Professional Theatre in the Academic Theatre Setting

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Professional Theatre in the Academic Theatre Setting

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Professional Theatre in the Academic Theatre Setting:

By: H. Keith Hight, M. Ed

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy at Virginia Commonwealth University

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007

Director: Noreen C. Barnes, PhD, Director of Graduate Studies/Theatre, Department of Theatre

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to discuss the dynamic of continued employment for the theatre instructor. Surprisingly, very little is written about continued employment for the theatre instructor. In the present study, the terms instructor and teacher carry the same meaning. Because theatre builds successful human beings, a theatre program must allow students, graduates, and other interested candidates the opportunity to work closely with experienced professionals in their field.

Research Hypothesis:
There is a positive correlation between the continued employment of a theatre instructor and their cultural competence and professional competence as it relates to teaching students.

Research Questions:

1). Does continued employment have a significant impact on the level of awareness of cultural competence and understanding in the relationship between student and instructor?

2). Does continued employment have a significant indicator to suggest assumptions or facts (i.e., perceptions) about professional competence and cultural competence and the relationship between the instructor and student.
Chapter One – Histrionic

At the onset of this work I think it is only viable to explain how this thesis idea began. I have often held the belief that my purpose as a teacher is to find the spark that will ignite a student’s passion to know, and to foster that quest for learning by giving it direction, focus, and opportunity. Likewise, my goal as an artist is to teach – not in the didactic sense of simply imparting a message, but in a larger sense of sparking a student’s curiosity and desire to learn. I have found that this is best accomplished by creating a newer yet retro approach to teaching theatre.

In the beginning, the skills were handed down. If you wanted to be a builder you went to a builder, apprenticed, and after 7 to 10 years, you moved up the ranks and were able to start working on your own. If you wanted to be an actor, you went to the theatre and worked backstage learning your skills hands on.

There were schools but not in the academia setting we use now. Somehow in expanding the term of vocational training and academia theatre, we have forgotten the most important person: the student! This is the person who will continue to carry on the touch. They will continue the traditions we have been doing long after we gone.

This is not slamming on the programs who continue to hold not only their faculty, but their students accountable. The programs that combine professionalism within the theatre community and maintain the air of academia so the academics are happy. This is for the programs where there is nothing but academia and stealing money
from the student. By this I mean as long as a student will pay the tuition, they will continue to take their money. This is who my frustration is with and this is for them.

IN 2005 USITT held a workshop entitled “From Doing It to Teaching It” it took time to reverse and dispute the old aphorism: “those who do can't necessarily teach”. Graduate school is not the only route to a teaching career. This is particularly true in Canadian post-secondary theatre production and design programs, where - in marked contrast with American schools - faculty members with graduate degrees are the exception. Nevertheless, there are many working faculty in the United States and elsewhere who established their professional careers before they began teaching.

How do professionals begin academic careers, and what do we have to learn in order to become good teachers? How do we adjust to dealing with students, and how do we sustain our professional careers? How, if we choose, do we leave academia and rejoin the profession full time?

Opportunities in professional theatre have greatly increased during the last two decades with the expansion of theatre centers in many cities and with the development of regional theatres throughout the country. The competition for jobs, particularly acting, remains keen, but the record of theatre drama graduates is impressive at some colleges and universities. Faculty members responsible for undergraduate education also contribute and are judged by their institutions on scholarship and service. The assignment of responsibility for student learning to each and every faculty member is absolutely imperative. In no institution should the role of faculty members be discussed
without this fundamental responsibility. What is the role of research by both students and faculty in the reshaped undergraduate educational environment? How will faculty members gain the requisite expertise and professionalism in their responsibilities for teaching and learning?

How should faculty members facilitate good educational practices in instruction and learning among their faculty colleagues, instructional assistants, and students? What are the responsibilities of faculty members to respond to diverse student communities, and to students who are resistant to the educational and learning environment shaped by the faculty members? What are the responsibilities of faculty members to provide "capstone experiences" for their students -- opportunities for synthesis, reflection, and preparation for the future? How is it that so little preparation is deemed by the professions, our institutions, and current faculty colleagues as appropriate for a role in which faculty members are responsible for subtle and diverse aspects of student growth and learning?

Role model institutions and role model faculty members exist for much of what is advocated in Shaping the Future. In many predominantly undergraduate institutions, there is successful integration of concerns for students and their learning in classes, laboratories and research and faculty pedagogical and research and scholarly activities.

Though recommendations for departments, administrators, and institutions of higher education are contained elsewhere in the report, it is essential to reiterate that recommendations to faculty members regarding their responsibilities for education are hollow unless teaching is fully and appropriately valued. What kind of knowledge of or
response to individual student learning is possible in that setting, and what kind of affirmation or responsibility for individual students can faculty members undertake with such a student-faculty ratio? While there are effective uses of demonstrations, discussions, and cooperative activities which are alternatives to lectures in large classes, most faculty members are simply overwhelmed by the responsibilities to manage large numbers of students, salvaging little time for effective teaching and less for the assessment of student learning.

What we have are two very different performance cultures. True, some Post School scholars have found niches inside of mainstream theatre departments, but performance studies as an approach is not important to most academic theatre departments--whose focus is fixed on professional training. As for the "entertainment industry" or the regional theatre, the commercial theatre, and even most of what happens off-Broadway, performance studies is not a presence.

So what? Why not let mainstream theatre go its way and performance studies its? All well and good, except that as a "performance subject" mainstream theatre is an incredibly fertile area that Post Schools ought to explore. And at the practical level, many if not most of the jobs available to Post School PhDs will be in theatre, dance, and communications departments.

If these basic assertions are true, then what else can one expect except an enormous gap separating Post School from mainstream theatre? Furthermore, it is quite "natural" that the aesthetic genre that performance studies most focuses on is performance art--a practice that began outside of, if not in direct opposition to,
mainstream theatre. Performance arts’ roots are in action painting, environmental visual arts, collage, projective poetry, and Happenings; and before that, in dada, surrealism, and futurism.

Where does one begin to build bridges to mainstream theatre? First, and most important, the mainstream theatre needs to become a major Post School subject. The techniques of fieldwork, analysis, and theorizing that have been used with such strong effect on the broad spectrum of subjects reflected in Post School publications needs now to include writing about mainstream theatre. This writing will come about more effectively if the Performance Studies International annual conferences actively seek to make mainstream theatre one of their core subjects. I am sure that Post School scholars can come up with many more subjects. The point is that the weird blind spot, the blank in Post School scholarship that is mainstream theatre, needs to be filled in.

Will mainstream theatre people respond to an interest from Post Schools? Well, people like to read about themselves no matter what is written. And Post School will have some extremely cogent things to say. Furthermore, there are areas where more direct interaction is possible. Theatre is one of the few professions where apprentices can still learn from those who practice their art. The internship program at Peninsula Players Theatre is part of a tradition, which runs as deep as the roots of the theatre itself. Since the Players launched their first season in 1935, interns, then called apprentices, have been given the chance to work side-by-side with professionals, learning the craft by observing and participating in it.
It is the professional involvement of faculty in academic disciplines that ensures the quality, currency, and depth of the content being offered to students. But now, because of the time constraints imposed on contingent faculty, especially part-time faculty, teachers of undergraduate courses are less likely to be informed about the latest developments in an academic discipline and to be challenged by recent research and writing.

Why do professionals from all walks of life believe in theatre studies, because theatre builds successful human beings? Students gain skills in communication, problem solving, creativity, and collaboration. These skills and experiences realized in the theatre can be used in a wide range of professions such as law, business, government, the natural and social sciences, and industry.

The Olney Theatre Institute Advanced Intern Training program (Bailey, 2007) provides hands-on advanced training in theater production and administration. The program allows students, graduates, and other interested candidates the opportunity to work closely with experienced professionals in their field. This exposure to process and to our audience illustrates what theater means to the life of a community and how the community enriches its theater. Olney internships are excellent springboards into a professional career in the arts. Olney Theatre Center interns have gone on to renowned graduate programs, major regional and Broadway stages, and freelance positions as directors, designers, stage managers, technical directors, technicians, theater administrators, and other industry leaders (Bailey, 2007).
Contingent faculty, especially part-time faculty, are less likely than their tenure-line colleagues to have professional support such as office space, personal computers, and professional development opportunities. Moreover, the heavy use of contingent faculty in fundamental first- and second-year undergraduate courses tends to separate tenure-track faculty from the introductory teaching that is critical to their understanding of the student body and of the basic questions that new students ask about their disciplines. This reduced contact with undergraduate students makes it more difficult for tenure-track faculty to sustain the cohesion and effectiveness of the curriculum. Appointments of full-time tenure-track faculty typically follow rigorous national searches, which include a review of the candidate’s scholarly record, an assessment of teaching potential, and consideration of other attributes by faculty in the department offering the appointment. Contingent faculty, by contrast, is often appointed in hurried circumstances. By contrast, in other institutions, contingent faculty is constantly evaluated, sometimes by faculty members with much less experience, or even by graduate students.

Economic differences provide an even sharper contrast between part-time contingent faculty and tenured faculty. While part-time faculty who teach in professional and vocational schools or programs are likely to hold full-time positions outside the academy, those who teach in core liberal arts fields such as English, foreign languages, history, and mathematics are more likely to rely on their teaching for their livelihood (Academe. Sep / Oct 2003).
You can usually peg a faculty member’s area of true expertise by asking what outside professional production work he or she has done recently. A teacher who never works outside the theatre department could be out of touch with current production realities (Patinkin 2007). Don’t discount adjunct faculty in less populated tech areas like makeup, props, and sound—these teachers are often full-time professionals who are taking time out from their entertainment business gig to teach the craft they know and love. To support themselves, part-time faculty often must teach their courses as piecework, commuting between institutions, preparing for courses on a grueling timetable, striving to create and evaluate appropriately challenging assignments, and making enormous sacrifices to maintain interaction with their students. A large gap in working conditions exists even between the most experienced part-time faculty members and newly appointed tenure-track faculty members.

Research enlivens and enriches the educational environment both from its effect on the faculty members as teachers and from the opportunities for students to do research with their faculty mentors. Faculty members contributing to cutting edge research must remain conversant with the practices and literature, which they can also more readily offer to their students. And by maintaining state-of-the-art research in their laboratories, faculty members offer their students first-hand experience with what practitioners do and with cutting edge research as well. It is not, however, the model for the faculty members who teach most of the introductory courses -- those in the colleges.

The educational and learning experiences for students are enriched by personal interactions with faculty members whose personal and intellectual vigor is evident in
classes, laboratories, tutorials, and research projects. Faculty members who include research in their professional activities must be encouraged to bring that research excitement (strategies, insights, and results, understanding of scientific creativity) to their students and to bring students to participate in their research (Watson, 2007).

Student learning is diminished by reduced contact with tenured faculty members, whose expertise in their field and effectiveness as teachers have been validated by peer review and to whom the institution has made a long-term commitment. Faculty governance is weakened by constant turnover and, on many campuses, by the exclusion of contingent faculty from governance activities. The integrity of faculty work is threatened as parts of the whole are divided and assigned piecemeal to instructors, lecturers, graduate students, specialists, researchers, and even administrators. Academic freedom is weakened when a majority of the faculty cannot rely on the protections of tenure (Stewart, 2007).

Most educators agree that maintaining the quality of student learning is a major challenge for higher education. Recent studies have identified informal interactions with faculty outside the classroom, which “positively influence persistence, college graduation, and graduate school enrollments” of students, as one of the strongest positive factors contributing to student learning.

Unfortunately, part-time faculty members, who are typically paid by the course, are discouraged by their employment arrangements from spending time outside of class with students or on student-related activities, whether in office hours and less formal interactions or in class preparation and grading papers. Full-time faculty generally
spends 50 to 100 percent more time per credit hour on instruction, in and out of the classroom, than do part-time faculty (Benjamin, December 1998).

However, as a diminishing number of full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty members must take on additional institutional responsibilities that are not typically shared with contingent faculty, including faculty governance and institutional support of various kinds, tenure-track faculty may find that they are also pressed for time to spend with students outside of class. Faculty participation in governance structures is an essential feature of higher education, ensuring that programs and courses are of high quality and are academic in nature. Faculty members also serve the university or college in many ways, such as by acting as faculty advisers to student organizations, providing information to prospective students and their parents, and supporting student activities.

Tenured and tenure-track faculty are expected to engage to some extent in teaching, scholarship, and service, and their salaries and teaching loads reflect that expectation. To maintain the quality of higher education, faculty must stay in contact with other scholars in their disciplines. Even full-time non-tenure-track appointments, arguably more stable than part-time appointments, leave little time for scholarly development, because faculty with these appointments tend to teach many more classes than tenured or tenure-track faculty. In doctoral institutions, full-time non-tenure-track faculty members teach 50 percent more hours than tenure-track faculty, and in other four-year institutions, 15 percent more (Benjamin, October 2003).

To support the essential mission of higher education, faculty appointments, including contingent appointments, should incorporate all aspects of university life:
active engagement with an academic discipline, teaching or mentoring of undergraduate or graduate students, participation in academic decision making, and service on campus and to the surrounding community. Faculty who are appointed to less-than-full-time positions should participate at least to some extent in the full range of faculty responsibilities.

The integrity of higher education rests on the integrity of the faculty profession. To meet the standards and expectations appropriate to higher education, faculty need to incorporate teaching, scholarship, and service in their work, whether they serve full time or less than full time. The academic freedom that enlivens and preserves the value of academic work is protected by a responsible and reasonable commitment between the university or college and the faculty member. For the good of institutions; of the educational experiences of students; and of the quality of education; the proportion of tenured and tenure-track faculty should be increased. The Dean of Chicago Theatre, Sheldon Patinkin, states “A teacher who never works outside the theatre department could be out of touch with current production realities. That means you need to be able to work with everyone in the community, faculty and student alike”.

The assignment of responsibility for student learning to each and every faculty member is absolutely imperative. It should be affirmed and reaffirmed by individual faculty members, departments, department chairs, deans and provosts, presidents, chancellors, federal policy makers, and private and public funding agencies. Affirmations must not be simply rhetorical, they must be embodied clearly in the reward structures of promotion, tenure, salary, grants and honors. In no institution
should the role of faculty members be discussed without this fundamental responsibility. Explicit in this assignment is a responsibility for more than what has traditionally been termed "good teaching." It is essential that all accept the definition that "good teaching" has no other meaning than the facilitation of "student learning."

In 1951, L. Kirk Denmark founded Court Theatre at Beloit College, the most popular professional arena theatre in Southern Wisconsin and Northern Illinois. "Theatre was his life. He was very dedicated to theatre, very intense about theatre. The English department, at that time, offered only a few courses in drama and theatre. Students continued producing and staging their own shows until a growing interest in the performing arts prompted the search for a theatre faculty member. Early Summer Theatre Students could earn credit for summer theatre work and, at the same time, gain valuable experience in the technical and theatrical aspects of the stage. The summer theatre workshops ran for four summers as the predecessor of Court Theatre” (Smith, Konni P. (1983)).

Good teachers who listen to what students are learning and listen to what students say work effectively to enhance their learning. Test answers and homework solutions are not alone in representing what students are "getting out of a course.” Among the things students are learning, in contrast to what the syllabus might say or the professor might affirm are what things are important to succeed in this course. Sometimes students learn to repeat formulas (words, definitions, phrases, formulaic solutions) without understanding the underlying concepts. Sometimes students learn that aspects of the course in which instructors may invest considerable time to
accomplish student learning (discussions, demonstrations, labs) are not "valued" by examinations or grading.

Sometimes students have learned about separate topics without making what seem to be obvious connections to the instructor. Faculty members should be enjoined to "listen early and often" to their students' descriptions of what they have learned and how they have learned it, what they understand and what confuses them, and what they have decided is valuable in each course. There is no excuse for a faculty member waiting until "course evaluation time" or the final exam to get this feedback (Hall, 2007)

What sacrifices and limitations have been made or compelled by institutions, which select the number of "faculty hours", the class size, and the degree of instructor expertise to assign to the classes? Can these goals be achieved in classes of 600 as well as in classes of 20? Is there a class size or a resource limited situation for which these goals are unrealistic? How can one take each student's experience and build from that toward increasingly correct or sophisticated reasoning if the students begin at quite different levels of understanding and ability? If the diversity is too great for a single approach to be effective, is the faculty member "doing the job" by conceding that this will not work? Or are these expectations reasonable regardless of class size?

These challenges are similar to those embodied in the National Education Standards, which are not only about content, as they emphasize processes and stages of learning and mastery. For instructors, they set measures of instruction environments and instructional mastery deemed essential for achieving student mastery. Dare we risk
envisioning that theatre faculty will be held to similar expectations? If so, current faculty members and their departments and administrators must create a variety of experiences, activities, resources, and assessments that guide and direct willing faculty members through the steps that are necessary to professionalize their teaching.

Any call of action to improve student learning properly ought to include a call to better assess students and to document student progress. Where will faculty members gain the skills required to effectively assess student learning? What are the alternatives to and validity of multiple choice testing? How does one assess group activities and cooperative learning? What are the merits of homework, oral presentations, team projects, writing assignments, portfolios, and examinations with choice, and many other traditional and nontraditional forms of assessment? It is unreasonable for faculty members to be called to do better without some guide to what can be effective. It may be equally unreasonable to proscribe what should be done, but it is important that resources on effective options and the results of systematic studies be available to faculty members, young and older.

Faculty members are enjoined to be aware of professional scholarship on learning and teaching. The research which forms the basis for systematic understanding of how students learn and the effectiveness of certain teaching practices is proceeding in two different camps: in programs devoted to the study of education and the preparation of teachers and in disciplinary programs. While there are some notable successful cooperative ventures among some representatives from these two camps, there remains deep suspicion and disdain in each camp for the other.
Theatre faculty members often doubt the validity or rigor of the research on learning or the instruction in pedagogy practiced in education programs or schools. Questions are posed about the measures of student learning, an emphasis on practice or style without adequate content, jargon and fads that sweep by faster than they can be assessed or appreciated, and difficulties in the isolation of instructional practices for assessment of their effectiveness. Education faculty members and science education professionals doubt the usefulness of large lecture-based courses for the preparation of science-educated teachers or citizens and challenge the commitment of disciplinary faculty members to education and learning rather than content delivery (Daniels, 1999).

The lists of suspicions and criticisms on both sides could easily be lengthened. One wonders if the effort spent at criticism or undercutting might better be spent in conversations.

We question whether the intellectual mission of a college or university is well served when the institution asserts that certain basic courses are indispensable for a liberal education but then assigns responsibility for those courses to faculty members who are deemed replaceable and unnecessary to the institution. Indeed, we believe that an institution reveals a certain indifference to its academic mission when it removes much of the basic teaching in required core courses from the purview of the regular professor.

Because of increased reliance on contingent faculty, students entering college now are less likely than those of previous generations to interact with tenured or tenure-track professors who, in turn, are fully engaged in their respective academic disciplines.
It is difficult for part-time faculty to be flexible and responsive to students’ interests and abilities when they lack class preparation time and are required to deliver courses according to a predetermined curriculum.

Academic freedom in colleges and universities is essential to the common good of a free society. Academic freedom rests on a solid base of peer review and as such is the responsibility of the entire profession. The profession protects academic freedom through a system of peer review that results in institutional commitment to faculty members. Faculty peers make careful judgments in the appointment process, conduct ongoing reviews that may lead to reappointments, and make evaluations that may determine the completion of the probationary period and the beginning of continuous tenure. Individual faculty members can exercise their professional inquiry and judgment freely because peer review affirms their competence and accomplishments in their fields.

To secure academic freedom for the entire profession, and to ensure the highest quality in teaching and research, the responsibilities of faculty peers in the appointment and evaluation of colleagues for contingent faculty positions should resemble those for appointments on the tenure track. Faculty members appointed and reappointed to contingent positions should receive conscientious and thorough peer reviews in which they can demonstrate their effectiveness; their successive reappointments would then validate their record of competence and accomplishments in their respective fields.

At the University of Massachusetts, there are also numerous opportunities outside the academic course of study. Students in the design program sometimes assist
faculty designers with their professional commitments. Due to our relationship with regional companies, graduate students undertake internships at such places as New World Theater and Hartford Stage. Portland State takes another approach that the Theater Arts faculty work professionally in the region's arts organizations, and are frequently assisted by their students (Dean, Mark (2007, May 4).

The College of Fine Arts should strive to create a learning community that supports innovative ideas, teaching strategies, and results that enhance the reputation and visibility of the University, the community, and the State. As the College progresses, it will build on past and current strengths while embracing and integrating inevitable changes that will occur. It is the vision of the College to graduate not only students that are well trained in their respective disciplines, but to graduate an educated population that has the ability to use its developing skills and talent for personal and universal goals (Stewart, 2007 July 1).
The purpose of this is to discuss the dynamic of continued employment for the theatre instructor. In the past twenty years, an abundance of empirical research and qualitative literature explores the subject of multicultural and diversity issues that affect the field of teaching. In this, I am seeking to explore the factors of awareness, attitudes, perceptions, and practices that empower continued employment for the theatre instructor.

The aim of this is to seek to investigate whether continued employment by the instructor: awareness, perceptions, and practices offers insight into the dynamic of how being prepared and understanding the current happenings in the field may impact the student and instructor working alliance. Surprisingly, very little is written about continued employment for the theatre instructor. The use of the term continued employment reflects on multicultural and diversity competency because to be culturally competent presupposes one's ability to be inclusive of multiple and diverse cultures.

The only way to attain this cultural competency and pass it along to others is to ensure that one understands the inner workings of one’s field. This cannot be done solely from a classroom environment, which is why the theatre teacher or instructor should continue to work in the field while teaching. Many other professions do this with great success, but little has been researched or suggested where theatre professionals are concerned. If theatre professionals remain working while they also
teach, they will keep a high level of cultural competency, both in the classroom and in the working world as well.

In the present study, the terms instructor and teacher carry the same meaning. The theatre instructor is learning how to be a skilled teacher who serves as a mentor in the development and sustainment of competence in professional practice within the school system. The reference to theatre instructor is used in several disciplines (e.g., secondary and post-secondary schools).

The hypothesis that will be addressed in this study relates to the correlation that is seen between the continued employment that a theatre instructor has and his or her understanding of cultural, educational, and professional differences and issues, mostly those that relate to race and ethnicity. This racial and ethnic understanding is vital today in many businesses and occupations, due to the globalization that is taking place throughout the world. Because of this, it is important to discuss here the importance behind the hypothesis and the significance of the research questions and statement, so that the reader will have a clear understanding of what is being studied and why the hypothesis and research questions are so significant.

People from all races and ethnicities are moving to different areas of the world and/or doing business with people that are 'not like them,' and this is also true of the school system and the theatre system. As this takes place, there are both opportunities and problems, as different cultures find ways to learn to work together. There are important reasons why this hypothesis is significant and why the research statement and questions that will be addressed must be discussed, as there is a lack of understanding
regarding how individuals in the theatre field react to their colleagues based on race and ethnicity and therefore how the theatre instructors then react to individuals in the schools where they are employed.

The interaction between instructors and their students has long been a subject of study, but theatre and cultural competency has not been that thoroughly examined. Quite often, the studies that have been done relate to Caucasian instructors and how their ethnic students respond to them in fields that have nothing to do with theatre. It seems as though there is a greater amount of diversity in the theatre profession today. In the past, there were not that many diverse individuals, but these numbers are changing, and therefore the relationship between instructors and students is becoming easier to study. While it is true that there are many Caucasian instructors, there are also many instructors out there with a different ethnic background. Some are African-American, as well as Native American, Asian, Hispanic, and other nationalities, as these individuals begin to be more respected and are given more responsibilities and recognition for their talents, instead of being judged based on the color of their skin.

Because the cultural diversity in this country is growing, and therefore is growing in each profession as well, recently researchers have found it important to examine the way that cultural differences affect instructors and their students. This research is valuable because it gives insight into the intricacies of ethnic diversity, and how people react to someone who does not belong to their same ethnic background or nationality. The cultural competence that all people have is very important for individuals within the school setting.
Because so many professions deal with cultural competency, it is important to understand it. Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross et al., 1989; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991). It becomes evident that when describing cultural competence from a practical sense: there is a need for a concise and working definition, which becomes more useful. Therefore, operationally defined, cultural competence is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes (Davis, 1997).

Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs (1989) suggest the practical definition and framework for understanding cultural competence as a component in the system of care in helping professions such as teaching. The word culture is used because it implies integrated patterns of human behavior that include: actions, beliefs, communications, customs, values, and thoughts as it relates to institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups.

The word competence is appropriate for use because it suggests having the ability, knowledge, and skills to direct the field of teaching and respond to emerging issues in a particular way: this ability to provide effective helping and responding skills allows for functioning within the context of culturally integrated patterns of human behavior defined by a group. Although being culturally competent in cross-cultural
settings requires an appreciation for learning new patterns of behavior and effectively applying them in the appropriate settings.

There are five essential elements that contribute to become culturally competent that include: (1) value diversity, (2) have the capacity for cultural self-assessment, (3) be conscious of the "dynamics" inherent when cultures interact, (4) institutionalize cultural knowledge, and (5) develop adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures. The five elements of cultural competence must be implemented in every aspect of the service delivery systems. This becomes reflected in the attitudes, structures, policies, and services of agencies and institutions.

Cultural competence is a developmental process with six possibilities, starting from one end of a continuum to another end, and that consists of: 1) cultural destructiveness, 2) cultural incapacity, 3) cultural blindness, 4) cultural pre-competence, 5) continued employment, and 6) cultural proficiency. Unfortunately, it is common for many disciplines to provide services to fall between the cultural incapacity and cultural blindness on the continuum (Cross et al., 1989). It becomes evident that these disciplines determine their level of cultural competence because such an assessment further develops an ability to achieve cultural proficiency.

The notion that continued employment exists in the field of teaching when it comes to the theatre instructor must have verifiable indicators to suggest mastery of this skill. It may be assumed that either the theatre instructor values continued employment through the demonstration of obtaining continuing education and work in this area or
that professional associations and institutions require continued employment for theatre instructors.

This implies that persons who are responsible for the training of future theatre professionals will retain continued employment, as it promotes a comprehensive approach to implement best practices in supervision in training programs for those that they teach. The lack of awareness about cultural differences can make it difficult for the triad that includes: (1) instructor, (2) student, and (3) theatre patron.

What constitutes cultural competence is up for debate. The use of the terms cultural sensitivity and cultural awareness are often described as synonyms, while others believe that these are steps along the road to cultural competence. The instructor-student interpersonal relationship depends on the depth of trust in relevance of race, ethnicity, and gender as it relates to the instructor-student encounter. The consequences of this lack of cultural awareness may be multiple.

In the vastness of living in a society with cultural and diversity similarities as well as dissimilarities, fundamental differences that exist among people arise from racial identity, national origin, ethnicity, and culture. Against this backdrop is also included family of origin background and individual experiences. With this in mind, these cultural and diversity differences impact belief systems, physical and mental health practices, and behavior in all interpersonal relationships that involve two or more people coming together in dialogue.

It is unfortunate that in the theatre field not enough attention is given to this phenomenon. This causes misunderstandings due to a lack of awareness of cultural and
diversity issues. This is a result of monocultural perspectives in the instructor-student working alliance.

The lack of continued employment results from a combination of factors that may include: Lack of knowledge, Denial/ Self-protection, Fear of the unknown, Feeling of pressure due to time constraints - not willing to make an attempt to better understand someone with cultural and diversity differences from oneself that leads to feeling overwhelmed about interpersonal relationships which require seeing life from another persons' worldview.

- Cultural destructiveness acknowledges only one way of being and purposefully denies or outlaws any other cultural approaches.
- Cultural incapacity supports the concept of separate but equal; marked by an inability to deal personally with multiple approaches but a willingness to accept their existence elsewhere.
- Cultural blindness fosters an assumption that people are all basically alike, so what works with members of one culture should work within all other cultures.

Cultural pre-competence encourages learning and understanding of new ideas and solutions to improve performance or services.

- Cultural competence involves actively seeking advice and consultation and a commitment to incorporating new knowledge and experiences into a wider range of practice.
• Cultural proficiency involves holding cultural differences and diversity in the highest esteem, pro-activity regarding cultural differences, and promotion of improved cultural relations among diverse groups.

The problem is that by comparison a lack of relevant empirical and qualitative research exists about continued employment for the theatre instructor. However, there exists by comparison an abundance of research and theory about continued employment for the counselor/mental health practitioner, the physician, the nurse, and many other helping professions. The problem becomes one of generalizing what is true for one profession to other professions, which is often not easy to do. However, with the lack of research pertaining to this issue, there is little else to be done. The majority of the research and theory that addresses continued employment tends not to focus on the continued employment of the theatre instructor.

The problem with self-awareness of continued employment for the theatre instructor stands to empower the instructor-student working alliance. The lack of this self-awareness stands to detract from the learning alliance between student and instructor because it becomes difficult to enter into dialogue about cultural issues when the instructor is almost always perceived to be in a position of power over the student. This is true either knowingly or unknowingly, because the theatre instructor writes a final report concerning the student's learning period and process.

In this present research, self-awareness is achieved by the theatre instructor knowing her/his own attitudes, perceptions, and practices in regards to supervising
students who are racially different from the instructor, as well as knowing what is taking place in the professional world, so that it can be brought back to the students.

It is the aim of this study to investigate the level of continued employment as it applies to awareness about the student and what is most helpful for a classroom setting. This study attempts to determine whether understanding as an independent variable allows the theatre instructor to not impose and/or project her/his own understanding and worldview towards others in a context that is inappropriate for the learning environment.

The purpose of this is to discuss the dynamic of continued employment for the theatre instructor. The aim of this is to seek to investigate whether continued employment by the instructor: awareness, perceptions, and practices offers insight into the dynamic of how being prepared and understanding the current happenings in the field may impact the student and instructor working alliance. Surprisingly, very little is written about continued employment for the theatre instructor.

The only way to attain this cultural competency and pass it along to others is to ensure that one understands the inner workings of one’s field. This cannot be done solely from a classroom environment, which is why the theatre teacher or instructor should continue to work in the field while teaching. Many other professions do this with great success, but little has been researched or suggested where theatre professionals are concerned. If theatre professionals remain working while they also teach, they will keep a high level of cultural competency, both in the classroom and in the working world as well.
The theatre instructor is learning how to be a skilled teacher who serves as a mentor in the development and sustainment of competence in professional practice within the school system. The reference to theatre instructor is used in several disciplines such as secondary and post-secondary schools. The interaction between instructors and their students has long been a subject of study, but theatre and cultural competency has not been that thoroughly examined.

The notion that continued employment exists in the field of teaching when it comes to the theatre instructor must have verifiable indicators to suggest mastery of this skill. It may be assumed that either the theatre instructor values continued employment through the demonstration of obtaining continuing education and work in this area or that professional associations and institutions require continued employment for theatre instructors.

This focuses on strategies and practices that can enhance continued employment for the theatre profession. This implies that persons who are responsible for the training of future theatre professionals will retain continued employment, as it promotes a comprehensive approach to implement best practices in supervision in training programs for those that they teach. The lack of awareness about cultural differences can make it difficult for the triad that includes: (1) instructor, (2) student, and (3) theatre patron.

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Chapter Three -- Review of the Literature

This present study review of literature discusses related literature rather than descriptive empirical research about the dissertation topic. The related literature review also explored studies that investigated the key words: attitudes, perceptions, and practices.

While 30 percent of Caucasian patients did not return to a mental health clinic after the initial consultation, fully 50 percent of Asian patients failed to return (Sue and McKinney, 1975). It was largely believed that Asian-Americans were uncomfortable with the fact that there were very few Asian-American instructors or counselors. These people did not trust the credibility of Caucasian counselors as much as they would have trusted a counselor of their own ethnic background (Atkinson, Maruyama, & Matsui, 1978). The cultural sensitivity of the counselor, the gender of both student and instructor, and how well the student has assimilated himself or herself into a different culture -- the culture of the instructor in question -- all affect the opinion of credibility in specific instructors. The fact still remains, at least in that particular study, that an instructor who is ethnically similar to the student will be more respected than one who is of a different race or nationality (Gim, Atkinson, & Kim, 1991).

It is apparently important, at least for Asian-Americans, that the instructors have the same basic ethnic background.

Another study, which used Japanese-Americans, looked at whether or not Japanese-Americans found instructors of the same ethnicity better than Caucasian-American instructors. For this study, Japanese-Americans rated counselors of the same ethnicity as better when they were portrayed as having a directive counseling style, but when
they were portrayed as having a nondirective counseling style the Caucasian American instructors was more desirable. Atkinson and Matsushita (1991) believe that their study based on Japanese-Americans is likely more credible than the previous study which discussed Asian-Americans. One study in which student-instructor match was examined pointed out the importance of gathering data not just from the student, but from the instructor as well. In the two previously discussed studies, information about whether or not the match between instructor and student was a good one came entirely from the student's point of view. Students were asked whether or not they would be willing to work with a particular instructor based on certain characteristics, one of those being ethnicity. No one, however, bothered to ask the instructor how they felt about working with a student of a particular ethnicity. Likely, this is because instructors in clinical setting are usually doctors or nurses and therefore are bound to work with whoever needs their help, not just the students that they are given to work with (Dolinsky, et.al., 1998).

However, for purposes of this type of study, it is extremely important to match up the instructors with students. Differences are important to consider on the part of the student, for their comfort with the instructor, but they are also important from the instructor's point of view. The reason behind this is that an instructor who is extremely uncomfortable with a student will likely not be able to work with and train that student in the same way they would work with and train another student whom they liked better. How the instructor feels about a student is just as important to the working
relationship and the knowledge that will be passed from one to another as how the student feels about the instructor (Dolinsky, et.al., 1998).

Similarities and differences between students and their instructors can have a very definite effect on whether or not the two get along well. Some instructors consider this matching up between student and instructor to be less distinct from other ideas such as alliance, transference, and counter transference (Dolinsky, et.al., 1998).

The better the match between student and instructor, the more benefits the student will get from the training. Studies of this nature often show that ethnicity is not much of an issue if the student and instructor like each other. Students who were given the option to choose between instructors often chose the one that they felt was the most understanding and competent in their work. They also often selected instructors that demonstrated qualities that the student themselves would like to have. Personality characteristics and demographics did not come into the equation, and there was also a strong correlation between the student choosing an instructor and that instructor rating the student as likable (Hollander-Goldfein, 1989).

Cultural competence is one of the issues that are often found in counseling and clinical relationships. Many people have the belief that this assimilation of all cultures into one culture is important for the survival of the human race, but many practicing clinicians do not agree with that philosophy (Sue, 1998).

Rather, they are listening to what the student has to say about his or her own life and culture, and therefore the concerns that this student has must be treated differently than the same concern in a Caucasian student. By understanding the cultural significance of
ideals and values, instructors can work to reassure students of specific cultures that it is perfectly acceptable for them to come and seek treatment for a problem, regardless of whether it is physical or mental, and that individuals within other cultures (even the student's own culture) will be treated with respect and dignity (Hall, 1997).

While it is unlikely that a professional instructor would have this opinion of a student simply based on race or ethnicity, it is not impossible. Even if there is no ill will between instructor and student, it would be easy for a student to assume that an instructor was giving them advice based on the instructor's opinion of their race or culture (Sue, 1998).

Still other studies present more evidence that the characteristics and working alliance between the instructor and the student are vital to the outcome of the training itself. Whether or not the student and instructor have a good working alliance has generally been thought to be a consistent predictor of what the outcome of the training will be. The professional and personal background of the instructor, including ethnicity, has not usually been taken into consideration; however, some studies have examined whether or not these differences in the instructor and student backgrounds actually affect the outcome of the training that the student goes through (Hersoug & Havik, 2001).

Experienced instructors seem to have a better success rate when it comes to retaining students in clinical positions. The instructors who had over six years of experience also have seen significantly lower rates of students who deteriorated during training or did not complete their training. They have significantly higher rates of students who stayed
with their training programs, as compared with inexperienced instructors (Hersoug & Havik, 2001).

Specific techniques and interventions are also very important, and experienced instructors have had more time to try out these techniques and determine what works and does not work for specific problems that a student may be experiencing. A student who finds an instructor who can articulate something of this nature often feels that their instructor has given their profession extremely deep thought and consideration. There is no indication that ethnicity affects this opinion of the instructor (Mallinckrodt, 1991).

In some studies, professional variables are assessed, as well as personal variables. When students took the same tests as the instructors had taken, the results were examined to see if there were similarities between student and instructor and if the similarities affected the outcome of the training (Hersoug & Havik, 2001).

Surprisingly, many students in this specific study found that instructors who had more experience were actually less likable. The results of the study indicated that the characteristics of a specific instructor had some impact on the evaluation that the instructor had of the working alliance. They also seem to have a limited impact on how the student evaluates the working alliance. The characteristics that instructors gave themselves when they filled out their questionnaires were not good predictors of how students rated the alliance between themselves and the instructors. There was, however, a slightly stronger correlation between how the instructors rated their characteristics and how they rated their own opinions of the strength of the alliance between themselves and the students (Horvath, 1991).
Previous studies have indicated that the ratings that student give to a working alliance between themselves and their instructor have been found to help predict the outcome of the training. The researchers in one study found it extremely interesting that the better training, experience, and skills that a instructor had was not a good predictor of how strong of an alliance a student felt they had with that particular instructor. Sometimes, the specific variables had a negative impact on how the student felt about the specific instructor. Research findings indicate that in general students tend to favor less experienced and less trained instructors, because they feel as though they are often kinder and more ‘real’ as people. Perhaps it is possible that these students feel that instructors who have had slightly less training and slightly less experience have not advanced so far in their craft yet that they cease to see students as real people. A relatively recent study also discussed the link between training and the improvement of abilities as a function of the ethnicity of the instructor. The goal is to discover what effect ethnicity has on students, and whether or not ethnic similarities between student and instructor affect the course of the outcome of the training. The lack of similarity between a student and their instructor has often been cited as a reason for the lack of those in need of advice from their instructors and mentors actually seeking out that advice. The position has also been advanced that students are most comfortable with an instructor who has the same ethnic identity. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this investigation involves whether continued employment as it relates to theatre instructors competency impacts the process of the interpersonal relationship between instructor and student. The variables that effect this
present study involve whether continued employment exists between the theatre instructors following attributes that include: awareness of cultural differences and how they may impact the instruction process, and the conceptual framework of cultural competence:

Cultural competence requires that individuals, institutions, and organizations:

· have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve.

Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period.
Chapter Four– Findings

The tone of future learning is often set by the way the class or session is opened, and this is true of the theatre classes that are taught and how the instructors of those classes where continued employment is concerned. There are several things that can be done in order to assure that the maximum amounts of sharing and learning are obtained. A positive learning environment can generally be created by seeming open and honest, but not by prying too deeply into someone’s life too quickly, because this may make some people very uncomfortable. Theatre training, of course, often requires people to work very closely with one another. If the people in a class or session do not feel comfortable doing this, they will not be able to effectively deal with their problems, and the time that they spend with an instructor in any class will not be as beneficial as it should be.

Being professional, however, is also extremely important. Many people do not feel comfortable with an instructor who appears to be unprofessional, because that person may be seen as not having the knowledge or competence that is required to deal with the learning that needs to take place in the classroom or the preparation that the students need for the real world when their schooling is complete. Having said this, opening a class or a session should be done in a way that is professional and thorough, but not so formal that participants begin to think of it as an inquisition. The instructor should introduce himself or herself, give information about his or her background (briefly) if it has not already been provided, and let the participants know what direction
the instructor would like to take them in. This should be stated not only for that particular class or session, but for the future as well.

This will help participants to feel more at ease and give them an idea of what type of issues will be learned as the sessions or classes progress. Providing information about the future of the discussions shows professionalism on the part of the instructor and also allows for some thoughts on the part of the students as they consider what they might be asked to learn in future classes and how they might deal with that. It gives them a chance to feel more prepared, and helps them talk more freely.

Mutuality is another important issue that instructors must consider. It has to do with finding a common interest or common ground with the student so that the student can feel that he or she can relate to the instructor in some way. This is very important because much of what goes on between instructors and their students is an exchange of thoughts, feelings, and information. In other words, the idea that the instructor sits in a chair and teaches while the student takes notes belongs to the past and the stereotypical attitude that some people still have toward education of any kind, regardless of who carries it out.

Instead, instructors do much more than that, and if the student and the instructor can feel as though there is common ground between them there is more likely to be more of an exchange of information. This will also help to build the confidence of the student because the student will feel as though he or she has made a contribution to the well-being of the instructor. This mutual feeling of kindness, compassion, and help received helps the confidence and well-being of both parties to the transaction. This is
why mutuality is so very important in any kind of relationship and especially in one where one party is trying to help the other.

Without this, the interactions between the instructor and the student would be strained and the support and empathy that are needed and expected in this type of relationship would be absent. Mutuality brings a sense of comfort to both parties in the instructor-student relationship and it allows for a deeper dimension of feeling and understanding that will make the student feel more accepted. Instead of seeing the instructor as a teacher only, mutuality will allow the student to see the instructor as a friend – someone that can be trusted and appreciated, instead of simply talked to. This feeling of friendship is often also felt by the instructor. Although there is a certain amount of professional detachment, which is necessary, the concern for other human beings and their difficulties is also a necessary part of the job of a teacher.

Because society has become a blend of so many different cultures in this country, it is important for instructors and others who work to help people to have an understanding of the different cultures of their students. This is true not only of Spanish and Mexican individuals, but of many other varied cultures that have recently been finding that America is the place that they want to be. There are dimensions that should be addressed by all who are training to be instructors so that they will be prepared for all of the various cultural differences that they will face. One of these has to do with language barriers.

Even for those people that have come from other cultures but speak English well, there is still a language barrier in that many of the expressions that Americans use
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are still misunderstood by those that do not come from this culture. They also
sometimes struggle with the way that questions are asked or answers given. There are
cultures that feel it is impolite to say ‘no’ outright, or to ask someone a direct personal
question, where American instructors may ask questions that are very thorough and
personal in order to better understand the student especially in theatre work where an
understanding of the students can help to bring a better understanding of the characters
as well. However, they will not get the answers that they want if they ask the questions
in a way that does not make the student feel comfortable.

What is said (or asked) and how this takes place, is also related to another
problem that instructors face – the body language that they display to the student. Some
cultures find it offensive when they can see the soles of other people’s shoes. Other
cultures feel that crossing or folding your arms is an insult, and closes you off from
others. This body language is especially important to understand for two reasons. First,
how the instructor uses this body language gives an indication of his or her feelings to
the student. Second, what type of body language the student displays to the instructor
can give that teacher important insight into whether the student feels comfortable,
whether they are being truthful, and if they are worried or concerned. These cultural
issues are very important and must be understood by all instructors to give the student
the maximum benefit.

How the instructor thinks about and reacts to the student will have much to do
with how the student feels about himself or herself. There is no way for people to
interact with one another and not acquire some understanding of what the other one
believes and feels. This is something that cannot be avoided or ignored, and it does affect the relationship that the student and the instructor have. A student who has an understanding of how the instructor feels about certain issues may look for acceptance by agreeing with the beliefs of the instructor, even if the student does not actually feel that these beliefs are correct.

This is, naturally, a concern because it slows down the process that the student is involved in when it comes to learning and working to understand everything that is being taught. Without the student being honest about his or her thoughts and feelings, the instructor can have trouble determining how to best help the student and what strategies might work in the future.

Instructors must take care that they interact with the student but do not do so to the extent that their beliefs and opinions become something that the student senses too strongly and therefore chooses to react to. The goal is for the student to discuss his or her problems and issues in a way that is non-judgmental and does not make the student feel as though he or she has to agree with everything that the instructor says.

This idea of agreeing can be one of the most problematic in the instructor-student relationship because the goal is to get the student to say what he or she really thinks and feels about things, not what he or she thinks the instructor would say or would like to hear. It is quite often difficult to keep this from happening, but instructors who do not want to see this happen must work to assure that their students understand that the feelings and opinions that are expressed in classes must belong to the student alone, and not the instructor.
Metacommunication is another issue of significance for instructors and their students. This involves more than just the communication that normally takes place during human interaction. Instead, it is the ‘communication behind the communication.’ By this, it is meant that metacommunication is more than just the words that are said and their meaning, but the meaning of the communication in general. When people communicate with each other, they often look at body language and listen to the words that are said by others. However, the communication itself usually has some deeper meaning. For example, people might be talking because they are very attracted to each other, and some of what they say in this context is not always exactly what they mean. They are looking for the meaning behind the words, and listening to what is not said just as much as what is said.

This is also true of instructors and their students. Listening to what is said and not said, and understanding the importance of all types of verbal and nonverbal communication is at the heart of metacommunication. This is one of the things that become very important in the instructor-student relationship, because understanding why the communication is taking place and what is meant by it is just as important as the words themselves, especially in the theatre. There is much more to communication than only the words that are said, and when an instructor and a student can be shown this, they are able to build on it and communicate at a deeper level than they were before. They can become confidants for each other, although the instructor must take care to keep his or her personal life mostly quiet and ensure that the professionalism in the relationship is maintained. It is sometimes difficult to balance this professionalism
with the idea of metacommunication, but the skilled instructor will be able to contribute to the conversation in ways that the student will find meaningful and important while still maintaining the professionalism that is necessary.

Where support and empathy are concerned, the importance of both is seen in the clinical setting. An instructor must be able to convey both of these things to a student in order to make the student feel comfortable. Without support, the student will feel as though the instructor is not really trying to help them conquer their difficulties and succeed. Without empathy, the student will feel as though the instructor does not really understand and appreciate what the student is going through. This may foster feelings of anger and worthlessness in the student, because it makes it more likely that he or she will feel as though no one understands what kinds of problems are really important to the student.

There are many different ways that the instructor can show support and empathy for the student and much of how this is done depends on the style of the instructor and what he or she knows about the student and the problems that the student is facing. If the instructor is not also still involved in the professionalism of the theatre in an acting or directing capacity, however, there will be no real understanding of what the theatre student is going through in the modern day.

In general, however, support for the student is shown by being honestly supportive of the decisions that the student makes, and when the student makes a decision that the instructor cannot support, it should be discussed with tact and sensitivity. In this way, it is possible that the student will feel that, while the decision is
not supported, the student is still supported, and this is one of the main goals of the classroom setting.

As for empathy, this is something that some instructors struggle with; because not everyone likes every student they work with. Empathy is hard to fake, but most instructors are very compassionate people or they would not choose to teach others. As such, they have empathy, at least to some degree, for all of their students and the problems that are faced. One of the best ways to show empathy toward students is to develop an understanding of who that student really is and what kinds of problems he or she actually faces. Most people can identify with at least some of the problems of others, and being able to identify with someone else is what often produces empathy. By learning as much as possible about the student, there will always be something to be supportive about and something to empathize with.

The academic experience provided by the College prepares students for professional employment in the fine and performing arts and design, provides them with the academic background necessary to pursue graduate study, and through involvement in their chosen artistic field, heightens their awareness of the physical, intellectual and cultural world around them.

The College should strive to provide an environment that facilitates the humanistic and artistic education of its students and nurtures the creative and professional growth of its faculty and staff. The College would be fortunate to have a diverse and professional faculty, most of whom deserve the title Artist/Teacher or Professional/Teacher. The vast majority of the faculty has worked, and continues to
work, professionally. In all of the departments, the faculty has been able to capitalize upon the discrete talents and skills of the faculty to the benefit, and accomplishment, of the mission of the individual departments.

This should also be a faculty that has proven their ability to adjust to increase in student numbers without comparable increases in faculty numbers, while maintaining and increasing quality instruction. Faculty has to prove their collective and individual willingness and ability to, overall, work well in the areas of Teaching, Research/Creative Activity, and Service. The faculty, for the most part, is very up-to-date on developments in their respective fields. Theatre features faculty involved in professional organizations, which represent the cutting edge. Some have extensive professional experience as filmmakers, journalists, television producers, theater directors, speechwriters, advertising executives, and public relations practitioners. Others have come to Communications and Theater through academic study, doing graduate work and continuing the practice of research and scholarship.

Theater is concerned not only with high standards of professional work, but also with encouraging the next generation of artists, teachers, clinicians, and media managers to develop an intellectual background and a sense of social responsibility. Toward this end, students should take at least half of their coursework in disciplines outside the School. For some, history and political science are related areas of interest; others choose literature and the arts, and still others choose business, economics, or the social sciences. In this way, the School participates in providing not only professional training but also a broad humanistic education for its students.
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Vita

H. Keith Hight was born in Henderson, North Carolina, and is an American citizen. He graduated from Terry Sanford High School in Fayetteville, N.C. He received a B.A. in Dramatic Literature and Performance from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. After Keith graduated, he worked for Carolina Civic Theatre creating a community theatre. Eventually, he moved to the west coast to teach at Olympic College and work in professional theatre. While living in Washington State, Keith graduated from Lesley University with his Masters in Education. While working at Olympic College, he was awarded "teacher of the year." Keith has directed to world premiers and was "recognized for his world concerns in the classroom" with regards to Sarajevo.

When given the opportunity to return to North Carolina to teach he accepted this challenge with great enthusiasm. While at Elizabeth City State University, Keith created and wrote a baccalaureate Theatre Degree program that included developing both classes and curriculum. He created a Children’s Theatre and a Living History program. He oversaw the remodeling and upgrading of equipment for the G.R. Little Theatre.

Currently, he is working at Campbell University and Fayetteville State University. Recently he has been awarded the DAV Certificate of Appreciation for A Piece of My Heart, Benny Award Best Production for A Piece of My Heart, Project Development Grant from the UNC Board for Regions $225,000, North Carolina Arts Council $1,000, Title III grant recipient $80,000, and Book-It Grant recipient $8,000.
His publications include The Guys, Lesley University 2003, Color and Its Meaning - Documentary for Lori George PBS 2001-2002, Letters from Sarajevo 2001 Published 2002, Copy write and the Director Hawaii International Conference on Arts and Humanities

He has present at several conferences and is a member of the North Carolina Theatre Association, Southeastern Theatre Association, Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, and a Member of the IAL5 UNION.