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The Human Voice: Theatre as a Means of Celebrating Diversity and Creating Community

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Abstract: As a theatre professor working in the deep south of the United States, I am keenly aware of this region's troubled history with civil rights, particularly as it applies to race and gender. My role as the primary theatre-voice instructor at my institution has afforded me the opportunity to participate in three dynamic collaborations in which the animating force of theatre and its applied training techniques played an integral role in facilitating the public affirmation of three historically oppressed groups: rural African-American school children (through the rehearsal and public performance of African-American praise poetry), transgendered individuals (through vocal therapy and applied acting techniques), and women in the STEM disciplines (through inter-active theatre presentations funded by the National Science Foundation). Each endeavor required the development of a unique application of both dramaturgy and a range of performance techniques designed to "give voice" to those who are frequently marginalized in the pursuit of their personal and professional desires, providing them with a sense of community and solidarity, and their audiences, often those belonging to the dominant culture, with new perspectives. My contention is that these kinds of theatre-based interdisciplinary projects can be effective instruments for empowering diverse groups with a sense of collective identity, and a forum through which their concerns can be heard, and their gifts celebrated.

Keywords: Theatre, Voice, Empowerment, Community, Education

Introduction: The Voice – Physical and Metaphorical

PATSY RODENBURG, AN international figure in theatre voice training, testifies to the primacy of voice as a vital means of communication when she claims, "as we open our mouths to let sound and words pour forth, we reveal the deepest part of ourselves."¹ In fact, she would argue, that claiming our right to speak is claiming our power- perhaps the unifying objective in our work with these diverse communities. I use the term voice in this article to identify the *physical* voice and its power to communicate human experience from person to person, but also the *collective* voice of those whose aspirations and challenges need to be articulated and amplified in the interests of social justice. In developing the voice through performance techniques, the speaker grows in personal authority

¹ P. Rodenburg, *The Right to Speak* (New York: Routledge 1992), p.x.

and the ability to compel others to listen. Just recently, the New York Times documented the work of the master voice teacher Kristin Linklater of Columbia University as she trained World Economic Forum fellows to capture an audience and shape their perceptions by embodying voice and language.² In addition to strengthening individual voices, we attempted to enhance the collective voices of African-American children and women in academic science through words - poetry in performance, personal narrative, and interactive theatrical dialogue - ancient practices serving, as art has always done, as a vital force for bringing people together, telling a compelling story, and effecting transformation.

Advancing Women in Academic Science, Technology, Math and Engineering through Inter-active Theatre

The³ National Academy of Sciences 2007 report *Beyond Bias and Barriers, Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science* concluded that “women are a small proportion of the science and engineering faculty members at research universities and they typically receive fewer resources and less support than their male colleagues.”⁴ In that same year, the National Science Foundation’s *Report on Women, Minorities and Persons with Disabilities* indicated that women represented only 31% of the faculty in the STEM disciplines at research institutions, lagging behind men in all measures of success, including rank and salary.⁵ To address these kinds of gender disparities, NSF created its Advance Program to develop “systematic approaches to increase the representation and advancement of women in academic science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers, thereby contributing to the development of a more diverse science and engineering work force.”⁶ In 2006, Auburn University was awarded an Advance PAID (Partnerships for Adaptation, Implementation and Dissemination) grant from the National Science Foundation. Auburn’s PAID initiative focused on STEM transformation through “small wins”, a series of small changes to “improve the climate and culture of the institution, thereby facilitating the participation, advancement, and success rate of female faculty in STEM”.⁷ This approach to change was pioneered by Karl Weick in his “Small Wins: Redefining the Scale of Social Problems”, which advocates for recasting larger problems into smaller ones which can be reconsidered as a series of controllable opportunities of modest size that produce visible results.⁸ At Auburn University, women represent only 16.6% of the faculty working in STEM disciplines, which NSF recognizes as Science, Math, Engineering, Technology and the Social and Behavioral Sciences.⁹

² P. Cohen, “Training for Leading Roles,” *The New York Times* (July 9, 2010)

³ Hague, D. Sollie, T. Alexander, O. Jenda, A.E. Smith, D. Svyantek, M. Wooten: ADVANCE Auburn Team Members, “Advancing Women in Academic Science, Technology, Math and Engineering Through Inter-Active Theatre” (part 1 of “The Human Voice - Theatre as a Means of Celebrating Diversity and Creating Community”).

⁴ Committee on Maximizing the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy, *Beyond Bias and Barriers- Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2007).

⁵ *National Science Foundation Report on Women, Minorities and Persons with Disabilities*, <http://www.nsf.gov/funding> (2007).

⁶ Advance National Science Foundation: <http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/advance/index.jsp>.

⁷ Advance Auburn Center: <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/provost/odma/womensinitiatives/advance>.

⁸ K. Weick, “Small Wins: Redefining the Scale of Social Problems,” *American Psychologist*, Volume 39, Number 1, (January 1984), p. 30.

⁹ D. Sollie, A.E. Smith, D. Svyantek, M. Wooten, “Auburn University STEM Faculty by Gender and Rank,” *Auburn PAID Grant Report Summary of Auburn University* (2010).

Concerned with the under-representation of women in STEM at Auburn and a host of climate issues compromising their advancement, the Advance Team identified a series of objectives, which, if accomplished, would create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women on our campus. These goals included researching, developing and testing the most beneficial and cost effective “small wins” approaches to promoting women in STEM, identifying those that would be applicable to Auburn, and disseminating this cost/benefit model to Advance and other institutions through publications and national conference presentations.¹⁰ The Advance PAID grant proposal included a provision for the development of original theatre presentations, through which some of the challenges facing women in STEM might be explored and communicated to a wider audience, fostering discussion and generating practical solutions to those challenges.¹¹ As a faculty associate and theatre consultant to this project, my responsibility was to develop theatre programming to serve these goals.

Theatre creates a communal experience with the potential to communicate the impact of the systemic barriers to women in these male dominated fields on a very human level. In seeking to create both a truthful and provocative theatre event, we looked initially to the work of Augusto Boal, the Brazilian director and activist who developed the theories and practices of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal believed in a theatre of transformation in which the audience actively participates in the process - either by taking over the role of the actor and changing the outcome of the scene, or spontaneously re-writing the play to find solutions to the problems of oppression embedded in the play’s dramatic action.

For Boal, the ultimate act of theatre was to *use* the solutions produced by the interactive theatre experience, to “mobilize against all forms of oppression and bring change to our communities and institutions.”¹² In seeking to apply Boal’s theories to our work, we also studied the work of the Center for Research in Learning and Teaching Theatre Program at the University of Michigan. The mission of the CRLT program is to develop theatre programming with the purpose of raising awareness about multicultural issues and developing strategies for “creating an institutional climate where all faculty and students can succeed”.¹³ Jeffrey Steiger, the Artistic Director of the CRLT Players and author of many of the program’s sketches, has identified a unique equation for the success of theatre as an effective educational tool. Building scripts on a solid foundation of research, the scenarios presented by the CRLT players invite engagement and identification with difficult issues, but because it is theatre and an artifice, and because humor is often used, an aesthetic distance is created that allows the audience to think critically about those issues and to participate freely in the inter-active components of the theatre experience.¹⁴ The CRLT Players have produced a series of inter-active sketches for the NSF Advance Program dealing with gender dynamics in hiring, ef-

¹⁰ C. Curtis, O. Jenda, D. Sollie, M. Stroup-Gardner, M. Wooten, “Project Goal and Objectives for Advance Auburn,” *ADVANCE Auburn: STEM Transformation through “Small Wins” NSF Advance PAID Proposal # 0620000* (2006).

¹¹ C. Curtis, O. Jenda, D. Sollie, M. Stroup-Gardner, M. Wooten, “Interactive Theatre,” *ADVANCE Auburn: STEM Transformation through “Small Wins” NSF Advance PAID Proposal # 0620000* (2006).

¹² A. Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (New York: Urizen Books, 1979), ix, 119.

¹³ University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching: www.crlt.umich.edu/index.php.

¹⁴ C. Kaplan, C.E. Cook, J. Steiger, “Using Theatre to Stage Instructional and Transformational Change,” *Change, the Magazine of Higher Learning* 3 (2006): 33-39.

fective mentoring practices and implicit bias in the tenure and promotion process and have provided a dynamic model for academic institutions creating theatre around diversity issues.

Having researched inter-active theatre practices, we also explored current studies on gender bias in academic science nationally, particularly the work of Virginia Valian, whose identification of the destructive power of gender schemas to cripple women's advancement has had profound effects on the ways in which women can advocate for their own empowerment within the academy.¹⁵ Our next step was to interview key personnel at Auburn about their experiences with the challenges facing women in STEM at our institution. This qualitative data would form the core of the inter-active theatre scenario we produced. The Principal Investigator for the PAID Advance grant prepared the Institutional Review Board Research Protocol Review Form, and we devised an interview template which focused on specific departmental climate issues, but allowed the subject to control the content of the interview.¹⁶

Of the 30 interviews conducted, 17 were with female faculty, 4 of these women were untenured, and 2 were administrators. Of the 13 men interviewed, one was a dean and 8 were department chairs. Most of the individuals who volunteered to be interviewed shared their views freely; secure in the knowledge that particular care would be taken in developing the script to avoid identifying particular individuals, circumstances, or departments. In surveying *faculty* members, we sought information about the length of time the individual had been at Auburn, the male-female ratio in their department, their rank and tenure status, the progress of their research program, the equitable distribution of resources and responsibilities, the efficacy of the mentoring process in their department and their satisfaction with work-life balance. We asked *administrators* to describe their mentoring programs, to assess the progress of gender equity in their programs, and to suggest innovations and practices that might effectively recruit, retain and advance women in their departments.

The interviews produced important information about the differences in the perceptions of men and women and faculty and administration when it came to several key issues. For instance, while conceding that women were under-represented in their departments, and supportive of gender equity in principle, 65% of men felt that satisfying progress was being made in advancing women in these fields. All women interviewed felt that the progress was too slow, and that not enough women served in key leadership positions with the power to change or institutionalize policies that would advantage women. All but one of the administrators felt that by and large, tenure and promotion criteria specific to their department had been effectively communicated to male and female faculty in a timely manner. By contrast, fully one third of the women interviewed stated that either the criteria for tenure and promotion had not been explicitly laid out, or that the bar kept changing, or that they were being held to a higher standard than the men in their department. 60% of all interviewees stated that female faculty struggled to balance teaching and service responsibilities with the demands of research. All faculty interviewed suggested that the department chair had the potential to play a crucial role in their advancement and roughly one third of women stated that their chair had been ineffective or frankly unsupportive of their attempts to achieve promotion and tenure. All of the tenured women interviewed cited supportive partners as vital to their

¹⁵ V. Valian, *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1999). Chapters 6-7.

¹⁶ Auburn University Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects Research Protocol # 08-312-EP 09019", *Advance Auburn STEM Transformation Through Small Wins* (2009).

ability to pursue promotion and tenure. All participants voiced concerns about a lack of institutional policies to support a healthy work-life balance, including implementation of dual hiring practices and on-site day care.

These findings supported the results of Advance Auburn's campus-wide climate survey in which "male and female faculty had characterized mentoring efforts at the institution as poor, with women in STEM responding unfavorably to their tenure and promotion process."¹⁷ These combined results helped to shape both the focus of the "Advance Auburn –Best Practices for Small Wins Workshop" which Auburn would host in May of 2009, and the content of the inter-active script we would be presenting there. As the script evolved, it was reviewed by the members of the Advance Team: the Principal Investigator and Assistant Provost for Women's Initiatives and faculty and administrators from the College of Science and Mathematics, Psychology, and Industrial and Systems Engineering. These individuals collectively represent a broad range of expertise in both scholarship and administrative skill and provided invaluable feedback on the authenticity of the dialogue.

Our goal was to incorporate our research into a scenario that would bring to life the challenges faced by a female faculty member and her department chair as they struggled to devise effective strategies for securing her tenure during a rather tense third year review. The conflict in the scene revealed a series of problems related to the clear communication of expectations for tenure, and the implicit biases held by both individuals. As the drama escalates, the characters become increasingly defensive as the female faculty member accuses the department chair of promoting a male faculty member and abandoning her to the mentorship of a colleague who is no longer current in the field, and failing to advocate for the quality of her research and citation record, strong teaching, collegiality and exemplary service with the tenure and promotion committee.

The scenario was presented at the "Advance Auburn- Best Practices for Small Wins Workshop" with professional actors in a Forum Theatre venue, in which the audience watches the scene, discusses the problems it presents, and creates new actions for the performers who replay the scene to address the challenges presented in the original scenario. Boal calls this 'simultaneous dramaturgy'.¹⁸ In performance, the actors created a powerful interaction, effectively portraying the frustration both individuals experienced when unable to communicate their intentions clearly. During the facilitation session, the workshop participants broke into small groups to discuss questions related to the mentoring process, effective communication, sensitivity to power dynamics in the faculty- chair relationship, gender schemas, and tools for self-advocacy. The presentation produced intense discussions, a powerful sense of common purpose, and thoughtful solutions adaptable to the "small wins approach" to institutional transformation. The participants recommended conducting third year reviews in the faculty member's office to offset uneven power dynamics, sending an electronic copy of the third year review in advance so the faculty member can prepare a response, emphasizing the positive contributions of faculty as well as recommendations for improvement, offering benchmarking procedures and dossiers of tenured faculty, communicating tenure and promotion expectations clearly and in a timely fashion and tracking progress at regular intervals.

¹⁷ D. Sollie, O. Jenda, D. Svyantek, A.E. Smith, M. Wooten, "ADVANCE Auburn Climate Survey Summary," *ADVANCE Auburn PAID STEM Transformation Through Small Wins Third Annual Report to NSF* (2009): 35-36.

¹⁸ Boal, 139-41.

The participants agreed that in STEM fields, research and funding hold primacy, teaching and service are secondary, and female faculty should manage their time and efforts accordingly. In addition, they would advise women in STEM to persevere in seeking access to information, resources and facilities and to create supportive networks of both male and female colleagues within and outside their institution.¹⁹

The workshop was attended by various faculty and administrators from Advance institutions nationwide and key Auburn personnel, including the provost, who invited the team to repeat the presentation at the heads and chairs council meeting as a diversity-training tool for administrators. In assessing the impact of the inter-active theatre scenario we reviewed the workshop surveys, which indicated a strong positive response to the presentation and the usefulness of the information derived from the subsequent discussion. Many participants relayed their intention to implement the mentoring practices and self-advocacy tools advanced in the interactive theatre presentation.²⁰ Several administrative units across campus have expressed interest in developing inter-active theatre programs for their disciplines, citing theatre as an effective means of framing and rethinking diversity issues.

Vocal Performance and Civic Engagement in Rural Alabama Schools

Ten minutes but a world away from Auburn University, the flagship research institution in the state of Alabama, is a rural, agriculturally based community of roughly 1,000 people whose entire school system is confined to one small campus in which 87% of the student population qualifies for the subsidized lunch program. State funding for education has been cut by 7% and teacher turnover is high. The elementary school offers no arts programming of any kind, and few of the predominantly African-American students enrolled there expect to graduate and attend that research institution just ten minutes away. With no central business district, the school is the center of community activity.²¹ Auburn University's mission statement, consistent with its land grant history of community service, proudly declares its commitment to outreach by "developing programs that will enrich the lives of all citizens in the state."²² As material proof of this statement, Auburn University's recently published strategic plan cites as one of its objectives the transformation of an underserved school district.²³ In concert with the underlying principles of the university's outreach program, the College of Liberal Arts created a Community and Civic Engagement Initiative whose mission is "to create a culture of faculty and student engagement both within and outside the university that will address and solve challenges facing communities."²⁴ To educate faculty about the best practices for developing civically engaged programming, scholarship and curricula, the College of Liberal Arts at Auburn underwrites a Community and Civic Engagement Summer Academy that introduces faculty to the policies and practices involved in these activities and the resources available to support them. This faculty development experience helped me

¹⁹ D. Sollie, O. Jenda, M. Wooten, A.E. Smith, D. Svyantek, D. Hague, T. Alexander, "Forum Theatre Presentation," *ADVANCE Auburn PAID STEM Transformation Through Small Wins Third Annual Report to NSF* (2009): 7.

²⁰ Sollie, et al, 7.

²¹ Lee County, Alabama Public Schools: <http://www.lee.k12.al.us>.

²² Auburn University: <http://www.ocm.auburn.edu/welcome/visionandmission.html>.

²³ Auburn University: http://ocm.auburn.edu/strategic_plan/.

²⁴ AU College of Liberal Arts/ Community and Civic Engagement: <http://media.cla.auburn.edu/cla/civicengagement/index.cfm>.

identify the ways in which my training in performance and the burgeoning communication skills of my acting students could be placed in service to these shared missions.

Current research suggests that arts-based engaged learning and scholarship “enhances student learning, advances community development and helps to create meaningful collaborations between diverse partners.”²⁵ This confluence of circumstances - the needs of the Loachapoka school system, the development of the community and civic engagement training program, and the university’s willingness to provide financial resources to support its outreach mission, created an opportunity for us to introduce theatre programming to an underserved school and civic engagement experience to a group of AU senior performance majors.

The *Imagining America Curriculum Project Report on “Culture and Community Development in Higher Education”* found that the best university - community projects involved partnerships that were “reciprocal and collaborative, producing knowledge through jointly designed activities and ensuring that community engagement projects serve communities as well as they do students.”²⁶ Engaged practice also necessitates exposure to information related to community engagement, “including race and class studies, white privilege, cultural identity and critical reflection on diversity and multiculturalism.”²⁷ Following these guidelines, we worked closely with the director of the Extended Day Program at Loachapoka Elementary School, identifying a specific matrix of educational goals for our students. We established a schedule of twelve on site vocal performance workshops to be led by the Auburn students, which would culminate in a public performance of African-American Praise Poetry. Through these inter-active sessions we hoped to engage both sets of students, black and white, in activities that would enrich their knowledge of language, African-American culture, and the power of the spoken word to build community and connect students of different backgrounds. Praise Poetry traditionally served to preserve community history and to pass on rituals of language, poetry, tradition and ethics to the younger generation, and our community partners felt this would be a meaningful and relevant exercise for the Loachapoka students.²⁸ Auburn University students stood to benefit from this enhanced academic experience by solidifying a knowledge of their craft by teaching it to others, expanding their multicultural literacy through a study of African-American poets, by developing an appreciation of human diversity and commonality, and strengthening a sense of empathy and social responsibility with respect to their roles as artists and citizens.

To familiarize ourselves with issues related to racial and cultural identity, we read Linda Christensen’s “Unlearning the Myths that Bind Us,” which reveals the insidious ways that racial stereotypes have been embedded in the various media children have been exposed to since early childhood.²⁹ The Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman denounces this as our “secret education”, which he says instructs us to accept the world as it is portrayed in these distorted

²⁵ G. Jay, “What (Public) Good Are the (Engaged) Humanities?” *Imagining America Curriculum Project Response*, *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, <http://www.imaginingamerica.org> (2009) 3.

²⁶ A. Goldbard, “The Curriculum Project Report: Culture and Community Development in Higher Education,” *Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life*, <http://www.imaginingameria.org> (2009).

²⁷ Jay, 7.

²⁸ B. Fountain, “The Praise Poem: History and Construction,” National Park Service, The U.S. Department of the Interior, <http://usasearch.gov/search>.

²⁹ L. Christensen, “Unlearning the Myths that Bind Us,” *Reading Writing and Rising Up, Teaching Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Rethinking Schools, 2000), Chapter 2.

social blueprints.³⁰ My acting students, so fond of their Disney movies, were discomfited to learn the extent to which their impressions of people outside the dominant culture had been manipulated.

Seeking to frame a discussion about the artist's place in the multicultural landscape, I required each student to read Jill Dolan's "Rehearsing Democracy: Advocacy, Public Intellectuals and Civic Engagement in Theatre and Performance Studies". This essay challenges theatre instructors to train their students to be informed, engaged theatre artists and scholars. When our students look into the larger culture, Dolan suggests, they will see continuing struggles with "racism, contentions over money and class, access and entitlement." If it is true that "theatre and performance help shape and promote certain understandings of what America looks like and believes in,"³¹ then it becomes particularly important that children of white privilege like my students come to have a broader understanding of what that is, especially if they hope to make viable contributions to the art form. The article has sparked discussion about the aesthetic tension that exists in academic theatre communities between those who would educate the whole student and those who focus on the studio training of future artists - a point of contention in my department as well. In reflecting on their limited exposure to diverse cultures, my students raised concerns about whether it was appropriate for a group of white students to teach African-American Poetry to African-American students. I told them that they had been invited to teach the voice and acting techniques that would help the children bring this vibrant poetry to life, skills they had been developing for the past four years. Here was an opportunity to create a new generation of actors or theatre patrons. The children could teach *them* about the life experiences the poems described.

In preparing to lead the workshops, the Auburn students reviewed the basic principles of alignment, breath support, vocal production, clear articulation and exercises for embodying language. They researched the African-American poets whose work we would be performing, as well as the cultural roots and purposes of praise poetry. Together we developed a series of interconnected learning outcomes for the Loachapoka students, aged 9-13, which incorporated voice and speech, performance, language arts, and working cooperatively with diverse partners. The AU students worked in teams to create lesson plans designed to develop those skills. They submitted lesson plans for evaluation one week in advance of their teaching session and journal entries weekly, regularly assessing their teaching performance and their students' progress. *The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* was an extremely useful tool in helping us coordinate our learning goals, objectives, strategies and assessment methods.³²

In the early workshops, which involved theatre games to develop team building, vocal exercises, and discussions and analysis of the poetry, the twelve Loachapoka students were engaged and enthusiastic. They bonded quickly with their instructors and followed instructions readily. They vied for the chance to read the work of Maya Angelou and Langston Hughes aloud and offered sophisticated insights into the images in the poetry and connections they were making with the language. The material we chose for the presentation, including poems written by African American children and Marie Evans' "Who Can Be Born Black and Not

³⁰ A. Dorfman, *The Emperor's Old Clothes: What the Lone Ranger, Babar and Other Innocent Heroes Do to Our Minds* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), ix.

³¹ J. Dolan, "Rehearsing Democracy: Advocacy, Public Intellectuals and Civic Engagement in Theatre and Performance Studies," *Theatre Topics* 11 (2001): 5.

³² J. Howard, *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* (OCSL Press: University of Michigan), p 16-29

Exult?” focused on celebrating cultural pride and unity. Educators and writers believe that poetry can help us to develop a sense of community because “if we use words well we can build bridges across incomprehension and chaos.”³³ The American poet Georgia Heard, author of *Awakening the Heart*, reminds us: “we read poetry from a deep hunger to know ourselves and the world.”³⁴ The sessions in which the two groups were engaged in speaking aloud and sharing their responses to the poetry were among the most fruitful, connected and harmonious.

The most significant challenges to our civic engagement experiment began to emerge as we started to rehearse our public presentation. After-school program attendance can be erratic, and this made it difficult to set the staging of the poems. Some children were behind in memorizing their lines, inviting criticism from their peers, which undermined the group dynamic. The Auburn students struggled to assert their authority under these circumstances and to keep the rehearsals on track. In spite of these challenges, the rehearsals moved doggedly forward and the program, entitled “Lift Every Voice” when performed before the community, was enthusiastically received and the students’ sense of accomplishment and pride was palpable.

Reflection and assessment is integral to any endeavor in community and civic engagement. In evaluating both student learning and community benefit, we return to the guidelines and objectives that shaped our activities and performance outcome.

What new knowledge was created? What new skills were mastered? What kind of intercultural dialogue took place? A significant community need was filled by providing students and parents with an exposure to the performing arts, according to our community partner: “For many of the parents, the performance was their first opportunity to view live theatre. They were impressed with the production and wanted to see more.”³⁵

The Auburn University students completed final reflective journals addressing the efficacy of their work, the progress they observed in the Loachapoka children based on the educational goals we identified, their understanding of diversity issues and social responsibility and their view of the ultimate value of the community and civic engagement experience. In coordinating the activities of the workshops and drafting an assessment template for the students and myself, I found the *Campus Compact Introduction to Service Learning Toolkit* useful because it clearly delineates a range of learning objectives in the form of knowledge, skills, and values and provides important criteria for critical reflection on the community engagement experience.³⁶ The Auburn students agreed that the majority of the children grew in their performative and cooperative skills, and that while they found the project extremely challenging, they felt they had grown through the experience, and were proud of the fact they had followed it through to a successful conclusion. Some of the student comments revealed the subtle biases they continue to hold but many of them seemed to grasp the idea that by grappling honestly with this intercultural dialogue, and placing themselves in service to others, it was their lives that were ultimately enriched. One student observed: “Watching these students progress and discover, allowed me to progress and discover. I found glimpses of myself

³³ House of Poetry, Boyds Mill Press: [http:// boydsmillpress.com/poetry](http://boydsmillpress.com/poetry).

³⁴ Georgia Heard, *Awakening the Heart - Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann: 1999), 19.

³⁵ C. Davino, Retrieved from email, July 10, 2010.

³⁶ D. Cooper, “Reading, Writing and Reflection” *Introduction to Service Learning Toolkit*, (Providence, RI Brown University, Camus Compact, 2003) p 91-97.

in their bad and good moods, in the pride and joy they exhibited in their final outcome. They taught me lessons about life and creativity, how to embrace others and myself, lessons of human understanding.”³⁷

Our commitment to Loachapoka continues. The community development effort we began this year will continue for at least two more years. We will likely streamline the AU student workload, vet the afterschool participants more carefully to ensure consistent attendance, improve communication with all stakeholders, and seek after social justice in our own small way. In the words of Maya Angelou: “I note the obvious differences in the human family/ but we are more alike my friends than we are unlike.”³⁸

Voice and Communication Techniques Serving the Transgender /Transsexual Client in Transition

Transgendered individuals are among the more marginalized groups in the United States, facing the kind of discrimination that profoundly affects their personal and professional lives. The Human Rights Campaign advocates for the transgender community on behalf of their legal, marital and employment status, as well as their access to public amenities and health care.³⁹ While the visibility of the transgender population is growing, transsexuals who seek to change their physical and sexual identity to express what they feel to be their authentic self, face enormous obstacles in the process, including incomprehension, even violence from the public at large.

In 2009, the Voice and Speech Trainers Association convened a panel to disseminate the most effective strategies for helping transsexuals make the vocal, physical and behavioral transition to their preferred gender. VASTA is an organization whose professional membership includes theatre voice trainers, singing teachers, and voice language pathologists. Until recently, vocal therapy for transgendered clients has been conducted almost exclusively by speech-language pathologists, but current practice invites collaboration with voice and acting instructors who can help clients make the transition to their new role.⁴⁰ In helping their clients to “pass”, and to feel comfortable and confident in their new persona, the voice professional offers an important service to these individuals, as well as providing a community to support them through an emotionally wrenching process. When a client makes a decision to change their gender, their marriage can founder, their relationships with their children are changed forever, and they may find their jobs or friendships in jeopardy. Because of the vulnerability of this population, the VASTA panel sought to provide information to other voice professionals about the highest standards of care involved in this kind of voice and communication therapy. They shared their clients’ stories and encouraged the conference participants to educate themselves about transgender issues - to make themselves available to those who might need their help.⁴¹

³⁷ H. Rule, *Summary and Analysis: Loachapoka Civic Engagement Project* (Auburn University, AL: 2010).

³⁸ M. Angelou, “The Human Family,” *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (New York: Random House 1994).

³⁹ Human Rights Foundation: <http://www.hrc.org/issues/9598.htm>.

⁴⁰ J. Stemple, *Voice Therapy: Clinical Studies*, 2nd ed. (San Diego: Singular Thompson Learning, 2000).

⁴¹ R. Adler, D. Hague, J. Cazden, D. MacArthur, “Sharing the Wealth-Speech Language Pathologists and Actor-Voice Trainers Serving the Transgender Population” *Original Voices : VASTA 2009 International Conference*, Pace University, NYC.

As a member of the VASTA panel, “Sharing the Wealth - Speech Language Pathologists and Actor Voice Trainers Serving the Transgender Population”, I was able to share the lessons learned from a collaborative enterprise at the Voice and Speech Clinic at Auburn University, serving on a team with speech-language pathologists to facilitate one client’s transition from a male to female identity.

The client we called G, was a 56 year-old university professor seeking vocal therapy to raise the fundamental frequency or pitch of her voice and to assimilate other vocal and physical behaviors which would allow her to communicate more effectively with others in her new gender. The head of the team, Dr. Michael Moran, focused on the pitch and resonance of the client’s voice, while Mary Sandage, a CCC-SLP who works with singers, performed the endoscopic evaluations and educated the client about vocal health. Lisa Roper, a graduate student in Speech Language Pathology, attended G’s classroom lectures and gave her valuable feedback on her feminized presentational skills. I worked with the client on developing more feminine inflection patterns through the use of dramatic monologues, and on non-verbal communication using movement exercises focused on body language, and acting exercises focused on characterization techniques.⁴² The client was, in essence, creating a role, and many of the voice and acting techniques we use in the theatre were applicable to this process as well. The rather complex details of this process are chronicled in an article I wrote with Dr. Moran entitled “A New Role - A Team Approach to Supporting the Transgender/Transsexual Client in Transition.” We were guided in this process by an extraordinary resource, *Voice and Communication for the Transgender, Transsexual Client, A Comprehensive Clinical Guide* by Richard Adler, Sandy Hirsh and Michelle Mordaunt. The team combined the most effective clinical procedures with the kind of intuitive approaches used in performing arts training. In addition, we provided an emotional support system for an individual making a revolutionary transformation in her life in a deeply conservative culture, largely uninformed about non-conforming gender identities. The goal of this work was client satisfaction and empowerment, and although G faced many challenges in her personal life, she felt confident in presenting her new persona to both the university and her professional community.

Theatre and Diversity

In summary, the art of theatre and engagement with its attendant disciplines, particularly vocal performance, can play a vital role in communicating and transforming the experience of those on the periphery of power and entitlement. The collaborations I have described brought together diverse partners with mutual concerns, sharing their voices to bring a new awareness to the challenges and human potential of those whose identities are other than the dominant culture in their sphere. In the theatre, we tell stories designed to articulate and celebrate the human spirit. Applied to a broader arena, the art of theatre can teach and effect transformation not just in those who gather to hear the story, but in those of us engaged in telling it as well.

⁴² D. Hague, M. Moran, “A New Role- Speech Pathologists and Actor Voice Trainers Serving the Transgendered Transsexual Client in Transition,” ed. Rena Cook, *Voice and Speech Review* (2009).

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