, and community, to help guide any student into the next phase of his or her life.

I realized that, in order to grow and elevate my program to the next level, I needed to make it relevant to today's students. The goal of my research question was to incorporate the 21st Century Arts

Map vision into workshops, daylong intensives, and courses that will:

- Offer all students a sequential pathway to deepen their knowledge and skills, as opposed to an isolated series of classes.
- Meet students' needs with flexibility by cultivating their interests and providing a way to express them in a tangible manner.
- Prepare students to apply their arts knowledge and skills in a variety of ways after high school, whether through higher education or joining the workforce directly.

“For many years, I utilized some alumni as guest artists and guest speakers, but based on the meetings I had in New York, I am now committed to formalizing an alumni network.”

At the Broadway Teachers Workshop (BTW), I was able to refine my skills in directing and production design, while learning to create meaningful and unconventional work in a collaborative environment. Designers Jenny Marino (Properties Design) and Rob Bissenger (Scenic Design, *Spiderman*) took us through the process of Design. They stressed the values of communication, creativity, innovation, and collaboration as being critical in design whether at the student or professional level. John Tartaglia, (*Avenue Q*), gave us a hands-on experience with puppetry. He encouraged us to try puppetry with our students, especially those with special needs, kids who have trouble expressing themselves, and for class team building. Our Directing workshop took us through a Viewpoints Directing class where we learned to use space, shape, time, emotion, movement, and story. I experienced first hand the techniques I can now use to direct large musical theatre scenes where the student actors must

become aware of who and where they are, how to look at their space, access, adjust, and tell a story without a director giving them every tiny movement. The capstone of the BTW was a morning with Stephen Sondheim. He was inspirational, and had an amazing wealth of information. He taught us a lifetime of theatre history in just a short period of time. No question was off limits. He gave us insight into his work, writing for the theatre, his process of collaboration, and his personal journey as a theatre artist.

The many Broadway productions I attended, both on my own and through BTW, allowed me to see how many of the concepts and designs, with today's technology, can be translated on a much smaller scale to fit my theatre space and school budget. For example, in *War Horse*, the projections of period sketches established the scene and moved as the show changed locations. This very simple, but effective technique, will play very well in my productions back home. I also found inspiration in a very unexpected place while I visited the Alexander McQueen exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The brilliant designs and exquisitely crafted clothes were just as theatrical as any production I'd seen.

During the BTW production Q & A sessions, I was surprised by the responses shared by the cast and crew. When asked for advice on how our students can best prepare for a career on Broadway, it was commonly suggested that students should embark



Krista Carson Elhai with Liz Larsen at the Broadway Teachers Workshop.

on a great, well-rounded education in whatever field holds their passion. They said to never stop learning – train in your craft, take classes, read quality books, both literature and plays, and above all, see good theatre. The other thing that struck me was how well-versed the casts were in the history and evolution of their respective productions. The cast of *Hair*, for example, all expressed a profound connection with the mythos and aura of the Age of Aquarius even though none of them had been born when their original show premiered.

Claremont High School has produced a substantial number of successful alumni that have gone on to have careers on Broadway and have a vast reservoir of experiences to share with my current students. I had the opportunity to meet with many of these alumni and they were exceptionally generous with their time, and gave me great ideas and feedback about how to develop workshops for young musical theatre students. They shared how valuable it was to work together, particularly as a group of diverse students, to rehearse, build, and perform our shows. For many years, I utilized some alumni as guest artists and guest speakers, but based on the meetings I had in New York, I am now committed to formalizing an alumni network. One that includes a newsletter, database, and an online forum, which can connect those already established in the theatre community with current students and young professionals.

It will take many weeks, if not months, to digest my experiences in New York. As I reflect on the Broadway Teachers' Workshops, meetings with the CHS Alumni Theatre Professionals, and my research into 21st Century Skills, I am beginning to synthesize what I need to do next. I found numerous similarities between the skills my alumni learned from CHS Theatre and the 21st Century Arts Map, including:

- thinking quickly in a stressful situation
- taking direction from a director, technical director, musical director, conductor, dance captain and more
- social skills and getting along with others
- researching a time period/composer, theatre style, construction or design technique
- spatial relationships in a large group on stage
- working outside one's comfort zone
- time management while balancing school, activities, family and a production schedule
- being on time
- taking initiative with regard to on stage and backstage choices



Krista Carson Elhai with students at Claremont High School

- leading other students
- working with a group for a common goal
- technology in theatre design, lighting, audio, special effects, and rigging

I taught these skills for most of my career but somehow never connected them to what the students would be doing after high school. They are critical for any high school graduate, whether they attend college, go into the workforce, or serve on a community committee. At BTW I learned firsthand the importance of these skills as a successful launch into the working world, and how easily they can be learned through a course of study in theatre.

This experience has renewed my energy as a director, teacher, and theatre educator. I stepped outside my comfort zone, gaining renewed excitement and enthusiasm while learning new techniques; developed increased confidence in my creative choices, allowing for a more efficient, creative and collaborative rehearsal process; and experienced being a student again, so I can now better connect with my own student actors, designers and technicians. I'm guessing that this year I'll win the "what I did with my summer vacation" amongst my colleagues. Although there is no official prize, I feel that I've already won. What I did this summer in New York will have a lasting effect on my students, my alumni, and myself for a very long time. I'm excited to rework my curriculum based on what I have learned, and to better prepare my students with 21st Century Skills. ●

Krista Carson Elhai teaches theatre at Claremont High School in the Claremont Unified School District. Ms. Carson Elhai has taught theatre for 28 years, at both Hemet and Claremont High Schools. Her program currently serves over 500 students while producing 8 to 10 productions per year.



2011 THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

Susan Franklin Tanner

Key Research Question:

How can I use 21st century multimedia technology to unleash powerful creativity and more fully engage students in the exploration and production of live theatre?

MY FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES WERE ALL I HOPED FOR AND NOTHING I EXPECTED! I devised my research question because I was most interested in finding ways to unleash the creativity of my *students* and further engage them in the exploration and production of live theatre through 21st century multimedia technologies. As I look back upon my fellowship activities, I realize that it is *my own* powerful creativity that has been unleashed and that I am now even more committed to and in love with the possibilities of live theatre!

As an accomplished teaching artist, I feel confident that the passion and expertise I bring to students engenders a love of theatre. My goal was to step out of my comfort zone and become well versed in the language and application of 21st century multimedia, and to be able to incorporate this new understanding into my theatre work with students.

My expertise has been merged with an enhanced vision of the possibilities of visual storytelling that, before this fellowship, I believed were the purview of only a skilled few. The lack of confidence in my technological skills has been replaced by a newfound daring attitude. I now understand that if one can imagine an image, there is someone out there (if not me, then a technical director, lighting designer, graphic artist, filmmaker, and/or yes— quite likely one of my students!) who can help me realize my vision. The beauty of theatre as a collaborative art form has been reinforced. Although I may have the ideas and concepts, there is no shame in calling upon others to help the images come to life. I learned, in fact, that almost no one in this art form does it alone and that even the most celebrated projection designers call upon video artists and graphic designers to help them implement their visions. So, in truth, this fellowship gave me an

opportunity to learn not only new, basic multimedia skills, but it also gave me permission to embrace the reality that my true skills lie in conceiving a visually exciting theatre project and inspiring others to join me in bringing that project to life on stage.

My first fellowship activity was attending the 17th ASSITEJ World Congress and Performing Arts Festival for Young Audiences in Copenhagen, Denmark–Malmö, Sweden, where I saw nine productions from all over the world. I dialogued with theatre artists and educators and came home full of ideas about how to implement new multimedia techniques. The most impressive productions were *2 Dimensional Life of Her* by Fleur Elise Noble/Insite Arts from Australia, a performance work made of drawing, animation, puppetry, projection and paper; *Leningradka* by Cube Theatre, Russia, which utilized multimedia and state of the art visual effects in combination with traditional puppet techniques; and *Hans Christian, You Must be an Angel*, a wondrous and imaginative living theatre installation full of light, sound, music and image.

“I now believe that my students’ digital world is my world as well. I feel comfortable speaking its language, even if my vocabulary is still in its infancy, and sharing knowledge and inspiration with students and colleagues.”

2 Dimensional Life of Her was more spectacle than story. The stunning visual images were almost scary, with layer upon layer of video projections, props, powerful sound effects, gigantic animated puppet-like figures made of either cut paper or just pencil drawings and FIRE! At one moment, the entire room was on fire, flames leaping from giant video screens, the sounds of fire flames crackling and roaring, and we were trapped. Then a woman— the artist/performer appeared and talked to the audience and to her creations, and demanded that they show us

a happy ending. *The Girl From Leningrad* was an anti-fascist puppet show mixed with video and still images of the Siege of Leningrad combined with contemporary video footage. It was a history lesson that I might choose to use for ages 12 and up.

While there were no formal Q & A sessions at the festival as advertised, I was able to make my own connections, boldly approaching directors, technical crew members and/or actors with questions. My question always began with: "How did you do that?" In all instances, I found that the artists were happy to share their process. The director of *Leningradka* spent over half an hour showing me the puppet "backstage," explaining the video process and discussing the content of the piece. The sound and video operator for *Hans Christian* revealed several secrets about how they did surprise effects. He revealed how a puppeteer, hidden under the table, manipulated pop-up miniatures and ran small pulleys that made a magical candelabra drop down from the ceiling. I actually appreciated my self-

styled Q & A sessions more than I would have had I been part of a large group. I came away with useful and practical information about how to replicate visual and multimedia effects.

2011 was a huge year for me both professionally and personally. In addition to the CTG Fellowship, I was the recipient of a Music Center Bravo Award in the Artist Specialist category and was accepted to an intimate, all expense paid media arts retreat at Otis College of Art and Design. I used the funds from the Bravo Award to purchase an iPad and travel to see theatre and cutting edge museum installations. In New York, I saw three plays featuring multimedia elements including *War Horse*, which was the most brilliant stage production I have ever seen. The subject matter, depicting the horrors of war, combined with the visual elements captivated me. The projections and scenic elements were stunning, but it was the puppetry that moved me most. The performance technique that demanded precise manipulation of each huge horse and the reverence the puppeteers showed for their puppets was spellbinding. The overall production was all I might hope for in a theatrical event. In Washington, D.C. I saw the massive *Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S.* by Nam June Paik at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, a video installation made of neon, steel and electronic components which depicted aspects of American life. This gave me many ideas about how to imbed video into my Living Diorama™ projects.

My original objectives, to become well-versed in the use of Mac applications, were met by participation in the Otis media arts five-day retreat where I learned the basics of iMovie, iDVD, and the operation of a high end Canon digital camera that I used to shoot a visual effect. After lugging and setting up equipment and enduring the frustration of malfunctioning high tech devices, I concluded, that although I truly enjoy the process of planning and imagining multimedia effects, my passion lies more in the conception than in the hands-on technical creation. Over the five days I grew to love live theatre even more than I thought. It was reiterated to me again that even the most celebrated and sought after designers work with a crew of people who support their vision.

As I embrace my newfound skills, I am planning a multimedia performance piece with a Sequoyah School teacher that will be focused on Hans Christian Anderson stories and characters. It will incorporate both low and high tech design elements inspired by Teatret Gruppe 38 from Denmark and



Susan Franklin Tanner and a fellow classmate at the Otis College of Art and Design 2011 K-12 teacher retreat.

PHOTO CREDIT KRISTY CAMPBELL.



Susan Franklin Tanner with students at Sequoyah School

a visual artist/participant from the Otis retreat. I am also planning the projection designs for Animal Farm that I will be directing in collaboration with five colleagues at Los Angeles County High School for the Arts.

Through this fellowship, I have gained essential skills that enable me to think “visually” and embrace 21st century technology. I now believe that my students’ digital world is my world as well. I feel comfortable speaking its language, even if my vocabulary is still in its infancy, and sharing knowledge and inspiration with students and colleagues. Just as I create an ensemble through the process of devising and mounting a theatre production, I now see that it often takes an ensemble to create and implement multimedia effects. I look forward to joining my students and colleagues as we explore elements of this wondrous digital world and incorporate what it has to offer into the magic and scope of live theatre! ●

Susan Franklin Tanner teaches theatre at Sequoyah School, a private school in Pasadena and the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts which is run by the Los Angeles County Office of Education in partnership with and on the campus of California State University, Los Angeles. Ms. Tanner has worked for 30-plus years as a Producer, Actor, Director, Teaching Artist and Theatre Consultant.

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