

CENTER THEATRE GROUP  
EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

# Chase Theatre Educators Fellowship: 2010 Chase Fellows Compendium

The Education & Community Partnerships Department receives generous support from the Center Theatre Group Affiliates, a volunteer organization dedicated to bringing innovative theatre and creative education to the young people of Los Angeles.

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#### CENTER THEATRE GROUP'S MISSION

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 arts education programs.

This mission is based on a belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

**Center Theatre Group** is Los Angeles' preeminent non-profit theatre company.

On our three stages — the Ahmanson Theatre, the Mark Taper Forum and the Kirk Douglas Theatre — we present the highest quality and broadest range of theatre: groundbreaking new works, explosive productions of the classics, and hit Broadway plays and musicals.

The same high standards that we apply to our stages extend to our education programs. Our Education and Community Partnerships department accomplishes this by: providing access to students, families and community members; bridging school and work; investing in educators; and supporting quality theatre education in classrooms.

We are proud to continue our tradition of contributing to the culture of our city and to the enrichment of the national theatre community, and we are grateful to our subscribers, donors, and board whose generous support makes our work possible.

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Leslie Johnson (THIRD FROM LEFT) with five teachers who received CTG's Chase Theatre Educators Fellowship Program awards. (L TO R) Brandon Rainey, Jane McEaney, Joanne F. Karr, Patricia Sciortino and Brian Patrick Byrne.  
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ASK ANYONE AT CENTER THEATRE GROUP ABOUT how they got to where they are today, and each of us will undoubtedly mention a memorable teacher who influenced and inspired us to pursue our passion for the theatre. It is well established that teacher quality is one of the most significant school influences on student achievement. Lately, there has been heightened debate in the media about how to prepare and sustain high quality teachers in all areas of the curriculum, including the arts. Teacher professional development is clearly one of the central issues in the school improvement conversation.

Given the clear connections between student success and high quality teacher training, it comes as an unfortunate revelation that the 2008 statewide study of teacher preparation and professional development practices in the arts in California, *An Unfinished Canvas: Teacher Preparation, Instructional Delivery and Professional Development in the Arts*, showed that: "Schools and districts seldom provide sustained, content-based professional development for arts teachers." Where opportunities do exist, few programs are designed to support individual needs and rejuvenate the creative and intellectual spirit that initially brings so many to teaching.

In 2010, Center Theatre Group was pleased to offer the Chase Theatre Educators Fellowship Program as a means to nurture the intellectual and artistic capacity of teachers who lead theatre instruction or regularly integrate theatre into their curriculum. We are delighted to share this compendium of reflections by our inaugural class of Chase Fellows. While each fellow embarked on a unique professional development journey to answer a key research question, in all cases their explorations resulted in so much more.

Through their experiences, each Chase Fellow asked questions, took risks, and challenged themselves in complex ways. For some, taking on the role of student/learner helped them gain new perspectives on their own students. For others, the fellowship was a chance to reconnect deeply with their artistic disciplines and personal creativity, reminding us all of the importance of regular artistic revitalization. For each Chase Fellow, all at different points in their careers, this was a chance to focus on different aspects of teaching and learning; to reflect upon and evaluate their practice.

We hope that our Chase Fellows return to the classroom reinvigorated, motivated to introduce fresh content, and armed with new perspectives on effective teaching methodologies. These diverse stories make clear that professional support for arts teachers is a sound investment, paying immediate dividends and promising almost unimaginable benefits for students and our community.

Read on and be inspired,

Leslie K. Johnson  
Director of Education and Community Partnerships

# About the Chase 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 theatre 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.

Center Theatre Group values the hard work and dedication of theatre educators, and with the support of Chase, is dedicated to making a sustained investment in theatre educators — as instructional leaders, artists and theatre-lovers.

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

① Address critical professional development needs and support the artistic revitalization of dedicated theatre educators in Los Angeles County

② 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.



2010 CHASE THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

## Brian Patrick Byrne

THIS FELLOWSHIP HAS PROVIDED ME WITH an incredibly rewarding professional development experience. With the grant money I received, I was able to attend two major training events in New York: the LiveDesign Broadway Sound/Projection/Lighting Design Master Class Series and the Broadway Teachers Workshop sponsored by Music Theatre International. Both events had significant benefits in helping me to answer my key research question, as well as providing me with unexpected lessons that have helped me in my work as a technical theatre teacher.

Key Research Question: How can I incorporate theatrical design instruction (specifically in the areas of lighting, sound, and projection design) into my middle school and high school technical theatre classes? How can I further mentor students interested in pursuing a professional career in these or other theatrical fields?

The Broadway Design Master Classes provided an opportunity to hear from some of the most renowned designers working in the theatre industry. This gave me access to wonderful material that I can incorporate into my curriculum, as well as insight into how various professionals choose to teach design-related lessons to a group of students. There were two days of classes in sound design, one day of classes in projection design, and finally two days of classes in lighting design.

The sound design classes were way beyond anything I have previously encountered in my training as a theatre designer and/or technician. I quickly realized that these were sound design MASTER classes and perhaps I needed to take a step back and take a few BASIC sound design classes. With that said, I certainly learned a lot more about the scope of sound design. While I had already been teaching my students about creating original sound cues for theatre, I had never explained to them the importance of speaker placement and how determining the installation of the speaker systems is integral and crucial to the design of any theatre production. I still am probably years away from being able to understand all of the physics and design

protocols for fully implemented sound design for professional theatre, so one thing I certainly learned is how much more there is to learn! However, I think I've gained enough knowledge to expand the scope of sound design material I teach to both my middle and upper school classes. I also plan to explore some possibilities for integration between my classes and the science department at my school to teach some of the basic physics of sound waves and the how that directly relates to sound design for live production.

“Something I never considered was how much of what I observed would teach me what I should NOT do when teaching my classes.”

The projection design classes were similar in that I have little background in the field, so some of the learning was over my head. However, it was amazing to again examine the scope that this growing field of entertainment design encompasses and to learn from the talented people working within this industry. I am amazed at how much can go into projection design for theatre, and how much it is used in modern productions. One great example is in the current Broadway production of *Green Day's American Idiot*, which ties together thousands (if not tens or hundreds of thousands) of images to help relay the story of a generation in search of purpose amidst a world where media is an ever-present and growing influence. Many people working in this unique field of design began working in the television and/or film industry and, as such, I see more possibilities for integration. While our school may not have the equipment to implement major projection designs like those seen in professional productions, I certainly would love to explore ways to tie together lessons in my tech theatre classes with the video production classes at our school. I might even get lucky enough to inspire kids interested in video to find a love for theatre through possible projection design projects!

The lighting design classes were more in my area of expertise and, as such, were more accessible for me. I was lucky enough to learn from some of the foremost lighting designers in the industry and got some GREAT ideas that I plan to use in my classes. One wonderful lesson has to do with color and how it affects an audience. It's amazing how one's eye can convince your brain you are seeing "white" light — until you turn on another light that suddenly looks "more white." This is something I learned back in college, but I was reminded how cool it is to see practical demonstrations of this effect. This was the first point during the week of master classes that I began to see some real modeling of how I would like to teach my students about design.

I had always hoped to learn by watching how these professionals teach classes in their respective fields of design and ways I might incorporate those teaching methods. Something I never considered was how much of what I observed would teach me what I should NOT do when teaching my classes. This is not to suggest that these designers are not amazing talented artists and even perhaps great teachers, but particularly in the sound and projection design classes, I really felt like a fish out of water. These "teachers" were throwing information at a group of "students" from the front of the room... information for which I sometimes had no basis or context or way of understanding because it was so new to me. This is exactly how many of my students must feel! Most of them are completely new to technical theatre, and many of them are completely new to the world of theatre itself. From this experience, I learned two important lessons that I will immediately implement in my teaching:

- ▶ Lay a groundwork based on subjects and concepts that any middle or high school student can understand, i.e. starting at the beginning without jumping in too fast.
- ▶ Engage students rather than lecture. This is something I have already considered when teaching my classes, I have always tried to do as much hands-on work with my students as possible. While lecturing may work for some master classes or college-level courses, it does not really serve my students very well.

Since I began teaching five years ago, these master class sessions were my first chance to really understand this and observe the phenomenon from the student's point of view. I felt how difficult it

was to sit and concentrate while someone showed PowerPoint graphs of how sound waves cancel based on the position of speakers. Later in the week, I was lucky enough to be enthralled and engaged by actually turning on lights, playing with color, and switching from tungsten-based lights to LED lights to see if one really can make the same colors and create the same stage pictures and "moods" using differing illumination technologies. That experience in observing various teaching styles, techniques, and lessons was in itself worth the entire trip.

"I am still years away from being able to understand all of the physics and design protocols of sound design, so one thing I certainly learned is how much more there is to learn."

This summer, I also attended the Broadway Teachers Workshop sponsored by Music Theatre International. One of the highlights there was one particular workshop where a panel of university teachers and administrators spoke to us about preparing high school students who wish to apply for admission into any of the country's many spectacular collegiate theatre programs. I certainly was in a unique "niche" at this workshop, as most of the other teachers there work with actors rather than designers and technicians. So while much of the discussion was centered on auditions, I was able to get some great advice regarding helping students prepare a design or technical portfolio. More than anything, I think I learned some great lessons about how many varied programs exist and, again, how much I have still to learn. One goal I have set for myself is that regardless of whether or not I have any students who might be interested in pursuing technical theatre and design beyond high school, I will do research on my own every year to learn as much as I can about college and university programs so that I can be a better first source of information to my students. While the college counselors at my school are amazing, this is such a unique type of program and I wouldn't expect every college counselor to know a lot about technical theatre or theatre design programs. However, I should be very aware of these opportunities for my students!

So where has this left me and how have I answered my original key research question? First and foremost, I am in the process of writing new specific lessons that incorporate theatrical design instruction. I will introduce the broad scope that

sound and projection design maintain in the world of theatre. Later in the fall semester (and to a greater extent in the spring term,) I will implement my new design lessons utilizing hands-on and experiential education techniques. Some examples will include having students experiment to find the "most white" light, how to successfully re-create a specific type of light on the stage (i.e. replicating the look of daylight at noon outside in Los Angeles in the spring), experimenting with speakers to understand constructive and destructive interference of sound waves, and maybe even a video editing project that relates to a concept for a particular theatre production.

Also, with guidance from my colleagues and based on my experiences, I hope to constantly reevaluate and tweak my teaching methods to keep students interested and engaged. I will try to utilize the idea of making sure the students always have something in their hands. While fully aware that some students are kinesthetic learners as opposed to just auditory or visual learners, it is too easy for me to fall back on a lecture and demonstration method of teaching. This year, I will make sure that students have something — a tool, a book, a handout, a laptop... anything that might engage their tactile senses — in their hands while I explain, demonstrate, or even ask them for ideas, questions, and feedback. I believe this technique will lead to much greater success than I have had teaching similar lessons in previous years.

Finally, I hope to maintain a connection with Center Theatre Group to give my students experiences beyond our little high school theatre and classrooms. CTG has introduced me to a world of opportunities here in Los Angeles that I never knew before. From the Target Young Audiences Program to the many amazing facilities that CTG operates, I feel like I have opened a door to new way to engage kids and get them excited about the world of theatre. Regardless of how many of my students pursue further education or a career in theatre, I often view my job as a means of developing lifelong theatergoers who can appreciate all that goes into putting on live theatrical entertainment. I hope to start utilizing some of these spectacular tools that CTG provides to really further this goal within my school and beyond. ●

**Brian Patrick Byrne** is the resident Technical Director and Technical Theatre teacher at Milken Community High School. With a BFA in Theatrical Lighting Design from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, he developed a love for teaching young people about technical theatre while working in theatre venues at the Kingborough Community College in Brooklyn. Brian investigated the following key research question: "How can I incorporate theatrical design instruction (specifically in the areas of lighting, sound, and projection design) into my middle school and high school technical theatre classes?" His fellowship activities included attending the LiveDesign Broadway Master Classes in Lighting, Sound, and Projection Design and the Music Theatre International (MTI) Broadway Teachers Workshop in New York.



2010 CHASE THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

## Joanne F. Karr

AS A 30+ YEAR TEACHING VETERAN, it is easy to become complacent. Although I direct different productions every year, I use many of the same lessons in each production. As each year passed, I found less and less “new” to teach. I have been fortunate to explore many subjects in the humanities through summer courses, but I never had the opportunity to study performance from a performer’s perspective. The Chase Fellowship allowed me the opportunity to be supported through a plan of study of my own design.

I wanted to learn more about acting by doing it. I have always been a behind-the-scenes person in my career as a theatre practitioner. In college, I performed in a couple of very minor roles behind the façade of an extreme character. One summer long ago I took an acting class, but I never got much past the nerves and memorization. Yet, this is what I ask of students everyday: to take the acting skills I am teaching and apply them to performance, both in the classroom and in productions.

My goal was to increase my own experience as an actor in order to become a more effective drama teacher and director. That sounds so simple, but I have spent my professional life producing, directing, and designing — looking at performances from every perspective but the actor’s. I wanted to change that. I hoped that by becoming more of an actor myself, I would become a stronger and more empathetic director and drama teacher; one learns by doing. Growing as an actor myself might seem selfish, but my motivation was not to pursue acting as a new profession or even as an avocation. The wonderful thing about directing high school theatre is that the better director I am, the better the students can be at what they do: acting, writing, designing, even directing for themselves. Experiencing the actor’s “job” first-hand, and then applying the actor’s perspective to productions and backstage workings makes me better at my job.

I knew my major areas of weakness in my recent teaching assignment were my own acting skills and my ability to guide my students through the devising of scripts required by the International Baccalaureate

theatre arts curriculum. Taking a course in acting for directors, interviewing actors, and attending a conference whose keynote event involved attendee’s participation in a devised performance, have helped me address these weaknesses.

Specifically to address acting, I attended the course “Acting for Directors” at the Utah Shakespeare Festival in Cedar City, Utah, which included attendance at productions and accompanying discussions, a backstage tour, and various individualized classes. Participants also were coached in scene and monologue performance by members of the acting company. I was fortunate enough to have the actors playing Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as my coaches. Each treated the assignment differently, and a side benefit of the course was a much deeper understanding of the difference between coaching, which provides guidance and suggestions for performance but leaves all the final decisions to the actor, and directing, which values the ideas of the actor but reserves the decisions and shape of the scene for the director.

“I ask my students to participate in acting classes and rehearse every day, but my own insecurities as a performer had previously caused me to dodge such participation at workshops and conferences.”

One challenge for all actors is long periods on stage with no lines, especially if there is no obvious stage business given. That was exactly the challenge I faced this summer when I was cast in the “3 Weeping Queens” scene from *Richard III*. I played the Duchess of York who has the fewest lines but is onstage for the whole scene. Although easier for memorization, I found my long silences difficult to fill. I had no props and there was nothing in the setting with which to interact. I knew it was

something our director wasn’t concerned with — he trusted me as an actress to fill the moments. I do the same with my inexperienced student actors. The problem was I am also an inexperienced performer. My many years in theatre got me through but now I will try to be a much more attentive director to those not speaking in a scene. I ask my students to participate in acting exercises and rehearse every day but my own insecurities as a performer had previously caused me to dodge such participation at workshops and conferences. To help overcome this issue, I made a point of participating in everything and rehearsing as much as possible throughout my fellowship, and I had fun doing it. I have always known participation leads to active learning — it was nice to prove that again to myself. I found there is no trick to learning lines, just as I have always told my students. Everyone finds the best way for him/her. Mine was endless repetition to the point where no thought was needed to say the right words. I found I needed more time to accomplish that than I had previously needed. Sharing this experience with my students is likely to make them more comfortable with the memorization process.

Basic physical and vocal exercises are a weak area in my teaching; and the course included daily practice in both of those areas. Stage combat, an aspect of theatre about which I know little, but is one where my students always show enthusiasm, was also covered. I found the movement and combat workshops more strenuous than I had anticipated, but still possible. I am now more aware of adjusting physical workshops to the comfort level of the participants, but I also know my students are a lot younger than I am. In addition, the scene study from Shakespeare’s plays demonstrated that it is always difficult to teach in a manner that promotes understanding and interest for the modern student. Based on these classes, I am now designing new and changed units on acting, combat, performance critique, and Shakespeare for my course syllabi in the coming year.

My key research question was, “How does approaching a play text as an actor differ from approaching it as a director/designer/teacher?” I found that in many ways, it does not differ. All the artists must have a thorough understanding of every word of the text and the play’s context and history. What is done with that understanding may differ, but the initial study and breakdown is very similar. The difference I did find is hard to explain. The director/designer/teacher is always concerned with everything, rarely having time to linger over any single detail, especially when one is doing



Joanne F. Karr (BOTTOM LEFT) with staff and students at the Randall L. Jones Theatre at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. PHOTO FROM CTG2010CHASEFELLOW-KARR.BLOGSPOT.COM.

educational theatre. As an actor, I had the luxury, but also the incredible challenge, of bringing my role to full life every time, and for the most part, only concerning myself with that. I hope I give my students a better appreciation of giving good performances. I believe that as a director I am better able to bring them to that level of performance. It is hard to know exactly when an experience or something an actor has said to me in an interview or a rehearsal will become important in class, but as I present material, I share what I heard as appropriate. For example, in discussing auditions, I have shared specific stories actors gave me about not being cast. Because a professional had the experience, the information takes on more value to the students. As the students attempt their own performances, I can talk about my successes and failures in memorization, character creation, filling silences, etc.

Perhaps most importantly, I have found new twists to old lessons, new material, and a renewed enthusiasm for what I do as a theatre educator. This is something I will need more than ever as budget challenges and more insurance and administrative restrictions increase the temptation to consider an early retirement. I don’t consider this past teaching year to have been among my best, but I have a feeling this year will be a very good one.

Addressing the difficulty of teaching the skill of devising material to American students was not in my original fellowship plan, however, the opportunity arose to be an active participant in a devised piece at the national conference I was able to attend because of the Fellowship. I am familiar with “devising” from having taught in the United Kingdom, but it has not been a common part of the American theatre curriculum until very recently. “Devising” asks an individual or group to create a performance piece from some type of stimulus, anything from a piece of written prose or poetry to a piece of music or art to a map or myth. That performance piece ultimately has a script of some sort, characters, setting, costumes, etc. Participating in the devising of a piece and then performing in it at the AATE (American Alliance of Theatre and Education) Annual Conference was an opportunity to not only put to work newly learned acting skills, but gain firsthand devising practice. I found that the false starts of the devising were perhaps the most important aspect of that experience. My students want their first ideas to work, and they each want their own ideas to become part of the final product. Sharing my process of developing material should help my students be more patient with themselves. I hope their collaboration and appreciation of the process, not just the product, will increase.

Joanne Karr is in her eleventh year of teaching drama at Walnut High School in the Walnut Valley Unified School District, having taught previously for the Los Angeles Unified School District at Hollywood High School and Westchester High School for over twenty years. She is a 2009 Music Center Bravo Award recipient and a two time Fulbright Exchange Teacher to the UK. Joanne investigated the following key research question: “How does approaching a play text as an actor differ from approaching it as a director/designer/teacher?” Her fellowship activities included attending “Acting for Directors” at the Utah Shakespeare Festival in Cedar City, Utah, viewing productions, touring facilities, visiting museums, and conducting interviews at the Tuachan Amphitheatre in St. George, Utah, and the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego.



2010 CHASE THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

## Jane McEneaney

TO TEACH THE WORLD, I MUST GO INTO THE WORLD, bring back its stories, and create a map that leads FROM the heart, TO the heart. My mission is to inspire a social conscience in my students and I believe theatre is a way to understand our place in the world and create a more compassionate student body. My role is to collect the shoes of children across the globe so that my students can try them on and discover what it’s like to walk in them, to discover how the shoe fits, where it rubs the skin into blisters, and how to relish the comfort and manage the blistered toe. I am not seeking reasons why my students should show pity or sympathy. I search for common ground between the students of Turning Point School, a private school in Culver City, California and students elsewhere in the world. The motto of the theatre program at our school is UBUNTU, an African phrase meaning *I am because we are*. As part of my fellowship, I proposed exploring this philosophy by traveling to New Orleans and asking these key research questions: Is there a universal story that must be told? How do we tell that story? Is it better to forget and move on, or is it essential to remember?

“I have always known participation leads to active learning — it was nice to prove that again to myself.”

Acting is often about trust. Learning about my struggles and identifying with them should broaden that trust. Students often want demonstrations of what I assign. Since I have felt unskilled, I have been somewhat reluctant to give what I thought might be a poor demonstration. Increasing my own confidence as a performer should help with this objective. Thinking one can do something is a huge contributor to success, whether it is in teaching it or learning it. Throughout the activities of the Fellowship, I learned by doing. I acted, something I have not really done since college. I studied texts, saw plays, spoke with actors, and heard presentations. I am returning to school feeling more enthusiastic. Some of my lessons will change and there will be some new ones. As a director, I hope I will be sensitive to my actors, but I also have renewed confidence that what I’m asking is possible, if not easy. I feel as though I still have a lot to offer my students, something I unfortunately had begun to doubt. ●

“I suddenly discovered that I was expecting them to eat meat and they were just learning to drink milk!”

I volunteered at the North Rampart Community Center (NOLA) in New Orleans, which serves African-American youth through summer camp and after-school initiatives. I worked at the center for four weeks, five days a week, eight hours a day.

In the first week, I engaged the children in a variety of theatre games, songs, chants, and rhythm stomps to create a common language and establish our space as safe, trusting, and joyful. Writing assignments given to the children were exploratory in nature, but not invasive. During our second week, I encouraged the students to take risks and used a variety of exercises to provoke discussion and reflection. I provided formats for their written



The silhouette represents one of the six boys who performed. We traced their bodies onto butcher paper, painted them black and then added words from their writings using a white paint pen. They were hung from the gym’s balcony for the performance.

PHOTO FROM CTG2010CHASEFELLOW-MCENEANEY.BLOGSPOT.COM.

expression, which was a great help to them in organizing their thoughts and determining their topics. With barely a nudge, they spilled open and their light began to shine. As we progressed from written word and games to the rehearsal process, the light beamed brighter and brighter — this is the same light I see in my students here in Culver City. Miss Joanne Finley, Executive Director of NOLA, made a powerful speech after a particularly challenging day. She preached that every child is precious and warned us not to feed them meat when what they need is milk. This simple statement became a guidepost.

I gathered the students in a circle and asked them to step forward if the statement I made applied to them. A variety of statements were presented. When I asked if they plan to attend college, all but one stepped in. Many of these children read and write below a third grade level, yet they stepped. Despite their hardships at home or struggles at school, they stepped. Their eyes are set on the future. Katrina had not changed any of that. I arrived expecting to hear Katrina stories. Instead, I heard Kora stories, and Zion stories, and Alex stories. I heard stories NOT about a storm but about children. The common ground I sought was laid out before me.

I followed this exercise with my next demand: MAKE YOUR STATEMENT. And they did. Essential to the child's development is the notion that he/she is heard, that the adults are listening. I offered my truth to the children in New Orleans and, in return, they offered theirs. They told their truth and I didn't squash it. I allowed them to write about everything, the good and the bad, in a fear-free environment. When they acted out, I met them in volume and ferocity and, together, we found respect.

Every day, Coach Parker, NOLA's Program Director, would acknowledge to the staff that we all want order in our classrooms though, most days, we won't have order. He hammered home that we could not and would not give up on anyone, nor would we change our standards. We would demand more and we would get more. It is not about hiding the ugly and celebrating the beautiful moments. It's all about the truth.

My New Orleans students experienced theatre for the first time in their lives. They have had few, if any, opportunities to perform in public. They are scared to stand in front of an audience and they are not ready to let us know how much they love saying those lines. On show day, the energy was at an apex. The kids were anxious, but focused and committed as well. I could feel fear radiating off their little, loud bodies. For many of my NOLA tribe, the solution for



Jane McEneaney and "The Big Boys" on the last day of class. PHOTO FROM CTG2010CHASEFELLOW-MCENEANEY.BLOGSPOT.COM.

fear is to numb the face and body so no one knows how they're feeling — whether it is happiness or terror. They reduce their emotional capacity to 50%. Vulnerability is just not acceptable. I was sincerely hoping that these children would behave like my Culver City children, who always deliver on show day, who surprise me every time with new creative impulses, incredible commitment, and unabashed joy. I was hoping the North Rampart boys and girls would do the same...I suddenly discovered that I was expecting them to eat meat and they were just learning to drink milk!

I forgot that they live a different life and have a different way of tackling challenges. And I relaxed and rejoiced that they had this moment in time to experience the charge between audience and performer. I love that they had this beautiful privilege to execute a job well done. Did our performance sparkle the way it had in the safety of our classroom? Not really. But it sparkled in a different way. And it provided nourishment. This I know without reserve.

Is there a universal story to be told? Yes, there is. It is the story of the good that lies in every child, rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate. Every child believes his/her dream will come true and that "in spite of everything... people are really good at heart." Time is often spent among educators discussing how to teach the child of privilege and how to teach the underserved. Having done both in extreme settings, I find that all this discussion is nonsense. The universal story is not connected to things past or even things present. It is all about hope, and a future that burns bright.

We must be the creators of material, the catalysts for young writers and new stories. We cannot do this if we stay safely ensconced in the darkness of our black boxes. We must venture out and do what all good actors do: listen! And then we must bring back all we have heard and share it with our students,

to let them decide how the story should be told and to open the portal between students across the country and, hopefully, across the world. Hence:

► I am beginning the process of adapting the novel, *Ruby's Imagine* by Kim Antieau, into a play and or musical, using the writings of the children of New Orleans to further develop the characters and embellish the storyline. The dialogue and music of the Hurricane Katrina story will be developed to suit the middle school student.

► I am offering a new theatre course this year entitled Actor's Workshop: MAKE YOUR STATEMENT. The curriculum will mirror what was done in New Orleans, with further writing and performance opportunities in connection with the *Ruby's Imagine* project.

► Rather than choosing a show from the Broadway Junior collection, this year's Winter Musical will be developed through a writing/trust process similar to the New Orleans model. Using song repertoire from the standard Broadway canon, students will chronicle the audition and rehearsal process by writing original scenes and monologues. Together, a unique musical theatre experience will be crafted and performed by, for and about the Turning Point Middle School students, rooted in the truth of their daily lives. I am eager to see the light burning brightly from this theatre tribe, the same light that beamed from my NOLA students, the light that is the universal story that we are obligated to tell and to celebrate.

► I realize that the scope of my theatrical mission cannot be adequately accomplished within the confines of a school day. Neither can it be accomplished if the adults in charge fear the outcome and the children's truths. I am now committed to establishing the Ubuntu Center here in Los Angeles, where children can express themselves creatively and receive the skills and personal support to help them achieve their goals.

I loved being with the New Orleans kids. I miss each and every child. I love the North Rampart Community Center for believing in each child, seeing each one individually, and never giving up on any of them. I loved living in the truth there. It felt right. I am amazed to discover that the safe environment I tried to create for my students was likewise created for me.

As I boarded the plane for LAX, I said a quiet prayer of thanks for this journey. There is no doubt that I returned to Culver City this September a better

teacher. Whether the curriculum calls for meat or milk — either way — I am ready. ●

*I am Fire and Light.*

—Zion, NOLA student

*I am a black man rising.*

—Alex, NOLA student

*You ask me who I am. I am the future.*

—Aspen, NOLA student

Jane McEneaney is the Performing Arts Coordinator for Turning Point School in Culver City. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan with a Master's of Music in Voice Performance, currently serves as a Board Member-at-Large for the California Educational Theatre Association and was a 2009 finalist for the Music Center Bravo Award. Jane investigated the following key research questions: "How do we tell universal stories? What happens when students actually meet and interact with the characters in the stories they tell?" Her fellowship involved traveling to New Orleans for a four-week workshop at the Lower 9th Ward Village community center. In collaboration with James Leceesne of After the Storm Foundation, she conducted theatre workshops for teens wishing to tell their stories from Hurricane Katrina.



2010 CHASE THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

# Brandon Rainey

OUR SOCIETY IS BEING INUNDATED WITH THE RISE OF GANGS IN OUR COMMUNITIES. A plethora of after-school and art programs is in decline due to budget cuts. In the midst of what's going on our youth are being caught in the crossfire. Many of our students are giving up hope because they feel like they are living in a society that does not care whether they live or die. I know because I was one of these kids, too. Growing up on welfare in a single parent home, I needed an outlet. I searched for a way to allow my voice to be heard and found it when I picked up a pen and began to create characters that spoke up for me and shared the secret things that were on my mind. The arts literally saved my life.

My goal is to give students in urban communities this same opportunity. As someone who once was a student of the arts and is now an educator, I want to inspire an appreciation for the arts and create a realm where each student can grow into the leaders they have been called to be. This means that the arts are not just a mere recreational activity but something that stirs inside of them daily. My proposal was to make this dream a reality by turning a group of students into a gang who uses the arts as their "weapons of warfare". I embarked on a research question that was both scary and exciting — to learn what it would take to build a gang of young artists who used the arts as their weapons and then actually begin doing it.

I hooked up with the D.A.R.E program and Success Through The Arts Foundation (STTAF). I sat down with several D.A.R.E. staff members to discuss their successes and failures. I was intrigued to study this program — once a huge success in the community. The D.A.R.E. school sites coordinator allowed me to direct a skit for three of the schools connected to their program, which allowed me to get some hands on experience working with students who were not my own. I was able to modernize these old school skits and make them relevant to the issues our youth are facing, the main issue still being drug addiction. STTAF is dedicated to using the arts as a catalyst for the education of students who have been traditionally underserved by public schools, underrepresented in higher education, and deprived

of opportunities that could enable them to realize rich and productive lives. The key to their success is using young people to help teach other young people. In the quest to build a gang, discipleship is a big part of the success of any gang. From this collaboration I was able to look at all the strategies this organization embraced to pull off this system of "Kids helping Kids" and begin to make sure that our students are ready for such a responsibility.

I started the next phase of the fellowship at the Music Theatre International Broadway Teachers Workshop in New York, a city I always dreamed of visiting. Dressed in my usual urban clothes and being the youngest one in the room at the age of 24, there were some questions about my position as an educator. I also discovered that I was only one out of seven African Americans in the room.

"But even with all the wonders of the show, I was more amazed to find I was the only person of African American descent sitting in the orchestra section of the theatre and, once again, one of the youngest adults."

As the workshop progressed, I came to realize that my briefcase of musical songs is quite limited. Even with all my studies at Morehouse College and in high school there was still so much about musical theater that I did not know. I paused to think about my students and how they are often foreign to the material being discussed. I started to think about the students who would go on to college and feel inferior to all of the other people in the room like I was feeling at that time.

A highlight of the trip to New York was attending all of the productions. This is where I learned the most and was challenged to enhance my skills to new heights. The very first show and most special to me was the musical *Wicked*. The show was



Brandon Rainey (FAR RIGHT) and the pilot group of students. PHOTO FROM BRANDON RAINEY.

amazing from start to finish and filled with so many surprises that I felt overwhelmed. But even with all the wonders of the show, I was more amazed to find I was the only person of African American descent sitting in the orchestra section of the theatre, and once again, one of the youngest adults. This is when I realized the plight of the theater world. The urban community is so detached from this kind of experience and I once again thought about the kids in my community who grew up just like me having never experienced something like this. I was emotional with tears of joy thinking about where I was.

The next show I saw was *Promises, Promises* which was a very comedic production that I thought was well put together. I also took a chance at seeing a new show called *Fela!*. There was an interesting buzz about this show being different and something worth the money so I purchased a ticket to see the production. From the moment I walked into the theatre the show was active and it incorporated certain elements of technology and film. I grabbed my journal and took note of this thinking I could borrow this directorial concept in a future production. The final production was a new musical called *Memphis*. I have always been a history person and I liked how this musical was drenched in the history of my people and the music world. I started to think about a project for my students and how they could tell their stories and make connections to historical events.

Coming back to Los Angeles, I held auditions for students I could use to pilot a new production incorporating all I learned. Out of all those who auditioned, I got a good group of students who were ready to embark on a journey that would transform their lives. I worked with students to create scripts based on their own life stories and brought in other

professionals to help with writing music. We were unable to secure a theatre for the actual production due to limited funds and time, but this process helped me realize we accomplished something more powerful than putting up a great show. These students wrote scripts based on their own lives and fell in love with the arts so much that even when I had to break the news to them that the production would be canceled, they kept coming to edit and critique their scripts and help put together some video footage of the project.

As I look forward to starting a new school semester in a newly promoted position, I feel so much more equipped in my current job directing elementary to high school students and in continuing to make my fellowship goal a reality. As I look around my community I see the incredible need to open doors for new generations who can experience the arts. I do believe that if they can keep building gangs, then those of us in the arts can too build a gang of arts students. "If not now, then when? If not me, then who?" I am enlightened and challenged and because of this fellowship I will continue to carry the torch to change lives through the arts! ●

**Brandon Rainey** is the Drama Director of the Inner City Education Foundation Public School's Fernando Pullum Performing Arts High School and Lou Dantzler Middle & High School. A graduate of Morehouse College with a BA in Drama, he started teaching in 2007 when he accepted a position at Washington Preparatory High School, making him one of the youngest full-time teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Brandon investigated the following key research question: "If we can build gangs in our communities then why can't we build a gang that uses the arts as their weapons?" His fellowship activities included partnering with a mentor at Success Through the Arts Foundation and participating in the Music Theatre International (MTI) Broadway Teachers Workshop in New York.



2010 CHASE THEATRE EDUCATOR FELLOW

## Patricia Sciortino

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO MY FELLOWSHIP GOAL. I wanted to use the sketch comedy writing process as a strategy for teaching basic writing skills to my middle school twice-exceptional (2e) learners, “students who exhibit remarkable strengths and gifts in some areas and problematic weaknesses in others” (Baum, Owen 2004). Imagine that your mind creates exciting stories, but you can’t organize your ideas to express them in writing. One student aptly described this disparity, shared by many 2e students, as, “What I think in paragraphs, I can only speak in sentences and barely write in words.”

The learning disabilities of 2e learners often mask their great gifts, and this is most true in any type of written expression. I believed that the sketch comedy writing process would tap into their unique perspectives and strengths of intellect and humor while also motivating them to push through their writing challenges. Their attention and memory deficits would be supported by the short-term objectives. Scaffolded instruction and the opportunities for diverse learning styles would help build personal self-efficacy through successful task completion.

I proposed to take a three-week intensive sketch comedy writing class in New York City to accomplish this goal and then slip smoothly back into my classroom with all the knowledge needed to help my students achieve their potential. Someone up there in 2e teacher heaven was laughing at my arrogance.

The reality was that “know” and “how” are two very different aspects of learning. British philosopher, Gilbert Ryle, describes these two distinct elements of content mastery as “knowing that” and “knowing how.” As it turned out, I was catapulted into the real emotional world of my 2e learners when they are forced to work in their areas of weakness during writing production. In the sketch comedy class, I learned and understood the concepts of the content, “knowing that,” but I could not appropriately produce this knowledge, “knowing how.” The true meaning of the words that were printed on a banner stretched across the back of

our classroom, “Follow the Fear” suddenly became crystal clear to me; nothing mediocre would ever become more than average unless one followed the fear through to mastery. This sometime took more courage than what, even I, a mature adult, could summon up.

“The sketch comedy writing class took me on a side trip into an area of my own weakness.”

The sketch comedy writing class took me on a side trip into an area of my own weakness. It allowed me to explore my own social and emotional challenges and how these could arise when 2e students are unable to consistently meet instructional goals and then hit an impasse. Many 2e learners are perfectionists and have high expectations, and the disappointment in not being able to meet these expectations is reason enough to stop trying. To fail publicly, in front of peers, puts the 2e learners in a situation where their only means of personal and social survival is giving up and becoming silent and/or getting out of the classroom as often as possible or not even coming to school. Even as an adult learner with mature self-advocacy skills, an identity in my areas of strength and a fairly healthy ego, admittedly, I wasn’t ecstatic about going into a classroom where I did not shine. My class participation in the sketch writing class began to diminish. I had begun as a strong contributor to class discussion and soon became anxious about reading my sketches aloud and hesitant in offering constructive criticism to my peers; if I couldn’t produce a perfect sketch myself, why would they trust my opinions about their sketches?

Where did the breakdown happen, and what could the teacher have done to prevent or diminish the negative experience for me? Most importantly, how do I, as a teacher of sensitive 2e perfectionists, convince them that the scariest and most uncomfortable choice of all, following the fear, is the only choice that will bring them closer

to skill mastery? Ah, new research questions requiring answers that are vital in meeting my original goal.

In the perspective of creating a safe and engaging learning environment for those who will face challenges in the writing process and even those who won’t, I would:

- ▶ Scaffold explicit instruction
- ▶ Provide opportunities for diverse learning styles (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic)
- ▶ Use multiple rubrics paralleling each phase of the scaffold
- ▶ Differentiate
- ▶ Provide the opportunity for collaborative and independent class work
- ▶ Set clear behavior protocol for critiquing peer work
- ▶ List “follow the fear,” a natural part of any challenging learning process, as an objective on each rubric.

Rubrics will help my students break down the production process into explicit skills and short term goals. Along this line, I will use a new rubric for each phase of the production process to keep the information and goals from being too overwhelming. If necessary, I will differentiate goals and align a specific student’s rubric objectives appropriate to his skill level. Hopefully, this strategy will focus the student on his or her individual progress and skill development instead of toward peer comparison.

Many 2e learners are visual/spatial learners and need visual input. There are no DVDs or clips on YouTube on essay writing that would engage the visual learner, but there are many well-known sketch comedy groups, both online and on DVD, for visual learners to use to identify the elements of the sketch writing process and analyze how the appropriate goals were successfully met. I will then have them develop their sketches through use of storyboarding, where their strong visual gifts can lead them through the writing process.

Other 2e learners are kinesthetic/spatial learners and need a kinesthetic approach to writing. After watching DVDs or clips of comedy sketches, I will use the improvisation process to help them literally “step into the shoes” of the sketch writer and use their high verbal intelligence and humor to create a sketch collaboratively with their co-actors. They will be encouraged to keep the dialogue that works and keep re-working the sketch on their feet until it meets appropriate sketch writing goals.

A digital recorder can be used to help them remember the development of dialogue from beat to beat. This was the learning style and explicit instruction that I was missing in my sketch comedy class; understandably, there was just no time for it in a three-week intensive class.

These strategies would provide ample opportunities to assess each student’s individual skill mastery and to proceed based on those observations and assessments. Student writers who are ready to write independently should do so. Those writers who need outside support should be paired with a more skilled peer or put in a mixed ability group. When impasses are hit, students can experiment with improvisation, transferring the learning to the kinesthetic mode to solve the problem. This will also allow the class as a whole to contribute constructive criticism.

If “follow the fear” is to be a goal in the classroom, it is essential that a positive and safe learning environment is provided the learners. Taking risks in front of one’s peers makes a learner vulnerable to inappropriate comments unless both the teacher and the students set a strict behavior code. The students must help set the code to buy into the code and must willingly follow the rules. It is up to the instructor to teach the appropriate way to give constructive criticism, literally putting the right words into the students’ mouths. This will keep the classroom a safe place to make mistakes and to stay motivated regardless.

This fellowship experience reminded me of my students’ emotional challenges and how these challenges directly impact their self-esteem. I was reminded how difficult it is not to compare one’s own skills to those of peers and to keep enough self-confidence afloat to publicly make mistakes and carry on anyway. I learned that development of 2e writers’ skills requires nurturing a certain emotional disposition so they can achieve skill mastery and task completion, because even before one word hits the paper, they must be ready and willing to follow the fear. ●

Patricia Sciortino was the middle and high school drama teacher at Bridges Academy, an independent school that educates Twice — Exceptional or “2e” students — students who are gifted or highly gifted and have some form of learning difference or disability. She began teaching over ten years ago at a school for students with language-based learning differences. Patricia investigated the following key research question: “How will the process of sketch comedy writing positively impact the personal self-efficacy of “2e” learners and motivate them to produce in all forms of written expression?” Her fellowship included participation in a three-week sketch comedy writing intensive at the Peoples Improv Theater in New York.