

2011 Chase Theatre Educators Fellows Key Research Questions



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. Serving on the CA State Thespian board since 1993, she is in her second term as the EdTA CA State Chapter Director. Krista also serves on the board of the California Educational Theatre Association (CETA) as Co-Chair of the New Teacher Committee, and as the Region I (Western United States) Representative on the EdTA Educational Policy Working Group to study issues and help promote national policies that impact K-12 Theatre Education. Ms. Carson Elhai is a two-time Finalist for the LA Music Center Bravo Award.

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?”



AILEEN GENDRANO teaches english and theatre at Mendez Learning Center 1A (School of Math and Science) in Los Angeles Unified School District. Ms. Gendrano is a native Angeleno. She graduated from California State University, Long Beach with a Bachelor in English Education and two years later graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a Masters of Education. She has always been passionate about reading, writing, and theatre which are continuously strengthened with the work that is done in her classroom. Ms. Gendrano currently works in inner-city Los Angeles, teaching both 10th grade English and Beginning Drama. Her curriculum is centered on the themes of identity, community and social justice as tools for student empowerment.

Key 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?”



HELEN A. PAPAPOPOULOS teaches math and theatre at Suzanne Middle School in the Walnut Unified School District. Ms. Papadopoulous has been working with the theatre program at Suzanne for the past 26 years and this is her first year teaching the theatre class. She is a National Board Certified teacher and a 2007 California Teacher of the year. In addition to teaching theatre, Ms. Papadopoulous incorporates performing arts activities into her math curriculum as a part of her commitment to differentiated instruction.

Key Research Question:

“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.)”



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. Franklin Tanner has worked for 30-plus years as a Producer, Actor, Director, Teaching Artist and Theatre Consultant. As the founder and Producing/Artistic Director of TheatreWorkers Project, she led the nationally recognized company in the development of 12 documentary plays including “Lady Beth: the steelworkers’ play” that was performed during a 16 city tour co-sponsored by Bruce Springsteen and profiled in a PBS documentary. In partnership with Shakespeare Center/LA, she directs Audition Prep workshops and Will Play Summer Theatre Conservatory.

Ms. Franklin Tanner holds a CTE credential in Arts, Media and Entertainment. She is a 2011 recipient of the Music Center Bravo Award and was recently invited by the Harvard Educational Review to submit an article about her experiences creating theatre with immigrant youth.

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?”