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Arguably more than any previous generation, students graduating from university programs in the twenty-first century need a comprehensive repertoire of essential skills for their rapidly evolving world. Undergraduate theatre training offers a wide range of those skills. In response to Glen Nichols's prompt for the CATR panel discussions, I conducted an informal assessment of skills that are generated in Canadian theatre programs (2017) based on an available 1994 rubric for "Arts Education Standards and Twenty-First Century Skills."[1] Analytical reasoning, information literacy, invention, self-direction, collaboration, and technological integration are examples of the competencies developed through effective undergraduate theatre studies programs; however, they are often the "hidden curriculum" (Jackson) little recognized by theatre educators and university administrators. There are limiting factors in the successful mining of the hidden curriculum for the benefit of our students including a lack of adequate teacher training for existing and incoming faculty (Pagen 223). Notwithstanding these factors, undergraduate theatre programs can provide a forum for the development of necessary skills for the twenty-first-century student.

Philip Jackson coined the term "hidden curriculum" in 1968 to describe the beliefs and values that are taught to students implicitly rather than explicitly through a given curriculum by instructors or administrative practices in a department or institution. In 1985 Elliot Eisner expanded on this concept with the term "null curriculum" which is the subject matter that is consciously or subconsciously excluded in the curriculum as well as the cognitive processes that are not nurtured in the classroom or coursework versus those that are. Within post-secondary theatre education the hidden curriculum can be found in various forms such as the misalignment between prescribed learning outcomes and actual theatre practice. For example, dissonant or inconsistent messages regarding representations of gender, race, or ability in performance promoted in the classroom setting versus script selection and casting practices in on-campus department-sponsored productions. Following are examples of the hidden curriculum in current undergraduate theatre courses that are essential liberal arts skills and knowledge for the twenty-first-century student.

Analytical reasoning is developed in many theatre courses through activities like script analysis, character interpretation, marketing, and production planning exercises that facilitate development of the ability to respond through written, digital, and verbal communication mediums.

Communication, information and technology literacy is developed through application of all other information systems that students are familiar with as applied to theatrical practice,

whether this be historical research, politics, social media, scenographic rendering, etc. Using digital technology as a communication, research, or production tool (e.g. lighting, projection, sound creation, and operation) theatre students learn to appropriately access, evaluate, and integrate information systems into their daily and artistic practice. Using digital technology as a research tool can develop a fundamental understanding of the ethics and legalities of access to information and dissemination of information.

Invention. Theatre is invention; every production contains invention of script, character, environment, etc., necessary to serve the needs of the performance. Invention requires creativity, innovation, and an entrepreneurial spirit. Creative work that is original in thought and execution is a central concern in theatre training and possibly the most complex concept to teach. Students who can tap into creativity demonstrate an ability and willingness to draw on any number of sources in order to generate an outcome and problem solve by being open and responsive to the media and materials available to them. These traits in combination lead to inventive outcomes not only in theatre work but also across disciplinary lines.

Self-direction, flexibility, adaptability, and collaboration are necessary in the communal practice of theatre. Within production-oriented theatre departments, students are encouraged and required to make the transition from learner to leader to serve the needs of productions. Theatre training in performance and production streams provides students with hands-on experience in adapting to a wide range of responsibilities and roles in addition to learning how to cope and excel in an atmosphere of rapidly shifting priorities. Students who experience being part of an ensemble or production team learn to collaborate while maintaining a specific role or purpose within a group setting. With theatre training, students can become self-directed, self-motivated learners through reflexive practice. In production, theatre students must navigate hierarchies and communicate detailed information in a respectful and efficient manner. Students learn to meet high standards of accountability, delivering an expected quality of work on time (tech week, dress rehearsals, opening night) while modeling expectations for a positive work ethic (e.g. preparedness, punctuality). Operating within a business model based on production schedules and concrete timelines provides opportunities similar to co-op placements or residencies.

Technological integration. Today's undergraduates are digital natives who view technology as a matter of everyday existence.[2] The theatre has always adopted and adapted new technology for its own benefit and continues to demonstrate adaptive use of technologies developed for other disciplines. In theatre, synthesis of historical information with modern ideologies is encouraged. Integration and interdisciplinary use of technology across the arts is increasing and as such students are able to compare, contrast, and challenge technologically constructed meanings across a range of media.

Consideration of how best to access the hidden curriculum in theatre studies must be accompanied by investigation of the null curriculum. An honest audit of what is not being taught and why is a necessary part of developing a strong curriculum and pedagogy that best serves the students. Theatre educators should be encouraged to "un-hide" the hidden curriculum

and challenge the null curriculums. Often, course outlines and syllabi are inherited from previous instructors and content repeated without careful assessment of the evolving needs of students or the individual strengths of the teacher (Pagen; Salzer 152). Theatre educators in a post-secondary setting need the support of administration to emphasize and realize the broader benefits of theatre training in a liberal arts degree. Learning takes place inclusive of, beyond, and in spite of how the technical and theoretical skills of theatre are presented. A liberal arts education grounded in theatre and performance that is cognizant of implicit, hidden, and null curriculums provides not only a discipline-specific set of skills and knowledge, but also a cross-disciplinary range of abilities and intelligences.

Notes

1 Prepared by the College Board for the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards in the US.
2 See Prensky.

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