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Towards a Culturally Responsive Directing Practice

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Towards a Culturally Responsive Directing Practice

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Dedication

For Grandma CC

You refused to drink out of a White drinking fountain just because you could

You sent your White children to a school where they were the racial minority

You were the first feminist I knew

You always, always spoke your mind

You never, never let things slide

You never backed down from a fight

You stopped people in stores and told them to stop spanking their children

Or not to talk to their wife like that

You were in the streets

Holding signs

Fighting for justice until the absolute end...

I promise I won't stop.

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Abstract

Towards a Culturally Responsive Directing Practice

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Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) is an approach to classroom teaching that draws on students' unique strengths, and seeks to improve the effectiveness of instruction for minority students by teaching through students' individual culture. CRP also concerns itself with curriculum that offers accurate, comprehensive, and diverse representations of people of all ethnic backgrounds. This thesis explores the process of applying the principles of CRP to the context of rehearsing and producing professional theatre. The professional theatre suffers from a lack of diversity, and many theatre artists are without a standardized approach to directing and producing theatre with thoughtful racial and ethnic representation in mind. Building on the scholarship and research surrounding CRP, as well as current discourses concerning diversity and representation in the field of theatre, this document explores the application of CRP principles, specifically *caring-in-action* and *valuing diverse curriculum*, to the process of directing the Latino play *Tomás and the Library Lady* by José Cruz González. This study invites theatre artists to consider

the importance of diverse, authentic representation both onstage and off, and offers some possible frameworks for culturally responsive directing.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In her article, “Why I Almost Slapped a Fellow Theatre Patron, and What it Says About Our Theatres,” African American playwright Dominique Morisseau recounts a recent run-in she had while attending a performance at a well-respected regional theatre. Morisseau was laughing and vocally responding to the work, when an elderly White¹ audience member asked her to “keep it down.” Morisseau, who had assisted in the play’s development and was engaging with the work as the show’s author intended, responded that she would enjoy the show as she pleased.

According to Morisseau, this is not an isolated incident, but a regular experience that people of color face when attending the theatre. Morisseau calls this phenomenon a “white privilege problem and an elitism problem.” She asserts that while patrons are often guilty of this behavior, the institutions and staff share the blame for creating an environment that

marginalizes audiences of color and tells them that they are not fully welcome in the theatre, except by permission of the white audience. It tells the upper-middle-class white audience that theatre is their home first and the rest of us are just guests. (Morisseau)

It took only a brief review of some of the US theatre’s institutional choices this past year to provide further examples of Morisseau’s claims.

In November of 2015 a director at Kent State University made the decision to cast a White actor in the role of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in a production of Katori Hall’s

¹ A note on the capitalization of “White”: My research draws on the work of many authors who choose not to capitalize the word “White” when referring to race. Roxanne Schroeder-Arce describes this choice on her part as a way to “interrupt the privilege the word carries with it” (2). After deliberation, I chose to capitalize the word “White” in my own writing to acknowledge Whiteness as a distinct race, rather than a neutral group, or an absence of race. When quoting other authors, I honor their choice to either capitalize or not capitalize this word.

² *American Theatre Magazine* recently published several articles addressing minority representation,

The Mountaintop. Hall condemned the choice as a form of racial erasure against black bodies. She writes:

Even in the theatre we are still fighting silencing, erasure. But our experiences and the brown skin that shapes them need to be witnessed. Our stories are worthy of that pedestal we call the stage, and our black bodies must stand unaltered in that spotlight. (Hall)

In August of 2015, Manhattan Theatre Club, a company whose mission includes a commitment to produce work “as broad and diverse as New York itself” (“About MTC”), sparked a public outcry when they released their 2015-16 season, featuring seven plays by White men. Playwright Paula Vogel challenged the privileged, segregationist implications of the season by challenging, “Would you drink from a water fountain that says ‘White’ above it because you can?” (qtd. in Collins-Hughes). This rhetorical question calls on people in positions of privilege to serve as better allies to artists of color whose work is continually passed over.

In the time it has taken for me to collect these stories, many more like them have emerged. Whitewashing, cultural appropriation, casting that ranges from questionable to harmful, and a persistent lack of diverse representation continues to plague the theatre. However, there is another trend emerging, one that may indicate a shifting tide. While offensive practices like yellowface (and blackface, and brownface) still occur with surprising frequency, popular theatre publications are increasingly addressing problematic minority representation and offering advocates and artists of color

opportunities to educate their colleagues and demand that the field do better². As a theatre director, I am practicing my craft in an age of increasing awareness and accountability, in which theatre artists must publicly grapple with and attend to issues of diversity and representation. Moreover, as a White ally, I believe that addressing issues like those mentioned above requires me to listen and try to understand these problems from the perspective of artists of color.

Morisseau echoes Vogel's insistence that people in positions of power and privilege in the theatre must embrace inclusiveness as a sacred responsibility:

Institutional leaders have to be the ones to set the tone for this kind of environment. We need to say it with our plays. With our programming. With the overall culture we set in the theatre. Or else we continue to foster a community of racial privilege and entitlement in the theatre, regardless of how many people of color there are onstage. (Morisseau)

As a theatre director and hopeful future institutional leader, I am deeply invested in understanding the nuances of responsible representation and promoting a more diverse theatrical landscape. It is possible that the "sins" of representation I described above were committed through ignorance and carelessness, rather than malice or conscious racism. Nevertheless, ignorance and carelessness continue to do significant harm to artists of color, audiences of color, the theatre's reputation, and our growth as an artistic field. As a White director preparing to stage *Tomás and the Library Lady*, a story about Mexican-American migrant workers, I looked to existing frameworks and models for actively addressing diversity and representation. With this thesis, I ask how the principles and

² *American Theatre Magazine* recently published several articles addressing minority representation, including "6 Take-Aways from the 'Mikado' Yellowface-Off," (Weinert-Kendt) and "4 Ways Theatre Critics Can Be a Little Bit Less Racist," which urges theatre journalists to examine their biases and do a better job representing work by artists of color (Tran). *HowlRound* ran an entire series entitled "Yellowface in the American Theatre," featuring interviews with Asian American theatre professionals.

practices of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) might inform my own approach to directing a story whose characters' culture and ethnicity differ from my own. More broadly, I question what the framework of CRP might offer theatre artists in terms of creating a welcoming space for artists and audiences of color.

BACKGROUND

Drawing on the writing of numerous scholars, Geneva Gay defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (*Culturally Relevant Teaching* 31). The foremost scholars of culturally responsive teaching, including Gay and Gloria Ladson-Billings, recognized the ways in which a homogenized, Euro-centric curriculum detrimentally impacts the success of minority students. These theorists and practitioners sought to define an educational model that includes minority youth and brings their strengths and cultural contexts to the table. Practitioners of CRP believe that by changing both the methods and materials of instruction, teachers can effectively shift the overall classroom environment from one that places students of color at a disadvantage, to one in which students of all backgrounds and ethnicities can thrive.

In her 2002 article, “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” Geneva Gay examines five “essential elements” of culturally responsive teaching, namely: developing a knowledge base about cultural diversity, including ethnic and cultural diversity content in the curriculum, demonstrating caring and building learning communities, communicating with ethnically diverse students, and responding to the ethnic diversity in the delivery of instruction (106). With this study, I chose two elements to transfer to a

theatrical context, specifically *cultivating caring relationships* (“Preparing” 109) and *valuing diversity of curriculum content* (“Preparing” 108). I use these two principles as a basis for studying how Gay’s framework for preparing as a culturally responsive teacher might inform my own efforts to build a culturally responsive directing practice.

SIGNIFICANCE

Like our classrooms, our theatres continue to be dominated by White/Western-European perspectives. If integrating the stories and accomplishments of people of color into classroom curriculum can help shift students’ and teachers’ notions of what students of color can accomplish, might the inclusion of diverse stories on our stages have similar benefits? For years, and with increasing intensity, US American theatre-makers and audiences have been dabbling in diversity both on and off stage, but progress is slow and missteps are inevitable. What theories and practices can the theatre turn to in order to achieve “diversity?” What does this diversity in the theatre really look like? CRP brought concrete theories and practices into all areas of education, from curriculum planning to classroom management. If applying CRP in the classroom can improve academic success for minority students, what benefits might it yield when applied to theatre, and other forms of artistic representation? With this thesis, I begin to imagine how theatre practitioners might follow in the footsteps of culturally responsive pedagogical pioneers, transforming the theatre into an environment where artists and audiences of all backgrounds actively participate in the artistic process and see their cultures and identities respectfully represented on stage.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

As part of my thesis research, I was fortunate enough to direct a fully-staged production of *Tomás and the Library Lady*, a bilingual play in English and Spanish for young audiences. The piece was adapted for the stage by playwright José Cruz González from Pat Mora's book by the same name. The story offers a biographical snapshot of a young Tomás Rivera, a Chicano author, poet, and educator, whose origins as a migrant farm worker shaped his life and work. The production was a partnership between the ZACH Theatre and the UT Department of Theatre & Dance, and was presented at the ZACH Theatre's Whisenhunt Stage for both school and family audiences. It rehearsed for four weeks and was cast with a combination of UT undergraduates and community actors. Two White UT undergraduate students shared the role of the Library Lady and alternated performance days, while two bilingual Latino/a actors performed the roles of Tomás, and Tomás's father, mother, and grandfather. The design and production team was comprised of UT graduate students, ZACH staff, and community artists.

METHODOLOGY

This study follows Philip Taylor's model of reflective practitioner research, a method of qualitative research that invites practitioners to ask broad questions of their practice, while remaining open to additional paths of inquiry that might emerge (37). According to Taylor, "reflective practitioners use their own instrument, themselves, to raise the questions of inquiry, to process how those questions will be investigated, and to consider how their emergent findings will impact upon their lifelong work" (40). In my study, I examined my own efforts to apply certain principles of culturally responsive pedagogy to my directing process in order to determine how these efforts might guide me to make more informed and responsible decisions as a practitioner. In keeping with

Taylor's model, I maintained a rehearsal journal of my intentions, observations, and reflections. I later analyzed these records for patterns related to my guiding questions, as well as additional themes that emerged.

In order to interrogate how the application of culturally responsive methods might impact my directing process I chose to integrate two specific concepts from culturally responsive teaching, namely, *demonstrating caring* and *valuing diversity of curriculum content*, into my practice and to reflect on the results. Therefore, I moved through my production and rehearsal process with a deliberate focus on demonstrating caring, and viewing the script and production choices through the lens of Geneva Gay's description of diverse curriculum. I collected data by maintaining a rehearsal journal. Within twenty-four hours of each rehearsal I recorded, to the best of my ability, the events and important conversations of the day. I similarly documented several production meetings and conversations during which the creative team and I discussed decisions related to design or production. While documenting my process, I attempted to highlight moments where demonstrating caring or considering the script or production as curriculum seemed particularly relevant. Because respectful and thoughtful representation is an essential element of CRP, I also highlighted moments where representation and culture serve as the apparent focus of conversation or decision-making.

Throughout my preparation and rehearsal process I used the following guiding questions to focus my approach, and collect data:

1. What does it look like to consciously cultivate caring relationships in a rehearsal process? How does a focus on caring relationships affect the way in which performers engage in the process?
2. How does viewing the script and production as "curriculum" inform and affect my directing choices throughout the process? How does considering the

requirements of culturally diverse curriculum impact my priorities and decisions as a director?

I based my understanding of “care” and “curriculum” on two primary texts by Geneva Gay. These include her 2002 article in the *Journal of Teacher Education* entitled “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” and her 2010 book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. Both of these texts go into depth about *cultivating caring relationships* and *valuing a diverse curriculum*.

Firstly, in order to examine my efforts to demonstrate *culturally responsive caring* throughout my rehearsal process, I looked to Gay’s description of *caring-in-action* in the classroom. Throughout the rehearsal process I made a conscious effort to bring the following approaches that Gay describes into my interactions with the cast and production team:

1. Creating bridges between the students’ home life and the classroom.
2. Showing concern for the whole person beyond their success in the classroom.
3. Clearly communicating expectations, and maintaining high expectations for achievement.
4. Creating a community of learners where students are responsible for each others’ success (“Preparing” 106).

In order to consider *valuing diversity of content in the curriculum*, I discuss how viewing the script and production choices through the lens of curriculum impacted both my understanding of the show and my choices around staging. I thought about my choices as curriculum by asking the following questions of what I was choosing to put on stage:

1. What are the possible messages or ideas these choices are communicating?
2. Are these choices accurate to the material I am trying to portray?

3. Are these choices accessible to diverse audiences? How so?
4. How are my choices affected or limited by the context of the production?

After completing the rehearsal process, I analyzed my rehearsal journal in order to find recurring themes and connections related to my guiding questions. From this analysis, several key tensions emerged around trying to enact CRP in a professional theatre environment. In my chapter about culturally responsive caring in the rehearsal room, I describe the observable ways in which relationship-building and fostering community brought a different focus to my rehearsal experience than in my previous directing processes. I also discuss my discoveries around the role of expectations, and my own sense of efficacy as a director. In my analysis of theatre-as-curriculum, I note the ways in which the framework of Gay's three types of curriculum, namely, *formal*, *symbolic*, and *societal*, impacted my decision-making. In particular, I highlight moments where multiple priorities within CRP came into conflict, and then examine how I used my understanding of culturally responsive curriculum to decide which priority to preference in a given situation.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this document, I examine my own attempt to bring a culturally responsive approach into the rehearsal room in order understand its impact on my own directing practice, and to potentially inform others in the field. In Chapter Two, I provide a brief overview of CRP as both theory and practice, pulling largely on the writings of Geneva Gay, one of the key contributors to the scholarship about CRP. I describe Gay's efforts to both convey the importance of culturally responsive teaching, as well as her approach to codifying culturally responsive teaching as a practice. I compare her theories and

methods to conversations about responsible representation in the theatre, especially discussions surrounding casting and diversity. In doing so, I attempt to draw parallels between the evolution of CRP in education and the professional theatre's more recent efforts to improve diversity and representation.

In Chapters Three and Four I describe and analyze the specific ways CRP informed my direction of *Tomás and the Library Lady*. Chapter Three focuses on how I worked to create a culture of care in the rehearsal room, including specific practices I integrated into my rehearsal routine, and challenges that arose. In Chapter Four I reflect on the ways in which viewing theatre as curriculum affected my decision-making and informed my priorities around production choices. In my Conclusion, I reflect on the ways in which integrating CRP into my directing helped me pay attention to my ensemble members in a new way, highlighted competing priorities in my directing process, and broadened my understanding of the nuance involved in representation. Based on my research and analysis, I discuss the ways in which CRP will inform my future practice, and offer recommendations about how it might be used in the field of professional theatre to create an inclusive and welcoming space for artists and audiences of color.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

THE ROOTS OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

Geneva Gay, one of the foremost scholars in developing and defining culturally responsive pedagogy, began writing about approaches to minority education in the early 1980's, referring to in its early form as "multiethnic education." In her article "Multiethnic Education: Historical Developments and Future Prospects," Gay explains that multiethnic education grew out of the civil rights movement. Many civil rights activists were college students, who knew what it was like to move through the education system "without ever seeing their ethnic peoples and experience portrayed, except in stereotypic, derogatory ways. These educational practices became the targets of their protests" ("Multiethnic Education" 561). While civil rights battles were waged on multiple fronts, many student activists funneled their energies into educational reform.

Simultaneously, according to Gay, new developments within the educational community spoke directly to the concerns of student activists, lending support to activists' demands that the educational system address the problems of representation in education ("Multiethnic Education" 561). First, textbook analysts had questioned the representations of racial minorities for more than half a century, and their findings reinforced activists' concerns about the ways racial minorities appeared (or failed to appear) in instructional materials. Writing in the early 1900's, Edward Johnson critiqued the representation of African Americans in educational materials, noting:

I have often observed the sin of omission and commission on the part of white authors, most of whom seem to have written exclusively for white children, and studiously left out the many creditable deeds of the Negro. The general tone of most of the histories taught in our schools has been that of the inferiority of the Negro, whether actually said in so many words, or left to be implied from the

highest laudation of the deeds of one race to the complete exclusion of those of the other. (Johnson iii)

Johnson's comments illustrate activists' and textbook analysts' critique of most textbooks and instructional materials of the era, namely that African Americans were either not represented at all, or were made to appear inferior in comparison to more favorably represented groups.

Textbook analyses throughout the early twentieth century reported similar results for all racial minorities, with ethnic distortions, misinformation, stereotypes, and exclusion persisting into the 1970's ("Multiethnic Education" 561). Using these analyses for support, student activists demanded that the curriculum and materials of instruction accurately reflect the heritage and accomplishments of minority students. Their efforts gained some traction in the 1970's, and resulted in an outpouring of revisionist materials and programs that sought to fill in the gaps in knowledge about previously underrepresented ethnicities ("Multiethnic Education" 561).

There was another discursive trend within the educational community that aided activists' efforts. In addition to turning a critical eye on the materials of instruction, educators began to also reconsider the environment and methods of instruction as it related to minority youth. Gay explains that many educators had embraced the premise that poor academic achievement by racial minority students was due to an inherent deficit or dysfunction in the youth or their families ("Multiethnic Education" 561). Many believed that minority youth lacked either the capacity to learn, or the support and family structure necessary to achieve academic success. However, in the 1970's, many educators and social scientists began to argue that the real problem resulted from "conflicting expectations of school and home, and the school's devaluation of minority group

cultures” (“Multiethnic Education” 561). In his 1971 book *Blaming the Victim*, William Ryan writes:

We are dealing, it would seem, not so much with culturally deprived children as with culturally depriving schools. And the task to be accomplished is not to revise, and amend, and repair deficient children but to alter and transform the atmosphere and operations of the schools to which we commit these children. (Ryan 60)

This excerpt indicates a paradigm shift from one that sought to locate the problem of poor performance within students, to one that scrutinized the educational environment. Proponents of CRP recognized that many educators regarded minority youth with a “deficit mindset,” which led them to regard minority students as incapable of success (“Multiethnic Education” 561). This belief meant some educators gave minority students less attention, challenged them less often, and were less likely to recognize their potential. According to Gay, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Christine Sleeter, and many others, addressing this harmful mindset and replacing it with an “asset-based” approach became a fundamental principle of culturally responsive teaching. Teachers were encouraged to recognize that all children came to the table with unique strengths and abilities, many of which were culturally-based.

Gloria Ladson-Billings, the educational theorist and teacher educator who coined the term “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy,” (later “Culturally Responsive”) was an influential voice in the social reform movement aimed at re-training teachers to more effectively teach minority students. She argued that a focus on representation and diversity in the curriculum did not do enough to address the educational needs of minority youth. She states:

Much of the purposed reform and debate about schools focuses on curriculum. What should we teach? Whose version of history should we offer? What priority should different subject matters be given? But it is the way we teach that

profoundly affects the way students perceive the content of that curriculum.
(*Dreamkeepers* 15)

Writing primarily about the educational experiences of African-American children, Ladson-Billings claimed that there was too little literature addressing the specific academic needs of that group. She attributed this dearth of information to educators' refusal to recognize African-Americans as a distinct cultural group. Instead, she theorized, White teachers viewed African-American students as though they were essentially White students who "just need a little extra help" (*Dreamkeepers* 10).

Ladson-Billings's work focused on reducing the "cultural mismatch between school and home" ("Towards a Theory" 467) by creating a learning environment for African-American students that resembled and celebrated their home culture. In addition to academic achievement, she emphasized the importance of students maintaining a strong sense of their cultural identity, rather than assimilating into White culture ("Towards a Theory" 474). Her article, "Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," interrogates the relationship between academic achievement and a strong cultural identity. In this study, she observed that, of African-American students who had been identified as high-achieving in elementary school, only half were doing well in high school:

A closer examination of the successful students' progress indicated they were social isolates, with neither African-American nor White friends. The students believe that it was necessary for them to stand apart from other African-American students so that teachers would not attribute to them the negative characteristics they may have attributed to African-American students in general. ("Towards a Theory" 475)

In other words, students felt pressure to choose between maintaining close ties with their cultural identities and peers, and academic success. Ladson-Billings's study observes the effect when teachers identified popular African-American students with a strong

connection to their cultural identities and put them in prominent leadership positions within their schools:

Their academic leadership allowed their cultural values and styles to be appreciated and affirmed. Because these African-American male students were permitted, indeed encouraged, to be themselves in dress, language style, and interaction styles while achieving in school, the other students, who regarded them highly (because of their popularity), were able to see academic engagement as “cool.” (“Towards a Theory” 475)

Here we see that when teachers positioned African-American students with strong cultural identities as successful, academically-engaged leaders without any pressure to abandon their culturally-located style, language, or behavior, academic engagement became possible without social risk. Ladson-Billings refers to students’ strong identification with and expression of their cultural identities as “cultural competence,” (476). Encouraging and cultivating a strong sense of ethnic identity became a key element of culturally relevant teaching.

In 2010, Geneva Gay released an updated edition of her 2000 book *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, in which she surveys shifts in educational standards and practices that have occurred since the first edition, and considers the implications of these shifts on culturally relevant teaching. She notes that, while the academic achievement of students of color continues to be disproportionately low, there have been strides in proving that utilizing students’ cultural heritages positively impacts learning (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* xxvii). While early research focused largely on the cultural context of African-American students, Gay’s updated edition consciously expands its attention to include Latino/a, Asian, Native American, and other ethnic and racial minority populations (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* xxviii).

In talking about multiethnic education in 1983, Gay predicted its biggest challenges would include translating the theory into practice, institutionalizing that

practice, and providing evidence of its efficacy (“Multiethnic Education 563). Writing nearly thirty years later, Gay perceives a new set of challenges for culturally responsive teaching to overcome:

The greatest of all obstacles to culturally responsive teaching is mainstream ethnocentrism and hegemony. They effectively block the acquisition and application of new, culturally relevant pedagogical knowledge, skills, and will in teaching African, Latino, Native, and Asian American students. Some educators fail to realize that the assumptions, expectations, protocols, and practices considered normative in conventional education are not universal and immutable. They are based on the standards of the cultural system of one ethnic group – European Americans – that have been imposed on all others. (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 243-44)

In other words, White Eurocentric educators, administrators, and policy-makers would prefer to pursue an assimilationist approach, trying to force round pegs into square holes, rather than commit to an educational style that acknowledges cultural difference.

In her 2012 article entitled “Confronting the Marginalization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy,” Christine Sleeter, educational reformer and advocate for multicultural education, affirms Gay’s assessment of the threat to CRP. She denounces the education reforms of the 1990’s for being “deliberately context blind,” explaining that “although racial achievement gaps have been the focus of attention, solutions have emphasized offering all students the same curriculum, taught the same way—based on the language, worldview, and experience of White English-speakers (Sleeter 565). She argues that the increased emphasis on testing and national standards pressures teachers towards standardization, rather than responsiveness (Sleeter 577). Like Gay, she sees CRP’s “potential to transform the existing social order,” as a significant political obstacle to its full implementation (Sleeter 563). Sleeter echoes Gay’s 1983 notion that the success of multiethnic education requires evidence of its effectiveness. However, while Gay advised that multiethnic education must demonstrate its effectiveness for minority

students, Sleeter's article concludes that researchers must also examine the impact of culturally responsive practices on White students. She implies that White educators and administrators lack the motivation to make changes to educational practices that solely benefit minority students. (Sleeter 579).

WORKING TOWARDS DIVERSITY IN THEATRE

Casting and Character

In considering how CRP might inform ethnic and racial representation in the theatre, I investigated conversations and articles about diversity in the theatre to find parallels with culturally responsive teaching. Three years after Gay's aforementioned article ushered in a new era of goals for minority representation in education, the Non-Traditional Casting Project (NTCP) formed to "advocate for the full participation" of racial minorities and "other disenfranchised artists in the performing arts" (Newman 23). In his 1989 article, "Holding Back: The Theatre's Resistance to Non-Traditional Casting," Harry Newman, Executive Director of the NTCP, criticized the very need for such an organization as "a testimony to our society's failure to acknowledge and accept [people of color] as individuals and as Americans" (22). He argues that the dire need to advocate for diverse casting is evidence that the Civil Rights movement never reached the theatre.

In almost every other segment of American society, including the most apparently conservative bastions of the military, the police, banking, government, and civil service, barriers to ethnic, female, and disabled participation have been overcome to a great extent, and not just at the lowest levels. Why are the performing arts, particularly the theatre, so far behind? (Newman 25)

Here, Newman points out that many American institutions had made great strides in the areas of diversity and inclusion, while the theatre still perplexingly lagged behind.

Early in their efforts, the NTCP's strategically distributed literature to artistic directors and casting directors, making a case for more diverse casting practices. Newman recounts the backlash with which these efforts were met:

One of our brochures entitled 'What is Non-Traditional Casting?' [...] was returned (anonymously) with the answer "the casting of inferior talents, semi-illiterate, and incompetent 'minorities'" scrawled on the back. Other comments [...] included "the vast majority of black/hisp 'ethnic' actors are ill-educated poor of speech and not intelligent enough to assume featured roles they are unsubtle and can't even speak English properly." (Newman 28)

It is clear from this response that the attitudes of theatre professionals even as late as the 1980's bore a disturbing resemblance to the same outdated notions of minorities' abilities that the educational sphere was working to dispel. In 2016, more than 25 years after the Non-Traditional Casting Project was established, the field still wrestles with diversity. Last year, the Asian American Performers Action Coalition (an advocacy group in New York City), reported the racial breakdown for actors in New York City. Between 2006 and 2013, on Broadway and at the 16 largest not-for-profit theatres in New York City, the breakdown was as follows:

- 14 percent of all available roles went to Black actors
- 3 percent to Latino actors
- 3 percent to Asian actors
- 1 percent to other minorities
- 79 percent to Caucasian actors.

By comparison, the population breakdown for New York City is 33 percent non-Hispanic White, 25.5 percent Black, 28.6 percent Hispanic/Latino and 12.7 percent Asian (Tran).

Even if these numbers changed to reflect a more proportionate representation, there are further issues to address. Casting performers of color is not, by itself, responsible representation. New discourses around casting are challenging theatre

practitioners to consider “color conscious” rather than “colorblind” casting³. “Colorblind,” a term that is rapidly going out of style when talking about race in general, pretends that people can move through the world or watch a show without registering race or assigning meaning to the racial casting of a show. In her 2014 article “Color Conscious Casting: Three Questions to Ask,” Lavina Jadhvani eschews the notion of colorblind casting as absurd:

I can’t think of an environment, in real life, where race doesn’t factor into relationship dynamics. And if it doesn’t exist offstage—why do we think we can (or should) create that scenario? I prefer the term “color conscious casting,” by which I mean that race is acknowledged in, and ideally deepens, theatrical conversations. (Jadhvani)

Just as Gay levels criticism against textbooks for “typing” African Americans by only showing them in “occupational uniform,” not giving them names, or by denying them speaking roles in stories (“Multiethnic Education” 561), the theatre must be aware of constantly recycling racial stereotypes and reproducing systemic inequality and erasure in casting, in writing, and in the stories we tell. A recent article in *American Theatre Magazine* entitled “4 Ways Theatre Critics Can Be Less Racist,” goes beyond casting practices to encourage journalists writing about theatre to reduce their use of stereotyping language and check their cultural assumptions (Tran).

Cultural Competence as a Value in Theatre

In studying the current discourse around responsible representation in the theatre, a theme emerged that echoes Ladson-Billings’s theory of cultural competence. In CRP, cultural competence describes a student’s comfort, pride, and familiarity with their own culture, as well as their understanding and respect for the cultures and ethnicities of others. Unfortunately, the theatre often continues to regard White stories and White

³ See Banks, Eyring, Jadhvani, and Wilson.

performers as “universal,” much in the way standardized curriculum codifies White perspectives and values. According to Asian American playwright Leah Nananko Winkler:

Right now in storytelling “white” still means “normal” and that mentality can be very isolating for a lot of audiences, creators, and people of color. The audiences have changed but a lot of the content has not. I still rarely go see a play I can relate to, but when I do, it’s awesome and validating and incomparably rejuvenating. Doesn’t everyone deserve that experience? (Winkler)

White-washing, a term that refers to the erasure of ethnicity and culture, and the normalization of the White experience, often implies the absence of stories or characters of color. However, White-washing often subtly pervades even the presentation of ostensibly non-White stories and characters. The following two examples of cultural White-washing come from critiques of television and film, but their significance directly applies to the theatre.

The first example comes from Persian-American actor Amir Talai. In his article, “When a Brown Actor Plays a White Character, Who Really Wins?” he levels criticism against a popular new television show, *Mr. Robot*. First, he praises the show for featuring a “realistically multi-ethnic, -lingual, and -national cast,” that accurately portrays the diversity of its New York setting. He also rejoices in the fact that the lead character is played by Rami Malek, an Egyptian-American. His gripe, however, is that this unambiguously brown actor is given an extremely White-sounding name, Elliot Alderson. He writes:

While it may seem like a victory for a brown actor to play a character with a stereotypically white name, it actually reinforces the idea that complex, multidimensional characters have to read as white, while characters with “brown” names are relegated to roles where we play terrorists named Mohammed or cabbies named Apu. (Talai)

This erasure of a strong cultural identity in our leading characters is pervasive and begins with our earliest exposure to media. In his article “Are Disney Movies Good for Your Kids?” cultural critic and scholar Henry Giroux explores numerous instances of subtle (and less than subtle) racism in Disney movies. His criticisms of Disney’s *Aladdin* are virtually identical to Talia’s concerns about the portrayal of Middle Eastern characters. He points out that the relatable primary characters of Aladdin and Jasmine speak in standard American English, and that Aladdin’s features were modeled after Tom Cruise (Giroux 62). He quotes Yousef Salem, former spokesperson for the South Bay Islam Association, who further explains how Disney perpetuates negative stereotyping of Arabs, even in a film where the main character is ostensibly Arab:

All of the bad guys have beards and large, bulbous noses, sinister eyes and heavy accents, and they’re wielding swords constantly. Aladdin doesn’t have a big nose; he has a small nose. He doesn’t have a beard or a turban. He doesn’t have an accent. What makes him nice is they’ve given him this American character...I have a daughter who says she’s ashamed to call herself an Arab, and it’s because of things like this. (qtd. in Giroux 61)

Talai, Giroux, and Salem’s concerns echo Ladson-Billings’s observations of African-American students who felt it was necessary to distance themselves from their race in order to avoid negative stereotyping. If culturally responsive teaching methods strategically strengthen associations between success and a strong sense of ethnic identity by placing student with strong expressions of their cultural identity in positions of academic leadership, television, film, and theatre might do the same by positioning characters and actors with strong ethnic identities in prominent, complex roles.

Culturally Responsive Artistry

My interest in moving culturally responsive pedagogy into a professional theatre context builds on Roxanne Schroeder-Arce’s recent research on Latino/a Theatre for

Young Audiences. In her 2014 article, “Toward Culturally Responsive Artistry: Implications for Institutions, Artists, Educators and Audiences,” Schroeder-Arce examines five principles of culturally responsive pedagogy as outlined in Geneva Gay’s 2010 book *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. For each of Gay’s principles, Schroeder-Arce develops an equivalent principle or application for producing theatre for non-White audiences within traditionally White spaces, by almost exclusively White companies, with particular attention paid to the audience experience. Schroeder-Arce’s article chronicles a production of her own play, *Mariachi Girl*, at the ZACH Theatre, the same theatre that produced my thesis production of *Tomás and the Library Lady*. Schroeder-Arce’s article introduces the term “culturally responsive artistry,” and is, to my knowledge, the first attempt to translate the theories of culturally responsive pedagogy into a theatrical context.

Schroeder-Arce’s article works to “open a conversation about the opportunities and challenges presented by producing plays of color at historically White institutions” (3). In her article, she explains how ZACH Theatre became a partner in producing *Mariachi Girl*, the company’s first foray into Latino/a theatre in their Theatre for Families series. ZACH’s Education Director Nat Miller cited the large Latino/a population already attending ZACH’s school shows as his motivation for presenting the show, stating “over 70 percent of the students who come to see our plays are from a Latino/a background. I wanted to make sure they were seeing their stories onstage and were represented” (qtd. in Schroeder-Arce 6).

In her case study of ZACH’s production, Schroeder-Arce attends to the institutional environment of the ZACH, mirroring the way in which culturally responsive educators focus on the students’ learning environment, rather than limiting their purview to the materials of instruction. She argues that theatres that have traditionally produced

White plays for primarily White audiences must take great care when beginning to cultivate a more diverse audience base:

If theatre companies like ZACH really want to reach out, to develop Latino/a audiences, they need to be prepared to first look at themselves honestly, to recognize their historical privilege, and then to listen intently to new voices and make some adjustments as new cultures walk in the door. (Schroeder-Arce 21)

With echoes of Dominique Morisseau's concerns about White privilege and elitist privilege, Schroeder-Arce seems to warn predominantly White institutions that welcoming a Latino/a audience requires more than simply producing a Latino/a play. Rather than relying solely on the inclusion of Latino/a work in the season, Schroeder-Arce advises that theatres strive to engage audiences throughout the entire theatre-going experience. She makes several recommendations regarding how the ZACH might have better reached out to a new Latino/a audience, such as by including Latino/a art in the lobby, and incorporating Spanish into the curtain speech or study guide. She cautions that "though a company's current staff may be eager to include communities of color, historical lack of inclusion is not easily dismissed, especially by those who have been overlooked and underrepresented in the past" (Schroeder-Arce 21). Again, she advises companies that it takes time and continual efforts to gain the trust of any community that has largely been excluded from a space.

Grounding her study in the framework of CRP, Schroeder-Arce argues for "a paradigm of culturally responsive artistry, specifically theatre that reflects the cultures and identities of the communities in which it is performed" (Schroeder-Arce 3). In considering the audience experience, and particularly the young audience's experience of seeing *Mariachi Girl*, Schroeder-Arce emphasizes the value of seeing one's cultural positively portrayed on stage, indicating:

As Mexican American Latino/a children who rarely see positive representations of self in their education and lived experiences saw their culture on stage being appreciated and valued by other children, they potentially experienced a sense of pride. (Schroeder-Arce 13)

This observation contains echoes of Ladson-Billings's emphasis on cultural competence, in which students witness their cultural identities in a position of importance. Katori Hall refers to the stage as a "pedestal," an elevated space of visibility signifying immense worth (Hall). Culturally responsive artistry asks us to consider what stories we are placing on that pedestal, and how, and for whom.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE DIRECTING

In this document I examine the impact and implications of a culturally responsive approach to directing. Starting with Schroeder-Arce's understanding of what culturally responsive artistry looks like, I aimed to discover how I, as a White artist seeking to direct a culturally specific non-White play, could approach the production and rehearsal process. Like Schroeder-Arce, I focused on building bridges between home spaces and the theatre, making the artistic experience both relevant and connected to lived experience (Schroeder-Arce 9). As a result of my findings in the literature, I considered how the differences between a classroom and professional theatre setting impact efforts to transfer culturally responsive pedagogy into the realm of theatre.

Chapter Three: Culturally Responsive Caring in the Rehearsal Room

In her 2002 article “Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching,” Geneva Gay refers to caring as “a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity” (109). She identifies “demonstrating caring” as one of the five fundamental principles of culturally responsive teaching, and dedicates an entire chapter in the book to the nuance of culturally responsive caring. Gay begins her chapter by drawing attention to the important distinction between caring *about* and caring *for* student success and well-being (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 48). Caring *about* students is a teacher’s internal experience of concern or affection, while caring *for* one’s students implies active engagement in *doing* something to positively affect the student’s experience (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 48).

This emphasis on the active nature of culturally responsive caring prompted me to choose this value to enact in my process, and to study in my research. In her chapter concerning caring, Gay maintains that it should not “be assumed that constructive caring will emerge naturally from the professional ethics or personal altruism of teachers. Instead, it must be deliberately cultivated” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 69). In other words, teachers’ (or directors’) genuine sense of caring does not guarantee caring behaviors that benefit students (or performers). Additionally, Gay refers to caring as a “pedagogical necessity” because of its measurable pedagogical impact, asserting that “caring prompts effort and achievement” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 55). As both a director and a person who struggles with relationship-building, I was interested to discover how consciously and deliberately cultivating caring-in-action might impact my rehearsal process, and affect the rehearsal environment. While it would be difficult to assess any direct correlation between my caring-in-action efforts and the ensemble

members' and creative team's effort and achievement, I worked to pay attention to the engagement of the ensemble and creative team at the same time I was observing and reflecting on my own efforts to demonstrate caring.

CARING-IN-ACTION

In defining culturally responsive caring, Gay provides a “functional profile of culturally responsive caring-in-action” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 51). This detailed list of twenty active components of culturally responsive caring was compiled by numerous scholars, and offers insight into the depth and breadth of caring as a concept. Gay writes that culturally responsive caring includes:

- Providing spaces and relationships where ethnically diverse students feel recognized, respected, valued, seen, and heard;
- Fostering warmth, intimacy, unity, continuity, safety, and security;
- Knowing culturally diverse students thoroughly personally and academically;
- Cultivating a sense of kindredness and reciprocal responsibility among culturally diverse students;
- Responding to the needs of diverse students for friendship, self-esteem, autonomy, self-knowledge, social competence, personal identity, intellectual growth, and academic achievement;
- Being academic, social, and personal confidantes, advocates, resources, and facilitators for culturally diverse students;
- Acquiring knowledge of and accepting responsibility for culturally diverse students that go beyond the school day and its organizational parameters;
- Helping students of color develop a critical consciousness of who they are, their values and beliefs, and what they are capable of becoming;

- Enabling ethnically and culturally diverse students to be open and flexible in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as being receptive to new ideas and information;
- Building confidence, courage, courtesy, compassion, and competence among students from different ethnicities and cultural communities;
- Being academically demanding but personally supportive and encouraging;
- Allowing for the active assertion of student interest and curiosity;
- Creating habits of inquiry, a sense of criticalness, and a moral edit among students to care for self and others;
- Treating everyone with equal *human* worth;
- Acknowledging social, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and individual differences among students without pejorative judgments;
- Promoting cultural, communal, and political integrity and solidarity among different ethnic and cultural groups;
- Dealing directly and bluntly with the vicissitudes of racism, and the unequal distribution of power and privilege among diverse groups;
- Preparing students to understand and deal realistically with social realities (what is), along with possibilities for transformation (what can be);
- Teaching ethnic, racial, and cultural knowledge, identity, and pride;
- Providing intellectually challenging and personally relevant learning experiences for socially, ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse students. (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 51-52).

Many of these concepts surfaced throughout the rehearsal process for this study. In this chapter, I focus first on producing *Tomás and the Library* itself as an act of caring, followed by a description and analysis of my conscious and intentional efforts to create a caring environment throughout my directing process. Finally, I discuss ways in which

culturally responsive caring had unexpected impacts on my process, and I note some recurring tensions between conflicting aspects of culturally responsive caring.

PRODUCTION AS AN ACT OF CARE

As we sat down to read the script together on the very first day of rehearsal Nat Miller, ZACH's Education Director and our show's producer, invited our two bilingual actors to share their experiences of performing for bilingual audiences. They both spoke passionately about the value and validation audiences experience when they see their language and culture portrayed on stage, performed by people who look like them. Miller added that offering Latino/a students an opportunity to feel proud of their heritage, and share that heritage with their peers, motivates him to continue pursuing bilingual theatre for young audiences. He also stated that the play inspires us to continue talking about social inequity, and the "right to education" (Rehearsal Journal, 7 Dec. 2015).

In CRP, both the methods of instruction and the materials of instruction must work in tandem to create an environment in which culturally diverse students can thrive. While I discuss the choice of *Tomás and the Library Lady (Tomás)* from the perspective of curriculum in the next chapter, the content of the play itself relates to many aspects of culturally responsive caring and therefore deserves a mention in this chapter as well.

Many of the caring-in-action principles listed above are not explicitly actions I engaged in with my cast or crew, but these principles were nevertheless acknowledged as fundamental underpinnings of our work together. In just these first few comments from our producer and bilingual performers, several caring-in-action principles were implicitly referenced, including:

- Helping students of color envisage themselves as capable;

- Teaching cultural knowledge and pride;
- Acknowledging “social, cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic and individual differences among students” without judgment;
- Directly addressing racism and the “unequal distribution of power and privilege among diverse groups” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 51-52).

Though I did not intend to apply these particular principles directly to my work with the performers (for instance, I did not feel that the non-White performers required any action on my part in order to “envisage themselves as capable,” nor would I consider myself capable of “teaching cultural knowledge and pride” to adult performers) these principles nevertheless represented messages we hoped a young audience might receive. Even though the performers were not the “students” at whom these specific actions were aimed, I suggest that by explicitly stating these goals in the room, and articulating them as guiding principles for producing this particular show, these caring-in-action principles created a foundation of culturally responsive caring under the entire process.

CARING THROUGH REHEARSAL ROOM CULTURE

Having identified caring-in-action as a primary as a way to bring cultural responsiveness into my directing practice, I identified the caring-in-action approaches that I felt I could concretely enact in a rehearsal and production setting. Because many of the principles in Gay’s list that directly reference an academic setting, or a teacher/student relationship, I have selected the caring-in-action principles I would apply in my process of directing *Tomás*:

- Providing spaces and relationships where ethnically diverse students feel recognized, respected, valued, seen and heard
- Fostering warmth, intimacy, unity, continuity, safety, and security

- Cultivating a sense of and reciprocal responsibility among culturally diverse students
- Acquiring knowledge of and accepting responsibility for culturally diverse students that go beyond the school day and its organizational parameters
- Enabling ethnically and culturally diverse students to be open and flexible in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as being receptive to new ideas and information
- Being academically demanding but personally supportive and encouraging
- Allowing for the active assertion of student interest and curiosity

Entering the process, I hoped to pay particular attention to my efforts to ensure that the creative team (performers, production team, and designers) felt visible and valued, how I was making an effort to learn about their lives outside of the production context, and how I was creating space for them to pursue their interests and assert their needs. Throughout the process, I made a point of observing and reflecting on how interpersonal relationships manifested, both between myself and the group, as well as between the members of the ensemble.

Laying the Foundation

A 2007 study in the *Journal of Urban Education* entitled “Creating Environments of Success and Resilience” examines how successful culturally responsive teachers begin building relationships and establishing expectations on the very first day of school. Specifically, the study looks at the behaviors of teachers in their first two hours with a new class. It identifies deliberate methods teachers employ to develop relationships with their students, and start building a learning community “where connections with and among students created a safe place to learn and an emotional climate where students could take risks, laugh, and trust one another and their teacher” (Bondy 328). This

description of a successful learning community closely matches my own idealized description of a productive, safe rehearsal environment. Therefore, I decided to use the article's findings and recommendations to craft my plan for the first day of rehearsal for *Tomás*.

One teacher in the same study noted “one of the most important things in building a relationship with your students is that they have to know something about you. And if they don't...then they're not going to open up to let you know something about them” (Bondy 334). The study describes various ways different teachers shared bits of themselves with their students within the first two hours of class. They told stories about becoming a teacher, shared vulnerable memories about their past or school experience, or told students a little bit about their home life and family (335). Following this example, I opened the first day by explaining that this process was part of my MFA thesis, and describing a little bit about what I was studying. I foregrounded the idea that I was there to learn and shared my feelings of vulnerability around working on a story so far outside my own experience. Though I can't quote myself verbatim from the room, in the notes I prepared for the day I wrote:

I understand that as a White person there is only so much I can learn through research about the culture and story that I am trying to represent, but I place a high value on honoring the cultural specificity of this story and will always regard that as an explicitly named priority in our work. (Rehearsal Notes, 7 Dec. 2015)

Through this statement, I hoped to not only reveal something about myself, but to acknowledge to the Latino/a artists in the room that I was aware of my limitations. Beyond that, I felt it was important to explicitly assert my commitment to doing justice to the story and truthfully representing the Latino/a culture portrayed in the play. Through this commitment, I hoped to communicate to the Latino/a performers that I would listen to and value their experiences and perspectives, an important caring-in-action principle. I

also wanted, through modeling, to create an invitation for all members of the team to openly discuss the cultural knowledge, or gaps in knowledge, they brought to our production process due to their cultural experience.

The second intention for the day was to begin building trust and a sense of community among the ensemble. I chose to facilitate “The Story of Your Name,” which is an activity in which participants get into pairs and tell each other a brief, true story about some aspect of their name. The participants trade stories, and then each participant introduces their partner and tells the story of their partner’s name to the whole group. I always love this activity, and felt that it resonated with many of my objectives for the first day of rehearsal. When used in our first rehearsal, it gave the performers a structured way to start talking and sharing information about themselves, which fostered an environment of warmth and intimacy. Secondly, having one of their ensemble members listen to their story and then share it with the group provided each individual a concrete opportunity to feel seen, heard, and valued. When asked what it was like to hear their story told, one performer observed, “I feel like she told it better than I do,” while another noted, “I was excited to tell it and I love hearing it and saying ‘yep, that’s me’” (Rehearsal Journal, 7 Dec. 2015). Hearing one’s story told by another can give it weight and validity. One of the bilingual performers connected this sense of validity to an earlier comment about the importance of performing Latino/a theatre in the first place – hearing your story makes you feel valued they said.

When asked what it felt like to *tell* someone else’s story, most ensemble members commented on the sense of responsibility they felt to properly tell their partner’s story. Members of the group offered the following observations:

Actor 1: I couldn’t stop myself from checking in with the person, looking at them to make sure I was doing ok.

Actor 2: It was fun, but I felt nervous about getting it right. (Rehearsal Journal, 7 Dec. 2015).

These reflections imply that this storytelling activity began to instill “a sense of kindredness and reciprocal responsibility among diverse participants” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 51) where they actively desired to honor each other’s words and experiences. It also offered the opportunity to tie the conversation back to our shared responsibility to respectfully tell the story of the real life Tomás Rivera.

Finally, the “Story of Your Name” activity revealed details about the ensemble members’ families, histories, and cultures. Therefore, the activity provided a valuable opportunity to learn and honor each ensemble member’s different cultural background and gain insight into their relationship with that background. Additionally, it set a precedent for bringing our families and lived experiences into the process.

In addition to my efforts to begin building relationships between myself and the ensemble and facilitate the performers getting to know each other, I wanted to be sure to lay out explicit expectations on the first day. Bondy indicates that some teachers start the year with an assumption that students all know what appropriate behavior looks and sounds like. The culturally responsive teachers observed in the study, however, made no such assumptions (Bondy 337). Bondy notes:

Teachers adhered to the often-recommended approach of making expectations explicit and concrete through using clear language, modeling desired behavior, and asking students for examples. They also provided a rationale for the rules and procedures, another frequently recommended practice. (Bondy 338)

I recognized that, like some teachers, I held certain assumptions about the correct way theatre professionals should behave in a rehearsal process, and that I took for granted that those rules are universally known by professionals. Therefore, I felt reluctant to state certain things that seemed so obvious as to potentially appear patronizing. However, I also recognized that it is a common practice for directors to lay out their expectations,

and that even if the actors are familiar with these expectation, explicitly stating them at the top of a process can serve as a reminder, and offer a reference point if any issues do come up. So, on the first day of rehearsal, I laid out several expectations, and offered my rationale for each one:

Expectation	Rationale
Please be on time for every rehearsal	I like to start on time and leave early if we finish early. This is how we respect each other's time.
We will engage in ensemble-building and try to learn from each other and create through collaboration. I ask everyone to show up ready to try things, and I place a high value on an ensemble that listens to each other, and is willing to try new things with each other	In this show there needs to be fluidity and seamlessness to the way the storytellers work together. You are narrating each other's thoughts and actions, finishing each other's sentences, and ensemble-building activities help develop an understanding of each others' rhythms and build the trust necessary to achieve that seamlessness.
Bring a pencil to every rehearsal, write down your blocking, and let me know if you need to run something again or take a moment to write it down.	I change blocking a lot, which can be very frustrating, but I rely on everyone to keep track of the latest changes, as I'll be walking around the room, experiencing the show from several angles, and I will absolutely lose track of changes in blocking.

Table 1: Expectations and Rationales

While I felt nervous about giving actors basic expectations, such as be on time and bring a pencil to rehearsal, doing so offered me the opportunity to communicate additional information about the process through subtext. Asking everyone to be on time allowed me to communicate that I respect them and their time, and reinforced the caring-in-action principle that every member of the ensemble shares a reciprocal responsibility to one another. My discussion of collaboration and ensemble-building offered a chance to

talk about the way I wanted the room to feel, and the relationships I hoped to cultivate. By providing my rationale, I was able to ground the collaborative, ensemble-building expectation in the story we were working to tell. Clearly laying out expectations became an additional opportunity to invite the cast into my vision for the play. I closed my introductory speech with the following statement:

I am committed to this being a process where everyone’s expertise, opinions, and lived experience are valued. You are the experts on your character, and on your own lives. As we get deeper into the process and I start getting absorbed by the minutiae about this prop or making this one moment work and I’m losing sight of something that matters, please please let me know. I really hope you’ll feel like you can approach me at any point in the process about any concerns or ideas, big or small. And if you don’t feel like you can talk to me, talk to our fabulous stage manager who will always be the actors’ best advocate.

This brief statement draws on many of the notions of caring-in-action I set out to apply to my process. The below table illustrates which caring-in-action values appeared in the above paragraph, and how:

Caring-in-Action Value	How it Appears in My Statement
Providing spaces and relationships where ethnically diverse students feel recognized, respected, valued, seen and heard	<i>I name the ensemble members as experts and promise to value their opinions and experiences</i>
Cultivating a sense of kindredness and reciprocal responsibility among culturally diverse students	<i>I invite the ensemble members to share my commitment to value everyone’s expertise, opinions, and lived experiences.</i>
Enabling ethnically and culturally diverse students to be open and flexible in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as being receptive to new ideas and information	<i>I state my desire to hear both ideas and concerns and I encourage them to share their feelings and ideas. I offer them an alternative person to talk to as an advocate, reinforcing that I want their concerns and ideas to be heard.</i>

Table 2: Caring-in-Action Values Identified

The remainder of the day was spent on theme and character exploration. I exercised the caring-in-action value of “allowing for the active assertion of student interest and curiosity,” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 52) by asking the performers to describe what resonated for them about their characters, what they most wanted the audience to know about their characters, and finally, what they were most excited to discover through this process.

By introducing and incorporating a number of the caring-in-action principles in our first rehearsal, I hoped to lay the foundation for a culture of care throughout the rehearsal process. My primary goals were to clearly communicate my own expectations, to assure the members of the ensemble that they would be heard, valued, and supported throughout, and to instill a sense of responsibility to one another and ownership over the work.

The Work-Life Balance

As I mentioned, one of the ways I chose to enact caring-in-action in our rehearsal process was to make a conscious effort to invite ensemble members to bring elements of their home lives and outside experiences into the rehearsal room, and to ensure that they felt valued and heard. For many directors, having personal conversations with their actors, stage managers, etc. before rehearsal or on breaks comes quite naturally. In my experience as a director, I am either deeply focused on mentally preparing for the rehearsal about to begin, distracted by some production-related concern or another, or simply awkward and uncertain about how to strike up conversations with people whom I don't know very well. Therefore, I set about the task of connecting with the members of my ensemble with a keen interest about how it might affect the overall process.

In analyzing my rehearsal journal, I noted several times that I felt I was doing a good job remembering to check in with the ensemble members. I set the personal goal of asking each person how they were and something about their life outside of the show whenever they arrived at rehearsal. In my journal, I cite multiple occasions where checking in with someone revealed something that was going on in their life, such as an illness or work issue. In these situations, I was able to adjust plans to accommodate them, or at least express concern and check in with them later. In the following example from my rehearsal journal, one ensemble member arrived about five minutes late for rehearsal, having never been late before:

When [they]⁴ arrived I asked how [they were] and they told us that they were up most of the night because a close friend of theirs had just gotten out of surgery. They were focused and present, though, throughout the day. After a break they told us that they had an update from her friend who was doing well, and we all cheered and were relieved. Everyone in the room is talking about where to go Christmas shopping and telling stories about their kids and their families.
(Rehearsal Journal, 16 Dec. 2015)

I can only theorize how things might have gone differently had I chosen to chastise the ensemble member for tardiness, rather than following my new rule of asking everyone how they are as soon as they walk through the door. I cannot know for certain whether they would have shared this information, whether their energy or focus would have suffered, or whether the rest of the ensemble would have been able to celebrate their colleague's good news. However, I was immensely grateful that I had checked in with this person and could offer them support and words of understanding. Connecting with the individual in this moment left me feeling closer to them, and grateful that they demonstrated a willingness to share a part of their life. The fact that they shared the

⁴ When speaking about the performers I have replaced gender-indicative pronouns with the gender-neutral "they, them, theirs" so as to consistently protect the performers' identities.

update that their friend was doing well suggests to me that they believed our concern and interest was sincere.

While grateful for the sense of connectedness I gained through these conversations, it also initiated a concern about productivity and professionalism, which I reference regularly in my rehearsal journal. I continually wrote that I feared the atmosphere had become too casual, or that I would allow it to become too casual. Four days into the first week of rehearsal, I note, “the atmosphere in the room is very relaxed and pleasant. The cast are joking and teasing each other and laughing a lot. People have started getting relaxed to the point where things bordering on ‘unprofessional’ are creeping in” (Rehearsal Journal, 10 Dec. 2015). Some of the “unprofessional” behaviors I described include teasing and swearing. On this same day I wrote about bringing up a political topic, and immediately regretting it, because I did not want anyone to feel uncomfortable or alienated. I knew that at least one member of our ensemble had a strict religious upbringing, and I worried they might feel alienated or uncomfortable if their opinions did not align with those of the vocal majority. In spite of being pleased that the majority of the rehearsal team was getting along well, I began to question what to do when the way in which one person demonstrates they are comfortable causes others to feel uncomfortable, as well as what it means to be authentic if you are constantly monitoring your speech (Rehearsal Journal, 10 Dec. 2015).

My rehearsal journal entries also devote considerable attention to my worries about balancing a relaxed, playful atmosphere and a productive one. Very early in the process I acknowledge that I personally need to take great care not to let the room become too relaxed and casual. Rehearsal demands so much energy and focus that I am often grateful for the mental break that comes with the spontaneous sharing of stories or joking around. I also make note of the fact that all of the ensemble members were

enjoying sharing stories and inside jokes, except for one individual who does not get involved with the inside jokes or playfulness as all. Without any particular reason to assume this, I remember growing concerned that this individual resented the lack of discipline and commitment to being “on-task.”

I find it significant that nothing in my rehearsal journal or memory indicates that either professionalism or productivity were ever a problem in our process. Nobody ever reported feeling uncomfortable or offended, and nowhere do I indicate that any actual rehearsal time was lost to non-rehearsal related conversation or play. On the contrary, I noted that the ensemble members consistently arrived ten minutes ahead of their scheduled call time, which allowed plenty of time to chat and still get started on time. In previous rehearsal processes where I have not explicitly attempted to cultivate an environment of caring and familiarity, I’ve encountered issues with both productivity and concerns about offense. While it is impossible to draw any definitive conclusions, it seems plausible that the additional consideration I gave to the performers' experience, and the intentionality with which I invited the group to bring themselves into the rehearsal room, resulted in my feeling a higher level of accountability, awareness, and more active efforts to create a safe and welcoming space.

I maintained my focus on sharing ownership of the process with the ensemble, and offering them opportunities to feel seen and heard. This primarily showed up in three ways:

1. I regularly checked in with the cast about how they felt about our progress.
2. After trying a new direction or running a scene, I asked, “How did that feel? Is that working for you?”
3. I would frequently offer the cast multiple options and ask them which one felt most useful to them. For instance, asking whether it would be more useful to

run through a section where we stop and fix things along the way, or a run-through without stopping.

By including these check-ins as a regular part of my process, I hoped to offer the performers a sense of agency over the process, opportunities to decide what was truly useful for them, and a chance to communicate needs or concerns.

While I did not study the effect these check-ins had on the cast, my rehearsal journal reveals that these moments offered something of value to me as a director:

We got behind on the first day and I quickly realized my expectations of how quickly we would move were unrealistic. So far nobody has seemed to be frustrated or confused by the lack of sticking to the schedule. I have checked in a couple times with the cast as a whole to ask how people are feeling about our progress. This has been met with positivity and nobody seems concerned or anxious. Next week I will make a new schedule that more realistically takes into consideration the time it takes to build something and run it multiple times with both actors. (Rehearsal Journal, 10 Dec. 2015)

This entry shows that I am thinking about the cast's comfort and experience, and taking the temperature of the room. Additionally, after the cast responds with positivity to my check-in, I immediately make a statement of what I intend to change in the future. I might have said, "the cast seems unconcerned about the schedule, so perhaps I won't worry about it either." Instead, I believe that these check-ins represented an active practice of consistently reaffirming my commitment to serve the cast's needs. This commitment, in turn, increased my sense of accountability and kept my focus on improving my process for their benefit.

Expectations and Efficacy

Throughout my process I utilized my rehearsal journal to intentionally track moments in the rehearsal room that related to my caring-in-action goals. When analyzing my journal after rehearsals ended, I observed two common themes related to caring. Both of these themes relate to expectations, though in a somewhat unexpected way.

The first connection emerged after noticing a series of entries related to one performer's apparent disengagement in rehearsal-related group discussions, and general camaraderie. Despite my reporting that the general atmosphere of the room was positive and productive, I regularly commented that one performer frequently appeared disengaged and absorbed in their phone during group conversations, during non-break times. In multiple entries I stated that this performer is doing excellent, energetic work on stage, but becomes withdrawn and low-energy between scenes, and does not participate in other group activities such as setting up the space or talking through problems or goals as an ensemble. I indicated that I consciously attempted to keep the ensemble member engaged by asking them directly to contribute their opinion to conversations, and asking for their participation with group tasks. These behaviors were sporadic, but as we entered tech week the instances of disengagement gave way to overt frustration. Our producer observed this and spoke directly with the actor to find out what was happening. I do not know the exact content of this conversation, but afterwards the individual's attitude and demeanor shifted dramatically.

In CRP, maintaining consistently high expectations of students is one of the fundamental ways to demonstrate caring, and encourage success. Geneva Gay indicates that "many teachers profess to believe that all students can learn, but they do not expect some of them to do so. Therefore, they allow students to sit in their classes daily without insisting on and assisting their engagement in the instructional process" (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 63). Additionally, she warns that, "the most effective way to be uncaring and unconcerned is to tolerate and/or facilitate academic apathy, disengagement, and failure" (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 54). In the situation described above, the performer may have acted withdrawn and disengaged in certain aspects of the rehearsal process, but was in no way disengaged, apathetic, or at any risk of "failing" from a

performance perspective. They were ahead of schedule in line memorization, and gave full energy and commitment during scene work every day. I never had a moment's concern that their performance would be anything less than wonderful, nor did I have any reason to believe that they were not passionate about the production.

Reflecting on the story of this performer's engagement raised a number of questions for me around the idea of expectations and engagement. What does it mean to be "engaged" in the rehearsal process? What behaviors are essential to ensuring the success of a production? How do directors evaluate the success of a rehearsal process independent of the final product, or should we? Was allowing disengaged behavior to continue throughout the process a failure of caring-in-action to this performer, or was allowing them to move through the process in their own way, in fact, an act of caring?

One of the biggest questions that I take from this example is "Why didn't I simply talk to the performer about my concerns?" As I note above, the actor's behavior changed dramatically as soon as a conversation took place, several weeks after I initially observed the behavior. Had I addressed the matter head-on with the individual, it might have resulted in a positive shift weeks earlier.

Questioning my decision to delay speaking with the performer illuminated another important aspect of teacher expectations Gay discusses. Citing a trend in research around expectations, Gay states:

Teachers' expectations and a sense of professional efficacy are interrelated. Teaching efficacy stems from the beliefs teachers hold about their abilities to positively affect the academic achievement of particular students. It influences teachers' choices of activities, the efforts they exhibit, and their persistence in the face of obstacles and challenges. (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 66-7)

To be clear, the research around teacher expectations mainly concerns itself with the way teachers neglect students whom they deem incapable of learning. This may have bearing

on different moments in my directing career, but in the case of *Tomás* I had no doubts about any of the ensemble members' abilities. However, Gay's research significantly points to the idea that a teacher's confidence in their ability to positively effect change predetermines what they will attempt. This notion has tremendous bearing on my process of directing *Tomás*. In the case of the performer I discussed above, I lacked the confidence to discuss their behavior in rehearsal, fearing that such a conversation might produce a negative result, rather than a positive one. However, that is only one example of the way my own sense of professional efficacy affected my choices throughout the process.

Another example of the way my own sense of efficacy impacted the rehearsal process reveals itself through my journal entries about choreography. The script contains several brief musical numbers, and the producer and I had not determined it necessary to hire a choreographer. However, there was one song that required movement, "Elotes," which depicts Tomás and his family picking corn in the fields. After spending the first two weeks completely avoiding the task, I finally carved out rehearsal time to put some movement in place. The following is my rehearsal journal entry from that day:

On Wednesday I asked the group to help me brainstorm some movement for the Elotes song. I am troubled by not having the skills to choreograph the movement in this section. I don't know how to stage 4 minutes about picking corn.

I don't think I set the cast up to succeed in creating gestures. I didn't offer specific enough instructions, and I feel like I lost trust in the room because I didn't know the music as well as I should have. (Rehearsal Journal, 16 Dec. 2015)

Here, I express a lack of confidence that I am capable of the task at hand. I rely on the cast to help me generate the movement, because I am unsure of my ability to do it on my own. Collaboratively generating movement can be very positive and fruitful, however, in this instance I walked away from the activity feeling that I failed to effectively facilitate

the collaborative devising activity. Beyond that, I worried that I lost status or respect from the cast due to these shortcomings. The theme of “losing trust in the room” repeated throughout my rehearsal journal, including this entry about language: “I am pushing myself to use more Spanish in the room, but I am worried that when I do so I am outing myself as ignorant and a bad Spanish speaker, and losing trust” (Rehearsal Journal, 10 Dec. 2015).

In regards to the choreography for the song “Elotes,” I continued to feel uncertain in my ability to successfully put movement to the song. I eventually roughed in movement, but felt ill-equipped to teach it, or fix the places where it was not clean. Eventually, the producer watched a run-through, recognized that the movement needed polishing, and offered to bring in the ZACH’s staff choreographer. This choreographer came in with no context and drastically altered the movement and feel of the piece. Because they came in as a favor, and with extremely limited time, I did not feel empowered to intervene. I ultimately ended with choreography that was tidy, but that I lacked agency in shaping to serve the story.

It was not until after the process ended that I re-discovered what Gay says about the way in which teacher efficacy affects student outcomes. However, in preparing to write about my process I encountered the following words:

Teachers with a low sense of efficacy avoid learning activities they feel incapable of facilitating and are consumed with thoughts about their own inadequacies or limitations. These preoccupations create stress, divert attention from instructional to personal issues, and further reduce teacher effectiveness. (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 68)

In the case of choreographing “Elotes,” my concern that I lacked the skills to accomplish the task caused me to avoid it until it was taken out of my hands. Similarly, my lack of confidence in approaching one of the performers about their engagement in rehearsal

resulted in someone else taking action on the situation. This not only meant that the issue persisted unnecessarily, but I believe it represented a missed opportunity to connect with a member of my team, strengthen our communication, and potentially shift the process in a way that might have made them more comfortable.

CONCLUSIONS

Attempting to bring the principles of caring-in-action into my rehearsal process for *Tomás* forced me to pay greater attention to the way in which I communicated with the ensemble. It caused me to develop language and habits by which I could invite the ensemble members' lives, knowledge, and opinions into the process, which helped me shape the rehearsal agenda to fit the performers' needs. The tensions around professionalism and productivity led me to interrogate the standards and structures of professional theatre that I often take for granted. Recognizing my own assumptions around what a professional rehearsal process should look like reminded me of Morisseau's experience as an African-American audience member. Morisseau found herself engaging with a piece of theatre in a manner entirely appropriate to the context, but deemed inappropriate by White patrons with preconceived notions about how a theatre-goer is supposed to behave. Gay indicates that, just as standards of knowledge often based in White Euro-centrism, so are expectations of classroom behavior. As I continue to pursue working with diverse artists, I need to critically examine what I believe successful, engaged participation can look like.

Additionally, when the White staff choreographer worked with the ensemble, I noted that the movement they added drew on the traditions of ballet and Broadway. It stood out to me that the choreographer referred to *chasses* (a standard ballet-inspired

dance step) as “basic” movement, and seemed to regard the step as neutral and appropriate for any context, rather than what it is, a movement style firmly rooted in a dominant Western European tradition. This moment reminded me that I must continue to critically examine and expand my own notions of quality beyond narrow Eurocentric ideals. Finally, my revelations around the ways in which my own sense of professional efficacy has the potential to affect the process lead me to wonder how I might increase my sense of efficacy in future directing work, especially when representing cultures other than my own

Chapter Four: Theatre as Curriculum

TOMÁS AS CURRICULUM

In order to transfer the principles of CRP into my directing process for *Tomás* I needed to consider the parallels between the classroom context and a rehearsal process. Some of the principles of CRP focus on cultivating caring relationships with students, building a learning community, and holding students to consistently high expectations. These principles transferred well into the context of our rehearsal room, and with the creative team, as they are methods that imply ongoing, personal interactions.

In addition to the interpersonal aspects of CRP, curriculum is also vitally important. For teaching to be culturally responsive, the content is as important as the teaching methods. When thinking about building relationships in the rehearsal room and among the creative team it made sense to for me to consider the director as in a position analogous to that of “teacher,” and the cast and crew as analogous to “students” because the director is often responsible for establishing the environment in the room, and determining how the group will work together to accomplish the task at hand. However, when I began thinking of a production as parallel curriculum, the audience seemed more analogous to the “students” discussed in CRP, and I chose to analyze the final production of *Tomás* as the “curriculum.”

I chose to focus on the final production as curriculum, rather than the script alone, because production choices can significantly impact what story gets told, and what messages audiences take from that story. By considering how my production choices affected the audience’s meaning-making, I could view my production choices as decisions about what to “teach,” which allowed me to study these choices as curricular. Teachers frequently have mandates that require them to teach certain content. Culturally

responsive teachers determine how to present, contextualize, and supplement that content in order to include diverse cultural perspectives. In this chapter, I use my rehearsal journal and reflections on my own production choices in order to consider how viewing a theatrical production as curriculum shapes culturally responsive artistry.

In her writing on CRP, Geneva Gay divides the idea of curriculum into three distinct categories: formal, symbolic, and societal (“Preparing” 108). In the classroom, formal curriculum refers to the content and materials of instruction, usually those approved by the educational gatekeepers. This content includes text books and supplemental materials, as well “other curriculum guidelines such as the ‘standards’ issued by national commissions, state departments of education, professional associations, and local school districts (“Preparing” 108). Symbolic curriculum refers to the subtler ways that the environment of a classroom sends messages to students about what is valued and important. According to Gay, the most common location for symbolic curriculum is the classroom bulletin board, where images, icons, symbols, rules, and so on, are put on public display. She also includes awards and celebrations, which communicate what behaviors and achievements are valued (“Preparing” 108). Lastly, societal curriculum refers to the learning that takes place outside the classroom, the information and impressions that students are inundated with directly and through indirect osmosis in their daily lives. This societal curriculum might include the way students’ parents, relatives, or friends talk about a certain subject, the way the media portrays particular ethnicities or ideas, or what students absorb by observing their environment (“Preparing” 109).

Throughout my process of directing *Tomás*, I examined and documented the way in which my understanding of Gay’s curriculum categories impacted my approach to production choices. My data in each of these areas is primarily my own analysis,

assessment, and reflections around choices that impacted the way an audience would make meaning from the story, and particularly those that impacted an audience's understanding of Tomás's life and cultural context. To consider formal curriculum, I analyze the script itself through the lens of culturally relevant teaching materials. I analyze the production's symbolic curriculum by noticing what is given value and importance in the space, meaning both the rehearsal room, and the final production. In looking at societal curriculum I discuss the tensions facing a culturally responsive artist who wishes to push back against stereotypes, but portray culturally recognizable characters that "ring true" to the communities they represent.

Formal Curriculum

One of the exciting aspects of examining *Tomás* through the lens of CRP lies in the fact that the script itself can be read as a testament to the power of culturally responsive teaching. The play's central conflict is between Tomás and the figure of his Nightmare Teacher, who we learn represents his classroom teacher. In his recurring dreams, Tomás's teacher looms over him, commanding the confused and uncomprehending boy to speak English. When he cannot, the Nightmare Teacher accuses him of being lazy and disruptive, and threatens him with punishment. Tomás is haunted by this recurring vision throughout the play. At one point he wakes from his nightmare so distraught that he swears he will never return to school and instead work in the fields with his family forever.

The conflict set up by playwright José Cruz González plays out the problem with White Eurocentric assimilationist education—the very problem CRP seeks to dismantle. The fact that these dreams begin with the U.S. pledge of allegiance, and that his White teacher repeatedly calls the main character "Tommy," rather than "Tomás," reinforces the

message that Latino/a culture and the Spanish language are not welcome in U.S. American classrooms. How many students of color, or emerging bilingual students, receive this message daily in classrooms throughout the United States? How many, like Tomás, contemplate leaving school because they feel they do not belong, and see little hope at success?

Luckily, Tomás meets the Library Lady while running errands in town, and their interactions help change his relationship to learning and education. If the Nightmare Teacher is precisely what culturally responsive theorists believe is the problem of education, then the Library Lady could be considered the solution. Many of the principles of CRP are foregrounded in the relationship between the Library Lady and Tomás. For example, in their very first encounter outside the library, the Library Lady uses her interest in Tomás's language and culture to begin forming a connection with him:

Young Tomás: Carne means meat in Spanish.

Library Lady: Carnay is "meat."

YT: Yes

LL: Carnay—

YT: Carne.

LL: Caaar-nay!

YT: Carne.

LL: Carne!

YT: Yes! (González 139)

Rather than expressing frustration or belittling Tomás's use of Spanish, the Library Lady tries repeatedly to correctly pronounce the Spanish words she learns from him. She goes through a similar process in learning to pronounce Tomás's name, practicing until she gets it right. Her determination and care with his name and language

stand in stark contrast to his Nightmare Teacher's approach. While the Nightmare Teacher says, "Your language is unacceptable and speaking it in the classroom is an act of defiance and disruption," the Library Lady's actions say, "Your culture and language deserve care and respect."

Throughout the course of the play the relationship between Tomás and the Library Lady grows. The Library Lady demonstrates that she both cares for Tomás, and strongly believes in his ability to succeed:

Library Lady: (giving Tomás a blank book) It's for your own stories. You are going to grow up to be something amazing, like a famous writer or maybe even a librarian. (González 152)

The Library Lady consistently communicates high expectations of Tomás, showing confidence in his ability to read from their first meeting, despite his limited English. She brings his culture and language into their lessons, and participates in genuine reciprocity with him. Tomás, whose previous educational experiences resulted in nightmares and a desire to leave school altogether, thrives under the Library Lady's tutelage. He becomes more confident and discovers a passion for both reading and writing. This narrative sends the clear message that students like Tomás possess the intelligence, creativity, and drive to succeed, but require teachers who value and believe in them.

Tomás and the Library Lady contains other aspects of CRP's values as well, and resonates with Gloria Ladson-Billings's notions around cultural competency. While Tomás spends much of the play learning to read and speak English, his final reading accomplishment is enjoying *Don Quixote* in his native Spanish. He is now able to read books that even the Library Lady cannot. The play ends by celebrating the accomplishments of the real life Tomás Rivera, whose achievements are meaningfully placed alongside his Chicano identity:

The real Tomás Rivera was born in Crystal City, Texas, in 1935. He was a migrant worker who graduated from college and became a famous writer and professor.

[...]

Tomás Rivera became a national leader on education and the youngest person ever to run a major University of California campus, and the first Chicano to do so. (González 152)

The moment the audience discovers that Tomás was a real person has a twofold impact. Firstly, the young people in the audience are faced with a true story of a young Latino boy who struggled in school and overcame poverty to achieve tremendous academic and personal success. One of the hallmarks of culturally responsive curriculum is that it highlights the contributions of more than just White Europeans (“Preparing” 110). Not only that, this person holds such importance that people created a whole play about him, and schools and teachers think he’s important enough that they are bringing classes to watch. As Roxanne Schroeder-Arce indicates, putting these stories on stage “[models and encourages] community members to know and praise their own and each others’ cultural heritage” (9). Beyond eliciting a sense of pride in one’s culture, seeing people of their race and ethnicity represented as successful can shift young audience members’ perception about what is possible for themselves, or their peers (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 151). The story of *Tomás* communicates to young Latino/as that they can overcome challenges and achieve great things while maintaining a connection to their culture.

Comfort, pride, and familiarity with one’s own culture is known as cultural competency, and it is another significant aspect of culturally responsive pedagogy. With *Tomás*, audiences receive the message that Tomás’s Chicano identity is inseparable from his success. Chicano/Latino/Hispanic students recognize that they do not have to hide or dissociate from their cultural identities in order to achieve greatness, while White and other non-Latino/a children are forced to integrate the notion that people of all races can

be leaders, educators, and worthy of respect.

Analyzing the script through the lens of culturally responsive pedagogy also meant paying attention to ways in which pride in one's cultural heritage was potentially subtly undermined. In the first read with the cast I noticed that the version the ZACH had distributed contained subtle differences from the anthology version of the script with which I was familiar. I comment on these discrepancies in my rehearsal journal:

We also spoke briefly about the changes between the two versions of the script in terms of other small cultural representations/references. 1. In one of the reading songs, the anthology version (which is the one I'd been reading in preparation) includes the lines "I saw smoke at an Indian camp/Rode a horse that I named Champ/Across a hot and dusty plain/Sheriff Earp was my name." However, in the version we are using the verse concludes with "Sheriff Tomás was my name." This tiny difference was huge to me, as the play walks such a fine line between valuing Latino culture and valuing learning English as necessary for success which in some ways points to assimilation. For Tomás to keep his own name as Sheriff (even while playing out a fairly traditional "American West" fantasy (and talking about "Indians")), meant that he was still able to imagine the protagonist of his story as HIMSELF, rather than imagining himself with a name of a more traditional White cowboy. (Rehearsal Journal, 7 Dec. 2015)

I also noted another minor change. The stage directions in the anthology version indicate that the Library Lady speaks with a slight German accent, and she teaches Tomás a few German words towards the end of the play. These lines, as well as the reference to the Library Lady's accent, were absent from the version the ZACH distributed. Their absence effectively eliminated an important, albeit small, nod to the notion of ethnic pluralism and cultural exchange.

Knowing that CRP encourages representing multiple ethnicities and challenging the idea of a White U.S. American as neutral, I contacted José Cruz González to ask him about the discrepancies or changes. Ultimately, I discovered that the ZACH had mistakenly distributed an older version of the script. The updated version (which we used) went back to the "Sheriff Earp" line, but restored the German accent, and the

section where the Library Lady teaches Tomás the phrase “ser guht.” Had I not been engaging with the ideas of CRP in preparation to direct the script, I am not certain I would have taken notice of these particular details.

Finally, I believe that the story of Tomás as told by González invites students to recognize social inequality, a key aspect of CRP. According to Gay, “culturally responsive teachers help students to understand that knowledge has moral and political elements and consequences, which obligate them to take social action to promote freedom, equality, and justice for everyone” (“Preparing” 110). On the first day of rehearsal the show’s producer indicated that, in addition to inspiring Latino/a students to feel proud of their heritage, one of his primary motivations in choosing the show was to spark a conversation about the “right to education” (Rehearsal Journal, 7 Dec. 2015). In Tomás’s story, we see a bright, creative, talented boy who associates school with fear, and is struggling to succeed due to the impossible circumstances and discrimination he and his family face. In the final moments of the play, Adult Tomás speaks to the injustice and inequity inherent in the system for Chicano/as:

Adult Tomás: I accept this honorary degree on behalf of the many Chicano children who did not have the opportunity to get an education, through no fault of their own...

On behalf of the many Chicano parents who have aspired for generations that their children be educated but who do not know what the education system is...

On behalf of the Chicano writer who hungers for community and justice...(González 152-53)

Tomás imagines a different fate for minority and emerging bilingual students struggling in classrooms where their cultures are devalued daily, and their home language is viewed as a barrier, rather than a bridge, to their learning. Viewing this story as curriculum helped me focus a critical eye on all aspects of a script’s messaging.

Symbolic Curriculum

Gay identifies a second type of curriculum, which she refers to as *symbolic curriculum*. In a classroom environment, symbolic curriculum includes “images, symbols, icons, mottoes, awards, celebrations, and other artifacts that are used to teach students knowledge, skills, morals, and values” (“Preparing” 108). The symbolic curriculum provides representation and reinforcement about what is valued in the classroom environment. According to Gay, “over time, [students] begin to expect certain images, value what is present, and devalue that which is absent” (“Preparing” 108). In other words, students’ values are shaped through subtle indicators of their teachers’ values.

In the course of analyzing our production choices as curriculum, I attempted to assess what I was valuing in the space. I analyzed my rehearsal journal for moments that pointed to how my values were manifesting both in rehearsal, and on stage. This process allowed me to notice after the fact where I spent my time, energy, and mental resources throughout the process, and reflect on what that might mean about where I’m placing value.

In considering Gay’s analogy of symbolic curriculum as “advertising space,” (“Preparing” 108), I became aware of the limited amount of advertising real-estate. If one thing is getting a lot of attention, something else is necessarily getting less attention. In our production and rehearsal process, conversations and considerations surrounding language received a lot of attention. Our creative team discussed language regularly in the rehearsal room, and I wrote about some aspect of language almost daily in my rehearsal journal. *Tomás* is a bilingual piece, chosen by the ZACH largely because it features both English and Spanish. Austin schools are full of emerging bilingual students, many of whom speak Spanish as their first language. ZACH Education Director Nat

Miller's remarks on the first day of rehearsal indicated that he believes the bilingual nature of the show offers an opportunity for Latino/a students to feel pride in their culture, and that the bilingual nature of the show also makes it a more accessible offering for a broader community.

I also placed a very high importance on the bilingual nature of the piece, and was acutely attuned to matters of language, both its use in the script, and in the rehearsal room. Approximately two months before rehearsal began I had started learning (or re-learning) Spanish in the hopes that it might make me better equipped to direct a bilingual show. My rehearsal notes make it obvious that I was thinking daily about how Spanish was functioning both in the script and in the rehearsal room. I refer to my own use of Spanish and my deliberate efforts to use Spanish more frequently, comment on whose pronunciation is proficient and whose needs attention, describe the bilingual performers' reaction to collaborating with our Spanish-speaking composer, and work through questions about how to handle different moments of pronunciation in the show. I also asked that the study guide and preshow speech be bilingual, and at one point tried to get bilingual "credits" on the screen during pre-show.

It seemed perfectly reasonable and correct that while directing a show written in both English and Spanish, about a Spanish-speaking family, attentively and authentically representing Spanish language would be an important priority. However, the Riveras are not the only immigrants in the story. As I mentioned in the section about formal curriculum, the Library Lady speaks with a German accent and teaches Tomás some German as he is teaching her Spanish. In my rehearsal notes on the first day I wrote of the German heritage represented in the piece, "This is so important to me because it helps us recognized that this learned librarian also once had to learn English, and it emphasizes that English is not the baseline" (Rehearsal Journal, 7 Dec. 2015). In another entry I

speak at length and with urgency about needing to ensure that the non-native Spanish-speaking members of the cast have the resources they need to properly execute the numerous lines spoken in Spanish. I conclude this entry with the note “Also, if I expect them to speak with a German accent I need to connect them to those resources as well. It is important that the Library Lady is an immigrant of a different nature” (Rehearsal Journal, 12 Dec. 2015). From these entries, we could assume that I place a fairly high value on telling the story of a German immigrant, as well as the son of Mexican immigrants.

Despite my conviction that I wished to tell a story that included the Library Lady’s German heritage, that story never made it to the stage. Uncertain that we could authentically present a German accent given the timeline and resources available, I eventually told the two young women sharing the role of the Library Lady to speak without a German accent.

At the time, I reasoned that this choice was justified from both an artistic, and a culturally responsive perspective. Artistically, the character’s German heritage isn’t significant to the action of the play, and is never mentioned anywhere in the text. I felt the accent might confuse or distract young audiences, and that the time and energy required to get the accent just right would take away from other things. From a culturally responsive perspective, I did not feel confident that we had access to the necessary resources in order to present a German accent authentically. Whatever the reasons or justifications, the data speaks for itself – the Library Lady’s German heritage was given less attention in the process and was all but absent in the final product.

In the course of any play I have directed, I have been forced to let a thousand things go due to time, money, and the various other limited resources. It is simply part of the natural process of putting up a show. I let the Library Lady’s German accent fall

away, and might have never looked back, had I not happened to read a review of the show written by a UT undergraduate theatre student, who noted:

One thing I did miss from the show [...] was the Library Lady's German accent. [...] As a third generation German American, I liked that there was this little taste of my culture in a play primarily about a culture I am not a part of. It made me feel more connected to the story, and I liked the juxtaposition of the cultures. I understood why they would choose to downplay the German character trait of the library lady, but it took me out of the world when she said "Guten tag!", not only because she pronounced it incorrectly, but because I was longing for more of that story. (Audience Review, 29 Feb. 2016)

While this audience member misremembers the exact line the Library Lady speaks in German (it's "ser guht," rather than "guten tag"), her observation that the line was mispronounced is completely correct. Reading this review prompted me to look up the correct pronunciation, and our production got it wrong. I was genuinely astonished. After repeated mentions early in the process about the importance of the Library Lady's German heritage, I both eliminated her accent and failed to ensure that the only two words spoken in German were pronounced correctly.

This review prompted me to further reflect on my handling of the German accent and language, and I now believe I committed an act of cultural and ethnic erasure. I was handed a script that celebrated ethnic pluralism, and my artistic choices undermined that aspect of the story. My determination to appropriately and respectfully represent Latino/a culture, guided in part by my sense of responsibility to the Latino playwright, as well as my assumptions about who the play was for and what purpose it needed to serve, meant that I prioritized the Latino/a representation, and focused my resources in that area. I was intentional about casting Spanish-speaking, Latino/a actors, insistent about finding a Latino/a composer to write the original music, and even made an effort to learn some Spanish myself. However, I did not feel the same accountability to represent the Library

Lady's German heritage. It never occurred to me to find an actor of German heritage. I did request a dialect coach, but did not present it as non-negotiable, the way I insisted on finding a Latino/a composer. After discovering we did not have the resources for a dialect coach, I did not seek out German dialect resources or attempt to educate myself about German accents. Never was I consciously thinking about privileging one culture over another; I merely believed I was doing my due diligence to honor the primary culture and language of the play. In my journal I continued to comment on Spanish throughout the process, however I do not address or even mention my decision to abandon the German accent, despite my early commitment to that piece of the story.

In this production I focused on the fact that this is primarily a Latino/a story and I therefore prioritized authentically representing the Latino/a experience. I do not believe that was necessarily the wrong decision. I do not believe it is wrong to carve out a space for an underrepresented group to be the primary focus, nor do I believe there is an imperative to ensure that other ethnicities are represented in that space (though I *do* believe directors should generally do their best to honor the playwright's intention). I am reminded of Geneva Gay's description of multiethnic education's expansion to European ethnicities:

Everyone got in on the ethnic act. White ethnics (Poles, Slavs, Germans, Greeks, Italians, etc) began to rediscover their heritages and joined racial minorities in demanding that their cultures and experiences be included under the umbrella of multiethnic education. ("Multiethnic Education" 562)

While there is nothing wrong with anyone wanting to celebrate their ethnic heritage and see it represented, Gay expresses a concern that broadening the focus threatens to dilute multiethnic education's original intentions ("Multiethnic Education" 563). A more current example might be the emergence of "All Lives Matter" in response to the "Black Lives Matter" movement, or the recent outcry when *Hamilton* posted an audition notice

seeking non-White actors.⁵ Together, these examples point to a trend of White European-Americans' resistance to racial minorities creating a designated space that excludes or limits the access of White people.

However, there is a larger point I draw from reflecting on the manner in which I let the Library Lady's accent and pronunciation fall away. From this, I realized that valuing one thing over another in my process may happen without my necessarily making a conscious decision to do so. It may happen due to limited resources, whether of time, money, or personnel, or it may be because one aspect of the story resonates with me, leaving me blind to other elements. Like posters on a classroom wall, systems of gold stars and punishments, and spending an hour a day on math, but only thirty minutes per week on art, symbolic curriculum communicates classroom and teacher values subtly, almost imperceptibly. Only by continually assessing both what is present, and what is absent, can a culturally responsive director take stock of what they are valuing in their process. Had I taken the time during pre-production to compare my stated priorities (attending to the authenticity of Latino/a and Spanish elements of the script as well as the Library Lady's German heritage) to the realities of where I was directing my resources and energies, I might have realized that I was not giving enough attention to the German heritage piece. Understanding this before rehearsals began would have given me the opportunity to support the German heritage element of the story.

⁵ The 2015 Broadway phenomenon *Hamilton* employs a deliberately non-White cast to tell the story of the founding fathers. As the show prepares to cast for a national tour, a casting notice was released indicating that the show was seeking "nonwhite men and women." Actor's Equity released a statement that the casting notice violated Equity's policies, and the notice was altered to clarify that people of all ethnicities are welcome to audition. The show's producer made clear that they do not intend to back away from their commitment to employing a diverse cast (Paulson).

Societal Curriculum

Drawing from the work of Carlos E. Cortés, the last type of curriculum Gay discusses is societal. Cortés defines this type of curriculum as the “massive, ongoing, informal curriculum of family, peer groups, neighborhoods, mass media and other socializing forces that ‘educate’ us throughout our lives” (Cortés 475-6). Television and other mass media prove a dominant force in this type of ‘education.’ According to social psychologist George Comstock:

Television is a powerful reinforcer of the *status quo* [...] Television portrayals and particularly violent drama are said to assign roles of authority, power, success, failure, dependence, and vulnerability in a manner that matches the real-life social hierarchy, thereby strengthening that hierarchy by increasing its acknowledgement among the public and by failing to provide positive images for members of social categories occupying a subservient position. (qtd. in Cortés 467)

In other words, the media perpetuates social inequity by reproducing and normalizing it. This has profound implications on students’ perceptions of racial minorities, resulting in students “developing well-formed attitudes about members of ethnic groups, including prejudices and stereotypes, by the time they reach school” (Cortés 467).

In discussing the Non-Traditional Casting Project, Newman points to the implications of societal curriculum in roles (or lack of) for artists of color:

Since so much of our knowledge, understanding, and compassion for the world is shaped by theatre, film, and television, the absence of full and satisfying roles (in the largest meaning of that word) for disenfranchised artists has had the insidious effect of reinforcing a view of a homogenous American society that has never been more than a fantasy. (Newman 23)

Here, rather than reinforcing social structures, Newman describes the version of the world laid forth by popular media as one that concocts a false world and erases people of color from the US landscape.

According to Gay, the messages received through these outlets are too influential to ignore in the classroom (“Preparing” 109). Echoing Cortés’s recommendations, Gay argues:

Culturally responsive teaching includes thorough and critical analyses of how ethnic groups and experiences are presented in mass media and popular culture. Teachers need to understand how media images of African, Asian, Latino, Native, and European Americans are manipulated; the effects they have on different ethnic groups; [and] what formal school curricula and instruction can do to counteract their influence. (“Preparing” 109)

Here, Gay emphasizes that culturally responsive teachers need to be aware of societal curriculum’s imprint on their students in order to address omissions, stereotypes, and other misconceptions perpetuated by the entertainment industry and cultural osmosis. In addition to considering script selection (formal curriculum) and the ways in which my production choices reflected my values (symbolic curriculum), I examined the way in which societal curriculum impacted our production of *Tomás*.

Portraying the Riveras

One example of societal curriculum’s impact on our production choices centers on the show’s costume design. In our first design presentation, our costume designer Becca Drew Ramsey, shared her concept for the Rivera family. In this presentation, Ramsey indicated that she intended to distress the family’s clothing and apply patches. Ramsey explained that she wished to convey that the family had limited means, but took great pride in their appearance and would not appear dirty. I questioned whether we were truthfully representing the conditions in which migrant workers often lived (and live), which include limited access to clean water, crowded housing, and performing labor that leaves them covered with dirt by the end of the day. Ramsey countered with her concern

that Mexican immigrants, of which there are many in Austin, are often portrayed as dirty and stereotyped as such.

Whether or not Ramsey possessed specific knowledge of societal curriculum as a concept, her reasoning points to the fact that societal curriculum informed her design choices. She identified a pervasive, harmful stereotype, considered its potential negative impact on our specific community, and determined that she would make choices that would push back against that specific portrayal. I supported Ramsey's desire to go in this direction with the costumes, agreeing that perpetuating the stereotype of Mexican immigrants as dirty would have a greater negative impact on our audience than a failure to represent the challenging conditions of the migrant situation.

Another example from the rehearsal process developed around our portrayal of the character Josefa, Tomás's mother. As written, the character bears the hallmark of some female stereotypes. Her dynamic with Tomás's father is that she frets, complains, and acts emotionally while he comes across as rational and pragmatic. For example, early in the script she worries that they should not have taken Tomás out of school, that he will be too far behind to catch up, and that something is troubling him. While these concerns are well-founded, they are also presented as one-sided. Her husband, Florencio, summarily dismisses each point, saying she "needn't worry," and "he'll be fine" (González 128). Upon arriving at their new home at the migrant camp, Josefa finds fault with every aspect of their new dwelling, presenting one negative observation after another while Florencio counters each with the general idea that she is overreacting (González 133). She is loving and supportive of Tomás, but also has an entire scene dedicated to lecturing Tomás about every detail of his behavior and appearance lest he create the impression that he hasn't been "raised proper" (González 137).

I discussed these scenes in depth with the Latina actor playing Josefa. She also felt that the way the character was written reinforced stereotypes about women, and specifically about Latina mothers. I noted our first conversation on the topic in my rehearsal journal:

Yesterday in the car scene I tentatively said I was concerned that this scene is written in a way that positions the mother in sort of a nagging stereotype and the father in the “strong,” dismissive stereotype, a la “it’s the woman’s job to worry and the man’s job to calm.” I felt it reinforces this idea that women are always worrying over nothing. [Actor 1] seemed particularly aware of this dynamic at play and stated that she was trying not to play into it. We talked about approaching the conversation as though they were both problem-solving together, really listening to each other’s perspective and trying to support each other. The two of them took this note beautifully and used physical contact to demonstrate support and connection. [Actor 2’s] Florencio softened in a nice way and I loved seeing husband and wife connecting like best friends instead of playing something that read as more of a stereotype. (Rehearsal Journal, 10 Dec. 2015).

Of course, the very fact that the female performer was so eager to push against this stereotype shows that it is merely that: a stereotype. With an abundance of examples of women and Latina mothers exhibiting these stereotypical qualities in the media, both the actor and I felt it was essential to represent something different. Together, we worked to portray Josefa as a more well-rounded character by finding ways to counter Josefa’s negativity, and by bringing a greater sense of equity into her relationship with Florencio.

Art Imitating Life?

These examples illustrate the ways in which societal curriculum informed the artists working on *Tomás*. We developed our approaches to portraying certain characters by first examining our knowledge and awareness of stereotypes. From there, we determined what alternative image or representation we would rather portray. However, several tensions arose while pursuing this alternative image. Months after agreeing to

move forward with Ramsey's design concept, and several weeks into rehearsal, I wrote the following journal entry:

I watched several videos about migrant workers and I was reminded again about the conversation Becca Drew and I had about not wanting to depict the family as dirty. Because migrant farming is dirty work and living in migrant camps is dirty and very sad. Of course you get covered in dirt and sweat all day and you're living with a dozen other people in a tiny room and how can this not be dirty? This makes me think about when it is valuable to represent things truthfully and what this story is trying to represent. Someone who rose out of impossible conditions. But it is also important to push back against negative perceptions that come with representations of "dirty" Mexicans so I understand why she wanted to make that choice. (Rehearsal Journal, 16 Dec. 2015)

In this entry, I begin to question whether I am undermining an important aspect of the story, namely, the truth and acuteness of challenging conditions for migrant workers like the Riveras. I began to think about the importance Gay places on authentic representation, as well as culturally responsive teaching's mandate to raise awareness about social inequality. Dramatically, I wondered if minimizing the family's poverty in some way diminished Tomás's accomplishments, reducing the audience's sense of the obstacles he overcame.

I had similar reservations about the portrayal of Josefa. While the feminist in me bristled at playing into a female stereotype, I was also aware that culturally located stereotypes and caricatures can offer a powerful source of identification and humor. As the grandchild of two New York Jews, I was raised on Mel Brooks and Woody Allen, and my parents frequently referenced and performed Jewish stereotypes. We were "culturally Jewish," which meant our ties to our heritage revolved primarily around food, behaviors (mostly behaviors about food), and the occasional Yiddish expression. The point, however, is that these stereotypes and cultural tropes cultivated a sense of connection with our cultural traditions. Additionally, identifying as a member of that

culture granted us insider status and permitted us to laugh at stereotyped portrayals that would be unacceptable from non-Jews.

As a non-Latino/a, I found myself in a challenging position when it came to negotiating whether to play into potential Latina stereotypes. After seeing an early preview of the show, one of my colleagues commented that my White feminist influence was apparent in the portrayal of Josefa. She also commented that this portrayal might strike some Latino/as in the audience as false, or as not accurately representing their culture. As a person who was not inside that culture, these observations prompted me to wonder which was a greater misstep: to misrepresent Latino/a culture or to stereotype it.

This tension was further complicated by additional artistic considerations. As I mentioned, Josefa's dialogue strongly evoked actions such as worrying, complaining, and lecturing. As much as I might want to resist placing these characteristics on a female character for political reasons, I also felt that I risked working against the playwright's intentions if I tried to impose an alternative take on the character. Had the dialogue allowed more room for different interpretations, it might have been easier to pursue a softer, more nuanced portrayal of Josefa. However, after receiving my colleague's comments about the character not ringing true, I realized that the character's language and demeanor were not in harmony. There was a noticeable discord between what she was saying and how she was saying it. Artistically, and dramatically, this detracted from the character's believability. Conversely, once I asked the actor to simply play the intention of the lines without trying to layer on our additional intentions the dialogue flowed more naturally and the character felt more believable.

CONCLUSIONS

Thinking of our production of *Tomás* as curriculum required me to consider how all of the production elements, from the script, to the design, to nuanced performance choices, impacted what messages our audience took away from the show. Additionally, my understanding of societal curriculum asked me to acknowledge that our audience enters the theatre with preconceived ideas and beliefs, and offered me the opportunity to either reinforce or counter some of those ideas. While Gay breaks the idea of curriculum into three distinct categories in order to clarify the meaning of each, my directing process revealed these categories to be deeply interconnected and largely inseparable. I discuss only the script as formal curriculum, but the audience did not sit and read the script, they saw a full production. Therefore, just like when a teacher shows a film in class, the production itself, and not the script, became the sole “instructional material” from which the students were making meaning. My exclusion of the Library Lady’s German accent becomes the equivalent of choosing a textbook or story to read in class with a generic White character, rather than a specifically ethnically located German-American.

While I use Gay’s definition of symbolic curriculum to increase my own awareness of what I, as a director, am valuing or prioritizing throughout my process, the idea of symbolic curriculum could be applied to many aspects of the process, production, or surrounding theatrical experience. I analyzed my journal to discover what language was given priority, but I could have just as easily discussed the way the rehearsal room was arranged, where the stage manager sat, or what type of behavior was reinforced or discouraged. In thinking about the production, I might have discussed the way books hung from the ceiling and were painted on the floor, creating a visual indicator that the production values books and reading. I am reminded of something professor and

playwright Steven Dietz tells his students: “Everything on stage is information.” The idea of symbolic curriculum added to my understanding: “What you put on stage will be considered *important*.” This idea can be extended beyond the stage as well to apply to the entire theatre-going experience. In her article, “Towards Culturally Responsive Artistry,” Roxanne Schroeder-Arce identifies the curtain speech, post-show discussions, lobby displays, programs, and study guides as opportunities to further connect with the Latino/a audience the ZACH was attempting to cultivate (11). Filling these spaces with Latino/a culture and Spanish language not only increase practical accessibility, they communicate that Latino/a culture and language are valued in this space.

Finally, thinking about societal curriculum forced me to recognize two important things. Firstly, theatre *is* societal curriculum. Like television, film, or any other media, the theatre represents an educative force, and the work we present contributes to our audiences’ understanding and beliefs about the world in which they live. Even though *Tomás and the Library Lady* is a show for young audiences, I do not think this only applies to theatre for young people. I suspect adults are also continually impacted by the representations of minorities they see in the media. Therefore, we have a responsibility not to reproduce and perpetuate harmful or essentializing portrayals of ethnic minorities or other marginalized groups. Secondly, we are never making work in a vacuum. Every play we produce is not only in conversation with the rest of theatre, it is in conversation with everything that has contributed to shaping our audience’s worldviews.

All of this leaves me with a strong conviction that culturally responsive artists must cultivate an awareness of how the plays they write, produce, and direct fit into, or disrupt, the narratives surrounding ethnic minorities, or risk reproducing narratives that continue to marginalize people of color. To give an example, a recent graduate director in the UT Department of Theatre and Dance cast an African American actor to play Stanley

Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Many students praised this choice as a triumph in color-blind casting, as it provided a powerful and talented young actor with a rare opportunity. However, others in the department questioned whether casting a Black man as a hyper-masculine, brutish, rapist was a socially responsible decision, given the social messaging often associated with Black men. If the director explored the implications of societal curriculum as part of the casting process (and I do not know for certain that she did not), she would need to contend with the harmful ways in which Black men have historically been portrayed and caricatured. Considering societal curriculum would invite her to question whether this casting choice was potentially perpetuating harmful perceptions of African Americans. Again, for all I know, all of these conversations and considerations took place.

Ultimately, when it comes to applying the concept of societal curriculum to my own practice, I know I will approach both scripts AND character portrayals by asking 1. What, if any, group is being represented in this story? 2. What, if any, dominant perceptions or stereotypes exist about this group? 3. How does the portrayal I'm considering contribute to, or counter, those perceptions or stereotypes?

Chapter Five: Valuing Culture

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Towards the end of my first year at UT I read an article posted online by New York Times Magazine called “Who Gets to Graduate?” The article’s title refers to the disproportionate number of economically disadvantaged students, many of whom are first generation college students and students of color, who drop out of college before obtaining their four year degree (Tough). The article challenges “mismatch” theory, a popular critique of academic affirmative action which suggests that such diversity initiatives might “ill-serve” the students they intend to benefit by admitting them to colleges for which they are underprepared, making it significantly more challenging for them to succeed (Friedersdorf). However, in “Who Gets to Graduate?” author Paul Tough cites several studies that suggest preparedness and ability have little to do with these students’ failure to thrive at college. Instead, the article suggests that such students lack resilience in the face of commonplace academic challenges because of a deeply internalized *belief* in their own abilities. In essence, students from economically underprivileged backgrounds have such strong doubts about whether they belong in college that they are quick to conclude that they are not college material and enact a self-fulfilling prophesy (Tough).

Growing up, my parents were determined that I would be the first in our immediate family to attend college. They spoke about college as a given, enrolled me in a high school program specifically designed to support first generation college students, and went into massive debt to support me when I decided to pursue an extremely expensive private liberal arts education. My mother considers it a personal victory that both my sister and I completed our four-year degrees and went on to Masters programs.

However, my mother was not the only one along the way who treated me like I was destined for higher education. From elementary school through my undergraduate degree I never had a single non-White teacher. I never had to battle for a teacher's attention or combat a teacher's preconceived opinions about my abilities because of my race. I never had school counselors raise their eyebrows skeptically at the elite schools I considered, despite my grades being somewhat mediocre. No one has ever implied that I was admitted to the college of my choice because the school needed to meet their quota of White people (my school overachieved in meeting its quota of White people). In short, when I arrived at my predominantly White, private, liberal arts college, I never doubted I belonged there. Why would I? Nearly everyone there looked exactly like me, talked like me, and thought like me. Reading this article showed me a new and unbearable side of my White privilege. It's not just that my path was made easier because I'm White, my very sense of my own abilities and what I am capable of was shaped (in part) by the subtle messages sent to me throughout my education. This article helped me understand for the first time the very real connection between teachers' expectations of students, and those students' belief in their own abilities.

LISTENING

In my introduction, I state my belief that as a White ally and future institutional leader, I have a responsibility to listen to the experiences of artists of color in order to, as Daniel Banks puts it, help "[make] US theatre more of a welcome table, with room and food enough for all" (1). Listening of this nature is not passive. Listening of this nature requires restraint and discipline. It requires more than remaining silent while another is speaking. It begins with the act of reaching out, of engaging curiosity, of taming an

unruly defensiveness, of believing a story so far outside one's own experience that it sounds impossible.

Through documenting and reflecting on my process of directing *Tomás*, I came to realize one path to listening begins with inviting another to speak. After applying both caring-in-action to my rehearsal process, and viewing the production through the lens of culturally responsive curriculum, I believe these two concepts contribute to the type of listening I hope to do by both creating an environment in which my collaborators feel invited to speak, and cultivating a readiness to listen. By utilizing a caring-in-action approach in my process, I actively invited the ensemble members to share their lived experiences, communicated concern and interest in each of them as whole individuals, positioned performers as experts, and created a space where they could feel seen, heard, and valued. I intended these actions to encourage the ensemble members to trust, share, and speak, but they also aided me, as a director, in becoming attuned to and prepared for what they might say. In other words, the practice primed me to listen.

Viewing our production through the lens of culturally responsive curriculum meant a different type of listening. In addition to listening to people, it required me to listen to the messages of the script with a deliberate attention to how it represented Latino/as, how it valued culture, and how it celebrated ethnic pluralism. Additionally, I needed to not only listen to what the script says, but all of the things my own choices say. I discovered (sometimes after the fact) that listening to different people allowed me to hear the same story in many different ways. Sometimes I would hear a personally irksome portrayal of women, sometimes the disappointing absence of a German accent, sometimes the celebration of a brilliant young Chicano's remarkable achievements, and sometimes the story of how a poor, failing Chicano was saved by a White lady's intervention. In addition to listening to the messages coming from the script and

production, I tried to determine what else people were hearing outside of the theatre, and how it might affect or alter the story we were trying to tell.

CONFLICTING PRIORITIES IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE DIRECTING

In my chapter on curriculum, I address a tension that arose when discussing costuming for the Riveras, a family of migrant workers. I felt conflicted about which was more important: showing the difficult conditions of poverty and limited resources often connected to migrant farm work, or refusing to participate in a culture that portrays Mexicans stereotypically and negatively. Proponents of CRP advise that curriculum should be comprehensive, and show diversity within diversity. Therefore, an ideal classroom approach involves exposure to a wide range of representations throughout the course of a school year. Students might explore the reality of migrant conditions in depth, as well as numerous other examples of Mexicans and Latino/as in a wide variety of professions and economic statuses. A single production remains logistically limited in what stories it can tell. *Tomás* portrays a single Mexican family, therefore, it felt necessary to choose, to prioritize one representation over another.

This is our business as theatre makers: prioritizing one representation over another. When we choose a script, when we cast a show, when we make design decisions, when we guide an actor's performance away from one choice and towards another – all of these represent the choice to prioritize one representation over another. In the entertainment industry, casting a recognizable name often takes priority over a casting a lesser-known actor who is ethnically appropriate for the role. Even when a director decides to honor ethnically-appropriate casting, they will still be called on to preference one representation over another. If a director determines that a Latina actor is necessary

for the role, their choice of specific actor contributes to their audiences understanding of what a Latina looks like: dark skinned, or light? Afro-Latina? Do they speak with an accent? What is their body type? Do they use a wheelchair? Are they portraying a housekeeper, or a doctor? Are they the only Latina in the cast? If so, how might their role reinforce social hierarchies?

Casting, design, performance – all of these elements often fall under the purview of the director’s own aesthetic and artistry. When artistry seems at odds with culturally responsible representation, it becomes a challenging test of a director’s commitment to culturally responsive artistry. To provide an example, I return to the choreography for the song “Elotes.” I desired the staging to reflect the mournful lyrics, which repeat, “will life get better someday?” I hoped the staging would evoke the challenging and exhausting nature of migrant farming, and my initial choreography, rough though it was, achieved these goals. However, in addition to the producer recognizing that the choreography needed to be more polished, he also felt it needed to be more “joyful,” or we would risk losing our young audience. Finally, I felt strongly that, aesthetically, the dance should involve all three performers. That meant putting a White, non-Latina body into the role of a Latina migrant worker for the duration of the dance. The same White, female actor performed the role of Enrique, Tomás’s younger brother, and I did receive criticism for that choice.

In the staging of this short song, a number of priorities and limitations affected our choices around representation. My priority of authentically conveying migrant farming as arduous and tedious conflicted with the producer’s priorities of traditionally “clean” choreography and a desire to engage a young audience. In terms of placing a non-Latina actor into small, Latino/a roles, I could point to the fact that our budget limited how many actors I had available to play the various roles. However, this excuse only

carries so much validity when you consider that the original production performed with two actors. If I felt strongly that a White actor should not portray Enrique, or should not take part in the dance, I would have found a different solution. I let my artistic vision (a small ensemble where everyone plays several meaningful roles) take precedence over legitimate concerns about placing a White performer in a non-White role. I did so in the midst of writing a thesis that attempts to denounce White actors playing non-White characters as a hugely problematic practice. Then I proceeded to use this practice in a show where culturally responsible representation was a primary focus of the process.

I do not share this example to suggest that I ultimately failed at my goal of responsible representation, but rather to demonstrate the ways in which competing priorities often impact choices of representation, often without time or attention paid to the consequences. Concerns about budget, ticket sales, treating the performers and creative team fairly, and the successful execution of an artistic vision all hold the potential to test a director's values and demand compromises, or even sacrifices. Even the very principles of CRP, which should theoretically work together to promote responsible representation, occasionally come into conflict, as we saw with the costume conversation. Prioritizing authenticity would have meant ignoring the implications of societal curriculum. Steering clear of a problematic portrayal in this case meant letting go of the priority to draw attention to challenging social inequities.

REMOVING OUR CULTURAL BLINDERS

Geneva Gay explains that teachers who wish to pursue a more culturally responsive practice must begin with careful self-analysis. She states, “if teachers do not know how their own cultural blinders can obstruct educational opportunities for students

of color, they cannot locate feasible places, directions, and strategies for changing them,” (“Preparing” 70). She advocates for consciousness-raising amongst teachers. The methods I used to collect data for my thesis, for example, keeping and analyzing a rehearsal journal, viewing the script and production choices as curriculum and interrogating what “lessons” they were teaching an audience, and creating caring, personal relationships with the performance ensemble and creative team represent repeatable, important actions for my own practice of culturally responsive artistry.

If White theatre practitioners genuinely desire a more diverse, equitable, and pluralistic field, we must remove our collective cultural blinders. These cultural blinders convince us that we are the only legitimate arbiters of proper theatre etiquette. They deceive us into believing that White stories are universal stories. They limit our ability to recognize, celebrate, and promote excellent art when it falls outside our culturally constructed comfort zone. In 1996, August Wilson gave the keynote address at the Theatre Communication’s Group biennial conference. In a powerful speech entitled, “The Ground on Which I Stand,” Wilson asserted the need for a culturally-rooted African-American theatre. He rejected the notion that inviting African-American artists into an otherwise culturally White framework is satisfactory. He said:

We cannot share a single value system if that value system is the values of white Americans based on their European ancestors. We reject that as Cultural Imperialism. We need a value system that includes our contributions as Africans in America. Our agendas are as valid as yours. We may disagree, we may forever be on opposite sides of aesthetics, but we can only share a value system that is inclusive of all Americans and recognizes their unique and valuable contributions. (Wilson 49)

Here, Wilson’s words remind me that *all* stories are culturally specific, including those that come from the dominant culture. As White theatre artists, as audiences, as critics, we need to recognize that our culture and perspective has dominated the field for some time,

leaving little room for other voices to be truly heard. We need to become aware of the cultural blinders that dramatically limit our range of vision, and discover the world of viable, excellent art is wider and richer than we ever imagined.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

CRP can provide theatre practitioners additional language and frameworks for discussing the complex issues of diverse representation. I entered into my research with an assumption that I would emerge with a concrete answer about how to reliably enact culturally responsible representation in every show. In fact, I emerge with only a greater appreciation for the complexity of the issue, and an even greater certainty that we, as practitioners, must keep pushing our field, and ourselves, to do better. For me, “doing better” means continuing to cultivate and reflect on the habits of culturally responsive artistry, such as caring-in-action, and viewing theatre through the lens of curriculum.

The effect of caring-in-action on my own experience was an unexpected by-product. I chose to bring caring-in-action principles into my rehearsal process because of its documented effect on student engagement and achievement. I reasoned that, if demonstrating caring and maintaining high expectations of students could enhance student achievement, it might increase the ensemble members’ investment and engagement in our show. Whether this occurred or not, I cannot say. However, I *can* say that the practices and habits of caring-in-action affected my own engagement as a director. In order for the performers and creative team to feel visible, heard, and valued, I needed to see them, listen to them, and value them. Much of the scholarship around CRP attends to *student* outcomes, as boosting student achievement and agency remains CRP’s primary objective. However, because my data consisted of only my own observations and

reflections, I can only speak with confidence about my own outcomes. My personal outcomes included knowing more about the performers and creative team with whom I collaborated, enjoying a more relaxed and genuine relationship with the ensemble members, and feeling more confident that I was creating a positive space for everyone involved than I have in previous processes.

The very act of naming theatre as curriculum forces theatre-makers to understand that what we do *teaches*. Gay quotes one African American child who says, “People are inspired by what they see on television. If they do not see themselves on TV, they want to be someone else” (*Culturally Responsive Teaching* 151). As theatre practitioners, we teach what heroes look like. We teach what positions minorities can hold in society. In describing symbolic curriculum, Gay asserts that simply by unconsciously absorbing the images on their classroom walls children learn to value what is present, and devalue what is absent (“Preparing” 108). I maintain that this principle applies to the “pedestal” of the stage as well.

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