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Recommended Citation

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Theatre During COVID-19: Perceptions of High School Students and Teachers

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Abstract

COVID-19 changed the way theatre was done in a high school setting. Students were required to wear masks and physically distance, and some even did theatre remotely. Doing theatre with limitations was especially difficult because the face and body play a vital role in helping actors tell a story. In this study, the researcher sought to understand what the perceptions of high school theatre students and teachers were while doing theatre during COVID-19. A survey, two focus group interviews, a group interview, and an individual interview were used to collect data, as well as observations in three theatre classes and afterschool rehearsals. The constant-comparative method was used to analyze the data. While there were challenges faced by theatre students and teachers as they did theatre during COVID-19, they still accomplished many of their goals, and COVID-19 restrictions did not discourage them from doing theatre.

Theatre During COVID-19: Perceptions of High School Students and Teachers

“Precautions! A COVID-19 Story”, “The Illness that Took Over Theatre”, “Masked: The Musical”, “New People”, “Overcoming”, “Amazing Tragedy”, “Same as Usual (Not Really)”, “The Last Tango: Mask Edition”, “The Year We Knew Nothing”, “Wow This Sucks”, and “Mask Up” were a few of the musical titles students came up with to describe their theatre experience during COVID-19. It is no secret that theatre students and teachers had a very unique theatre experience during the 2020-2021 school year due to COVID-19. They were living and doing theatre during a time that was uncertain and, quite frankly, had never occurred before. I thought that it would be valuable to document what theatre students and teachers experienced in this historical time and get a behind the scenes look into how theatre was done with restrictions.

Purpose

Due to COVID-19, students were required to wear masks and physically distance which was especially difficult because the face plays a vital role in helping actors tell a story, and physical touch is used for establishing relationships between characters (Hagan, 1991). Some students chose to be remote learners and that presented its own set of challenges in a theatre classroom. With new challenges present, it became apparent to me that students would be doing theatre in a distinct way and their experience of doing theatre would be different from years prior.

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of novice and veteran theatre students who were in person learners and remote learners, as well as the perceptions a novice theatre teacher and a veteran theatre teacher had of doing theatre during COVID-19 in a high school setting. With that in mind, my research questions were as follows:

Research Question: What are the perceptions of theatre students and theatre teachers of masks, physical distancing, and remote learning in a theatre classroom, rehearsal space, and performance space?

Sub Question 1: How do the perceptions of novice theatre students differ from the perceptions of veteran theatre students about doing theatre during COVID-19?

Sub Question 2: How do the perceptions of a novice theatre teacher differ from the perceptions of a veteran theatre teacher about doing theatre during COVID-19?

I had the privilege of conducting this study during my year-long clinical teaching placement at Parker High School while I was a graduate student (all names are pseudonyms). Parker High School is located in Parker, Texas. Parker is located in Trinity County and is 180.6 miles from Red Wood, Texas. It has a population of 123,707 people with a 0.54% growth rate from last year. Parker High School is a 6A school making it the largest high school in Parker. Parker High School is home to 2,137 ninth through twelfth graders. The minority enrollment at Parker High School is 66% of the student body which is composed of mainly Hispanic students. Parker High School placed in the bottom 50% of Texas schools in overall testing of math and reading.

Literature Review

Several theatre practitioners such as Uta Hagan, Robert Cohen, Konstantin Stanislavski, Sanford Meisner, and Rudolf Laban have developed acting techniques and approaches to help actors tell stories. All of these theatre practitioners stress the importance of the relationship between the physical and psychological when acting. The body, especially, is a vital instrument for an actor. Hagan (1991) mentions the following:

If the actor wants this limber instrument to be at his beck and call, to be animated during his character's struggle to achieve his objectives, responding freely and intuitively to the imagined circumstances and surroundings and to the characters with who he is interacting in the play, he must understand all the things that bring his body to life. (p. 100)

Just like a musician must practice their instrument in order to know it well and become trained to use it, an actor must work on training and refining how they use their body. Further, Cohen (2007) mentions the idea of the body and mind needing to be connected in order for an actor to overcome their obstacle(s) and achieve their goal. He notes how acting is a rare combination of gifts that include "imagination, physical dexterity, vocal strength and flexibility, and emotional depth" (Cohen, 2007, p. 2). An individual must be free with their body in order to fully let it come to life.

Using masks to portray theatrical characters on stage was such a staple of primitive theatre but has since subsided as more modern theatre approaches have emerged. In early theatre, masks were a hallmark in Greek, Roman, and Italian theatre. Wilson and Goldfarb (2018) mention how masks covered the entirety of an individual's head to allow actors to play multiple characters and to add dramatic effect, or spectacle, to a performance. It is actually quite rare for actors to use masks today when acting, because their face is one of the primary tools used to tell story. Since masks covered the entirety of an actor's face and had a set facial expression, they had to really focus the delivery of their lines and the delivery of actions and emotions through the use of the physical movement of their bodies. Also, because theatre was done outdoors and because actors wore masks, they were forced to be extra physical with their bodies.

Some students have chosen to be remote learners and that presents its own set of challenges in a theatre classroom. Remote learning is not a new way of learning, but in the current times it has come to the forefront of education. When the lockdown happened in March of 2020, schools and universities resorted to remote learning to finish off the school year. Hargrove and Klondike (2020) were some of the first to publish their findings of their experiences transitioning to remote learning with their students during the lockdown in March of 2020. They documented their experiences of two design courses at two distinct universities and the tools and techniques they used to transition the courses to an online setting. They discovered that even though they did everything in their power to recreate the environment of their face-to-face classes, “personal connectedness and simulating a culture of togetherness amongst students was difficult to establish given the sterilizing effect of timed, remote interactions” (Hargrove & Klondike, 2020, p. 18-19). Further, they also found that although students had an overall positive online experience, they lacked the student-to-student interaction they had shared when they had been in a physical setting (Hargrove & Klondike, 2020). Hargrove and Klondike (2020) came to the realizations that in developing a virtual footprint, both students and teachers really benefited from the virtual sharing of student work on a consistent basis. It really helped strengthen the interaction of the students and the teacher in the course. Although moving into a remote setting for design courses was not the most favorable situation, students and teachers were enhanced by the opportunity to learn and collaborate in a different environment, under distinct circumstances.

Remote learning is not the only visible change COVID-19 has inflicted on students. Due to COVID-19 there is an added layer of factors that adolescents are facing. Quarantining due to COVID-19 created negative psychological and behavioral affects for children and adolescents that could linger years after the fact (Nazish, Irum, Imran, Hassan, & Sadiq, 2020). In theatre, the

psyche of a person is highly in play. Due to this, high school theatre students are susceptible to gaining emotional knowledge and learning how to manage their emotions (Larson & Brown, 2007). Larson and Brown (2007) found that the progress of high school students developing emotionally often stemmed from a highly charged emotional experience, and the emotional culture of a setting. Theatre affects adolescents and helps us learn more about how students have been able to grow because of it. Whether it be through the incorporation of theatre into a youth-based violence prevention program in a classroom setting and seeing viable effects on students or students believing that theatre can mean something to people and should be done even if controversial material is being portrayed, theatre is affecting students at an emotional level in the classroom setting (Omasta & Brandley, 2016; Zucker et al., 2010).

Theatre has done so much more than just affect the emotional and mental state of a person. Like previously mentioned, theatre is physical and even more so because of COVID-19. Physical activity in the classroom has been seen as adding value to their day by both teachers and students (Stoepker & Dauenhauer, 2020). Students and teachers in a regular classroom perceived physical activity to be a positive, but it made me wonder how much greater the implications would be in a theatre classroom where the physical body had to be used to tell stories even more so than before because of restrictions. Minor (2020) interviewed nine high school theatre students from all over the state of Texas over Zoom to get their take and their perspective on how things are going during this time. The students were extremely candid about their experiences. They mentioned a variety of highs and lows and things they learned because of COVID-19. They were given the opportunity to have their voices heard and in turn set up the opportunity for theatre educators to learn something.

There is very limited research that has been done in a high school theatre classroom and even less that has elevated the voices of high school theatre students. Further, there has not been a study that highlights student voices and their experiences of doing theatre during COVID-19. My study will contribute to the educational community and to my classroom by providing the first action research study to be performed under these circumstances and provide the raw and initial perspectives of theatre students and theatre teachers about doing theatre during COVID-19. It will demonstrate how theatre students and theatre teachers felt about doing theatre in a completely new and unexpected way.

Methods

This study was conducted in a high school theatre classroom consisting of students in grades 9th-12th. For the study, I worked to understand how COVID-19 had affected the way theatre was done in a high school setting. I really wanted to make sure I elevated the voices of those who were experiencing it first-hand.

Participant Selection

The participants in my study consisted of students in the two Theatre 1 classes and students in the Theatre Production class, as well as the two theatre teachers at Parker High School. The students in the Theatre 1 classes were novice theatre students, and the students in the Theatre Production class were veteran theatre students. One teacher was a novice teacher, and the other teacher was a veteran teacher. I sent home a parent information letter and consent form, and the students were asked to sign an assent form. Six students in the second period Theatre 1 class participated. Eleven students in the seventh period Theatre 1 class participated. The one remote learner that participated was in the seventh period Theatre 1 class. Ten students in the Theatre Production class participated. All students who consented participated in the survey, but

then only six Theatre 1 students, six Theatre Production students, and one remote learner participated in the two focus groups and individual interview conducted in the study. Of the twenty-seven who participated, sixteen students were Caucasian, eight were Hispanic, and three were African American. The two theatre teachers were Caucasian males.

Data Collection

In my study I collected inquiry and observational data. Hendricks (2017) mentions that “inquiry data are used to gather information from participants about their knowledge, values, beliefs, past experiences, feelings, opinions, attitudes, or perceptions” (p. 90) I conducted a survey (see Appendix A) to gain an understanding of their thoughts as it relates to doing theatre during COVID-19. In the survey I asked students questions that allowed them to voice their experience with theatre before COVID-19 and during COVID-19. The survey consisted of open-ended questions and one Likert scale question. I also utilized the survey in order to select the students who would participate in the focus groups. One of the questions in the survey asked students whether or not they would be interested in participating in a focus group with some of their classmates.

I placed students into three different categories of engagement as it pertained to their perspective about doing theatre during COVID-19. The categories students were placed in were with students who were really enthusiastic, students who were indifferent, and students who could care less about how COVID-19 has affected their theatre experience. After students were placed into those categories, three students from the first group, two students from the second group, and one student from the third group were randomly selected to participate in the focus groups (see Appendix B). The focus groups consisted of students in the Theatre 1 and Theatre production classes. The first focus group was composed of six Theatre 1 students. The second

focus group consisted of six Theatre Production students. It had been my intention to conduct a focus group interview of four to six remote learners but only one remote learner in the Theatre 1 classes consented to participate, so I ended up conducting an individual interview with that one remote learner. Each focus group lasted between 20 to 60 minutes. Finally, a group teacher interview with the two theatre teachers was conducted and lasted around one hour and twenty minutes. The two focus group interviews, individual interview, and group interview were recorded and transcribed.

I also collected observational data. The observational data collected consisted of field notes and a sketch journal. During each observation I sketched what I saw, and I wrote down brief words and phrases of what I saw and heard. After each day was over, I elaborated on what I sketched and wrote down during my observation. I observed the Theatre 1 classes as well as the production classes for the first two weeks of the three weeks I conducted my study. The second and seventh period Theatre 1 class periods lasted 45 minutes and the fourth period Theatre Production class lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes. The rehearsals for the One-Act play happened during the production class period and occasionally after school, so I had the opportunity of observing students and teachers outside of the normal classroom setting/routine.

Data Analysis

I utilized the constant comparative method in order to analyze the data I collected. Mertler (2009) mentions that this method of analysis utilizes the main parts of inductive analysis while also conducting the data collection process and coding the acquired data. I took the data acquired from the survey, group interview, focus groups, and observations and grouped them into categories that featured similar responses from students and teachers and looked for patterns and themes in the data. I coded the data and made sure I made a distinction between data

collected from teachers and data collected from students and whether the individual was a novice or veteran theatre student or theatre teacher. I analyzed data by using level 1 codes, the initial themes that arose from the data, and level 2 codes, the synthesis of the data to create sub themes for the level 1 codes (Tracy, 2013). I coded the first 20% of my data and created 17 level 1 codes that I then used to analyze the remaining 80% of the data and developed six more level 1 codes. I then created three level 2 codes and manually indexed those codes with supporting data. I then created a codebook (see Appendix C) that includes all my level 1 and level 2 codes labeled by name, defined, and used in an example.

Findings

I developed three level 2 codes from my data: Acting is Harder/ Different, New and Unexpected Ways of Doing Theatre, and Human Interactions and Theatre Should Not Be Taken for Granted. As a way to present my findings, I decided to use a format that is familiar to theatre artists. For each level 2 code, I created a variety of mini scripts that are in the format of a play script. Each mini script is composed of quotes from the teacher and student surveys and interviews (see Appendix A and Appendix B). I came up with a title for each mini script that exemplifies the content of that script. I tried my best to include things said by novice and veteran teachers and students in each mini script in order to represent the various perceptions of all the participants. Following each mini script, I elaborated and expanded upon the content of the script, and I continued to use play format by italicizing the words as if they were stage directions.

I really wanted my data to be as interactive as possible. Using the voices of the teachers and students throughout is intended to help readers get a good understanding of what the participants had to say about their theatre experiences during a COVID-19 year. To keep the

theatre theme going, I included a little summary of the year as described by Fisher, a veteran theatre student, (see Figure 1) and a cast list that highlights all of my participants.

About the Play

2. In one word describe your theatre experience this school year.

Eventful

3. Now elaborate on why that word describes your experience this year.

Lots of things have had to be altered due to help meet Covid restriction guidelines. We had to perform our fall play outside and with masks, learn how to sing with clear masks for musical, and perform with masks in our one act play. These are all very different for all of us (but especially seniors) to get used to.

Figure 1. Fisher's survey response (veteran theatre student).

Cast

Novice theatre students: Marie, Kevin, Anne, Ego, Kate, Naoma, Gigi, Elizabeth, Eddie, Sal, Fran, Libby, Le'Nae, Taylor, Sia, Marky

Veteran theatre students: Brinley, London, Laura, Jane, Fisher, Xanara, Allie, Mandi, Rory, Emilia

Remote theatre student: Jalon

Novice theatre teacher: Jonathan Blake

Veteran theatre teacher: Halle Glowczwski

Acting is Harder/ Different

This code focuses on the reality students faced as they engaged in theatre this year. They had to make verbal and physical adjustments when acting in order to be heard and understood. Students and teachers had a lot to say about the difficulties as well as the unexpected positives that wearing masks and having to physically distance had on their ability to act.

Masks Change Things

Masks were probably the biggest topic brought up by students and teachers during surveys and interviews. This makes sense because masks are in your face, literally, and they are the most evident addition to everyday life due to COVID-19. Students, especially, were not shy about voicing their frustrations.

Mask Up

Mr. Blake (*novice*)- For *Hamlet* I know there were kids that were having to adjust [their mask] every five seconds and you could tell oh my gosh, this is bothersome.

Fisher (*veteran*)- It was a really big hassle. Like having to deal with the constant putting your mask up if it falls was so irritating.

Taylor (*novice*)- I don't like it. It feels like every time I talk, it slides down my nose. So yeah, that sucks, and I had to start talking louder, well I do that all the time anyways. (*laughs*)

Elizabeth (*novice*)- Well I know some people in our class, they speak very quietly and so I can't hear them at all. I'm just like okay I'm going to pretend like I hear you.

Mr. Blake (*novice*)- It does hinder the quiet kids a lot more.

Anne (*novice*)- Trying to talk loud with a mask on stage it's difficult for me because I'm already quiet.

Ego (*novice*)- I just wish we didn't need masks.

(The challenges that came with masks were two-fold. First, masks posed a challenge because they are impractical. Novice and veteran students alike found masks to be quite uncomfortable and irritating. They had problems with masks slipping off their faces (talking, simply talking did that), making it hard to breathe (especially when dancing and singing in the musical), sticking to their mouth (this problem primarily arose when students were exposed to the Texas humidity while doing theatre outdoors), making it hard to project (sometimes they had to yell to be heard, especially while performing outdoors), making it difficult to hear their classmates (the mask moved but very little sound was heard from some of the more quiet

students), and making it more difficult to identify people. Both teachers expressed that learning student names was a lot harder because a lot of kids look alike when only their eyes were exposed.

What these students and teachers were describing is the everyday difficulties that people face when it comes to wearing masks. These difficulties were even more prevalent in a theatre classroom because students were asked to express themselves verbally and physically. Doing that was more challenging for students who were naturally shy and struggle being loud in the first place. My participants were adamant about talking about the logistical side of wearing masks while performing. The challenges did not stop there. Students, especially veteran students, and both theatre teachers expressed that acting techniques needed to be taken up a level in order to be understood on stage.)

Masked Acting

Kate (*novice*)- The most challenging thing was having to keep the masks on because acting is hard to do with masks.

Naoma (*novice*)- Mr. Glowczwski is always like you have to enunciate. I'm like I know. (*laughs.*)

Mr. Glowczwski (*veteran*)- If you don't take this opportunity to force your kids to improve past it, you're missing a big opportunity, because this is a great opportunity to teach kids how to act more physically and how to enunciate and project better.

Kevin (*novice*)- It definitely makes you need to like act more like body wise and then also project more with your voice.

Jane (*veteran*)- [I became] more in tune with my body and as tuned as like a physical actor and how to use my body and everything to portray emotion because I feel like I'm solid on my facial expressions so having to take that away has been not great for me. It's good now.

Mandi (*veteran*)- The way I act I rely more on my facial expressions [too] rather than physical movements. I have had to work harder on getting comfortable with moving around and expressing through physical movement.

Mr. Glowczwski (*veteran*)- I can't see your face, and I can't see your full expression. I can see your eyes, but I can't see your full expression and because of that, you've got to be more animated. You've got to be bigger. You've got to talk with your hands. When you're upset, I need to see it in your body.

(The second challenge that came as a product of having to wear masks was apparent when students performed in class and then they performed on a stage. In theatre, students are storytellers so it is important that they are able to tell a story vocally, physically, and emotionally. Masks forced students to focus greatly on really articulating their words. During rehearsals and during class, Mr. Glowczwski (veteran) led students in vocal warm-ups to help strengthen their performance vocally. He expressed that in any given year, articulation and diction are things that are stressed but often not executed well by students, but this year, it was absolutely necessary for students to be strong vocally. They did not have an option if they wanted to be understood. Novice theatre students thought that acting was really hard because they were constantly being asked to project their voices and really enunciate their words. Having to project their voices was something that was really new for them so it took some getting used to and constant reiterating from their teachers. The veteran theatre students focused a lot on connecting their vocal and physical movements when acting. Mr. Glowczwski stressed to them that they could not be subtle with their voice and movements, since they had a mask on and the audience was far away from them.)

Something else that is important to mention is that the veteran students found masks to be inhibiting on their performance. A veteran student named Jane even mentioned that during the musical she had trouble connecting emotionally to the others on stage because of the sweat and condensation that was on her plastic mask. The clunkiness of the plastic masks posed a challenge when students tried to hug one another on stage or get closer to another character. There were

plenty of things that the participants had to say about the cons of wearing masks in theatre class and during performances, but they also experienced some unexpected pros.)

Masked Confidence

Mr. Glowczwski (*veteran*)- I think some kids like wearing [masks].

Fran (*novice*)- I found masks comforting since I didn't have to worry how my face looked. So I think that helped a lot. (*smiles, you can see it in her eyes*)

Fisher (*veteran*)- I'm going to say something and I'm going to be honest. The tea is (*dramatic pause*) . . . doing the shows during COVID, *ZERO* stage fright.

Xanara and Brinley (*veteran*)- Oh yeah! That's what I was thinking.

Fisher (*veteran*)- Because in my head I'm like okay first of all we have masks on. The audience knows we're in the middle of a pandemic doing a show. If it's not perfect it's because we're in the middle of a pandemic doing a show.

(The revelations that students made about the confidence masks gave them as they performed was so unexpected. What Fran said about feeling comfortable on stage because of the mask is something that I actually myself identify with. Theatre is such a vulnerable art form, and it can be intimidating to put yourself out there for the world to see. The fact that some students found masks as a helpful tool during performances is something that I do not think many people expected.)

Physically Distancing

Something that teachers and students had to be really intentional about was making sure that physical distancing was happening in the classroom, during rehearsals, and during performances. Some settings lended themselves more to be able to do this. It was definitely easier to follow physical distancing guidelines when on stage because the director could intentionally block students away from one another and students would have specific places they would need to stand. In everyday life that is not the case.

You Stand Stage Left and You Stand Stage Right

Naoma (*novice*)- It was really interesting to see how they did performances with masks and social distancing.

Xanara (*veteran*)- With *Hamlet* we couldn't really touch each other and so for the fighting scenes for the more intimate scenes we had to spread it out. We had to find ways to get around that so that we weren't like very close to each other. To social distance and stuff.

Kevin (*novice*)- With *Hamlet* I think there was just a sense of we're not gonna take off our mask or anything like that. It's a no nonsense kind of situation, and we kind of just upheld that standard the whole time, and that was pretty nice.

Jane (*veteran*)- I do think *Hamlet* was the safest show we've done.

Brinley (*veteran*)- Glowczwski did really well at blocking to where we didn't ever physically come in contact with each other. Where we were always separate. Where we were always doing what was best for us, as well as doing [*Hamlet*] outside where it was spaced, where masks were required even though we were outside. I think we did a really good job of making sure we were distanced, and during [*Little Women*] I mean the casts were separated as best they could and after the show everyone cleared out.

Fisher (*veteran*)- I am going to be honest, and I am going to say (*dramatic pause*) . . . some of the things that did irritate me with the um rules of the COVID guidelines with the directors was the pick and choose attitudes with like the COVID rules. Like they would be like okay today six feet apart social distance all this stuff sit away from each other. The next day everybody is sitting in a row, and it's fine, and no one ever mentions it again. I just thought like things like that could have been done, handled better.

(The execution of physically distancing students while on stage and while not on stage varied a bit depending on the shows. The first show of the school year, Hamlet, was definitely the show students felt safest doing. Students wore cloth masks at all times, and they physically distanced from people as much as possible. In Hamlet, Mr. Glowczwski (veteran) blocked a show that was almost one hundred percent physically distanced on stage. The actors did not touch on stage, and they kept a safe distance from one another when they were stationary on stage. In Little Women, students wore plastic masks but Mr. Blake (novice) blocked students in closer proximity to one another. When students were not on stage they were asked to physically distance. Students and teachers have expressed that they did try their best to physically distance

but it did not really happen as it should have all the time. Students liked being around their friends so physical distancing measures were not always carried out. The teachers did their best to enforce distance, but they were not always successful. During class, it was really difficult to physically distance students, because the classrooms are not that big and the amount of students in each class was pretty large.

One way that Mr. Glowczwski and Mr. Blake were able to make it easier for them to physically distance students was by having smaller cast sizes. Usually for the musical they cast around sixty to seventy students to participate. This year only thirty-two students were cast. Some students expressed disappointment in having a smaller cast, but at the end of the day, they understood that it was necessary in order to keep everyone safe. As far as audience sizes for shows go, this varied depending on the show. For Hamlet, since the play was outside, there really was not a cap for the amount of people that could attend the show. However, everyone had to wear a mask and physically distance. For Little Women, since the show was in the auditorium, only a select few people could attend the show in person. The seats were taped in various places to let people know where they could sit in order to physically distance from others during the show.

In order to allow more people to see the musical and to help limit the amount of people who came to see the show in person, the musical was streamed. Mr. Blake, who directed the musical, actually said he would have preferred to have had the musical be only streamed. He thought that it would have been simpler to do it that way since they would not have had to worry about taping off seats and making sure that everyone was being safe. He thought it would have relieved some stress, and it would have been safer to make only the streaming option available for the show. He expressed that students had a different view than he did. There were students

who told him that if the show was only going to be streamed then they did not want to be in the show. Some veteran students really liked the idea of adding the streaming option in the future on top of having a live audience because family members that are usually not able to see their shows would be able to.)

Acting Setbacks

Something really interesting I discovered as I analyzed my data was that veteran theatre students in particular struggled with having to act with masks on and physically distance on stage because doing so made it more difficult at times to play a character in an authentic way.

We give you *Hamlet*, *Little Women*, and *W;t*

Brinley (*veteran*)- I mean as Jo it was so hard cause Jo says so many things. She's a writer so she uses very specific words to describe very specific situations and in that musical and I mean even in *Hamlet*, having words that we're not used to using and having to be so specific with our diction, like I don't know how I pulled it off, but it was like I was speaking as a completely separate being.

Laura (*veteran*)- In *Hamlet* I played a very very complex character. I'm a female playing Hamlet, and my dad was played by a female, and all of that is great, but it's just another layer of complexity on a very complex character. And then you add the fact that it took me about a month to understand exactly what I was saying. I had to sit down with the play and pick out piece by piece what I'm saying because Shakespeare is so dense and on top of kind of a muffled sound.

Mandi (*veteran*)- COVID has made acting more challenging than it already is. It does not make it any less enjoyable or fun but us as actors had to focus more on bigger movements and louder voices *while also focusing on our characters.*

Laura (*veteran*)- With Suzie in *W;t* my number one goal when I get on stage is not necessarily my GOTE, but geez I want to make sure that I can be heard. There's times when I am projecting and being loud, and I think that it's taking away from the character. I really do.

(Mr. Glowczwski and Mr. Blake did anything but lower the expectations they had for their students who participated in shows this year. They actually elevated the expectations for their students. They decided to entrust students with challenging material even though they would be tasked with having to abide by all the COVID-19 restrictions and precautions while performing. They picked complex shows, and they expected students to authentically portray

their characters. All the shows they did at Parker High School for the 2020-21 school year had really complex characters that required students to step up their acting. They were all vocally difficult plays so the students had to take it a notch higher when saying their lines. Students did experience setbacks because many times they described how they lost some authenticity in their characters because they had to yell to be heard or be extra physical with their body when their character would not verbally and physically be that way.)

Fisher (*veteran*)- I actually think that acting physically um it kind of took away almost from the characters that we're portraying just a little bit.

Sal (*novice*)- The masks have made it harder to act out a play with emotion.

Laura (*veteran*)- Yeah and Hamlet doesn't yell the whole time. I would have liked to play a softer side of Hamlet, but I couldn't. I memorized all of Hamlet to perform with half of my face covered and a muffled sound.

(Students really rose to the occasion, and they were up for the challenge. The veteran theatre students placed expectations on themselves to produce really good theatre. For them it was not just about being seen and heard; they really tried their best to play their characters in an authentic way. Sometimes factors due to COVID-19 got in the way, but they still did their best to do what they could.)

New and Unexpected Ways of Doing Theatre

This code focuses on the various new experiences students and teachers were introduced to because of the COVID-19 safety guidelines and restrictions. In order to be as safe as possible while doing shows and theatre, a show was done outdoors and some students chose to do theatre remotely. Teachers and students did not know what to expect.

Doing Theatre Outdoors

One of the experiences that had the greatest impact this year was doing the first show of the school year outdoors.

Shakespeare in the Park

Mandi (*veteran*) – I think the craziest thing was successfully doing a show in a park outside.

Xanara (*veteran*)- Um I think also being outside was really difficult because none of us have like performed theatre outside and even with like the mics it was still difficult to like project and all that.

Kevin (*novice*)- Um the receptors for the mics and everything had to be placed in a certain spot or you couldn't hear or the audience couldn't hear you.

Laura (*veteran*)- I was just very focused on yelling over my mask, and there were times when I was like geez I am projecting so loud because I was in a park and people are so far away and there are kids on the playground, and I was just like "oh my voice hurts" because I'm just yelling and screaming and trying to get the point across.

Mr. Blake (*novice*)- There's just A LOT of factors that you just never even have to consider when it comes to doing a performance indoors that we had to consider, and I don't think we considered probably ninety percent of them when we said hey, we're going to do this outside.

Xanara (*veteran*)- It was very interesting, and I think it's a really cool thing to have just like in our theatre experience. To be like oh we performed a Shakespearean play outside.

Mr. Glowczwski (*veteran*)- It was truly like one of my favorite theatre experiences as a director, and I think it was because of the outside aspect of it, and the hunger of the kids too. The kids were really eager to do something.

(The decision was made to do the first show of the 2020-21 school year outside in an attempt to be as safe as possible and abide by all of the COVID-19 guidelines. Performing a show outside was a new experience for both students and teachers. Both teachers and students agreed that doing a show outside was a unique experience and one they will never forget. For the novice theatre students who participated in the show, most of them on crew, this was their

first time participating in a play ever, and it was outside, and they had to wear masks and physically distance.

Rehearsals and performances for Hamlet were held at a park in Parker, Texas. Even though the show was outdoors, all students wore cloth masks during rehearsals and performances. This was their first experience performing with a mask on, and it was outside. For many students, this was the hardest show they had ever done, but it was a growing experience for them nonetheless. Doing this show really helped them prepare for the shows that followed after. The veteran students expressed how proud they were to have been a part of this outdoor show. It was challenging for them with so many new elements that were thrown their way, and they rose to the occasion and made the best of their situation. They were just really happy that they were even allowed to perform. Jane (veteran) expressed that she thought that lesser directors could not have pulled off doing the show.

Because the show was outside, the weather played an active role during rehearsals and performances. The weather held up for the most part, but students expressed how uncomfortable and hot it got at times as they did all of these physical and vocal movements in the Texas heat while wearing a mask. Interestingly enough, during the performances in the evening it actually got pretty cold. Elizabeth (novice) mentioned that she went to see the show and really her only critique was that it got cold so her mom had to run home to get her a blanket. She said the actors also looked like they were freezing. Other than that she said the show was really good, and she really liked how Laura (veteran), who was Hamlet, moved through the audience. Those who attended the show were asked to wear a mask and physically distance. There was not proper seating at the park so the people who came to see the show had to bring a chair or a blanket to sit on or else they had to sit on the grass.

Mr. Glowczwski, who directed the show expressed that this was one of his favorite shows to ever direct. He really enjoyed being outside and being able to do theatre with his students in a new and unique way. Mr. Blake, who was the technical director for the show, expressed that doing the show was really stressful. There was a lot of planning and preparation he had to do since during the week of the show they had to bring lights and sound equipment to the location, assemble it, and then take everything down at the end of the rehearsal or performance. One thing that the teachers and students found not to be super reliable were the mics. Mr. Glowczwski blocked students coming from different parts of the park and sometimes they even did scenes away from the stage. This became a bit of a problem because a lot of the times the mic receptors did not reach where the actor was standing so the students had to yell to be heard and that was something that really strained their voices. Actors had to rely on their own ability to project their voice while wearing a mask and use their body to reinforce what their character was saying.

On top of some mic issues, in this outdoor theatre setting students experienced having their dressing rooms in RVs (which made it difficult to physically distance), costumes getting dirt and mud on them, not having a proper backstage area, and holes in the ground when they walked. These were just a few of the new experiences' students endured due to doing theatre outside. There were technical and performance issues that occurred as well that are just theatre related and happen on non-COVID-19 years. Many students, especially veteran students said that this show was their favorite show this year, despite the unexpected and new way they were required to do theatre.)

Doing Theatre Remotely

Doing theatre in a remote setting was a new experience for both teachers and students, and it came with its challenges. Teachers had to navigate teaching theatre to remote learners.

Novice students not only had to navigate learning theatre for the first time but also learning how to do theatre for the first time through a computer screen.

Theatre in 2D

Mr. Glowczwski (*veteran*)- The separate like the hybrid thing that we're doing is not working. It's no good. I don't like it. It's only even feasible because I think you're there, but like how are we supposed to do scenes with kids online when they're not even there all the time? There's no way for the kids there to be successful, and today, just today, I spent so much time over there talking with them. There was no way I could have also then helped the kids who were in class.

Mr. Blake (*novice*)- Like Mr. Glowczwski said, the whole hybrid thing just doesn't work and I can't imagine this model working well for anybody. . . . I mean I've got all these great lessons, I've got all these great things I want to do, and I'm like okay this is what we're gonna do but then I'm like "oh yeah what are the remote kids going to do now?" You know. How am I gonna do this with them, and a lot of the time you know I feel bad but like they kind of don't get the full experience of an assignment.

(This is really the first time that theatre has been done remotely in a high school setting.)

Mr. Blake (novice) mentioned that he cannot imagine what it has been like for teachers who have been teaching for a long time and are not as used to or comfortable using technology. He said he was able to pick up the technology stuff because he is tech savvy, but he knows that is not the case for everyone. Teaching theatre to remote learners was a learning curve for both teachers and students in trying to figure out a way to teach and participate in theatre in a way that is effective. Both teachers had mostly negative things to say about their experiences with remote learning. They expressed that they felt that remote learning was not the best learning experience for theatre students. Many of the activities they did in their classroom just did not seem to work in a remote setting. They tried to adapt and see what would work, but most of the time they were not successful. Mr. Blake noted that many of the performance and group activities were the ones that posed the greatest challenge to remote learners. Many of their projects had to be modified for remote students, and a lot of the times that took away from what they should have been learning. He noted that theatre is a very collaborative art form, and it was very hard to have

students collaborate in a remote setting. It was difficult to give remote learners the attention they needed when there was so much already going on in the classroom. Mr. Glowczwski (veteran) expressed that having me in his classroom this year made it easier to balance between in person and remote learners. I was the one who usually connected the Zoom and interacted with remote students.

One of the biggest things that both teachers and I noticed about the remote learning environment was that it made it really difficult to connect with students. Remote students did not have to wear masks so their face was not physically covered, but we faced another problem. Their face was covered by a screen. Remote students across the board did not like sharing their screen and responding to us. That was probably one of the biggest setbacks because we would sit there and talk to students and explain things, but a lot of the time there was no response, so it kind of seemed like they were not even there. Some students liked using the chat to respond to questions or ask for help. Really, the only time students shared their screen and unmuted themselves was on performance day, and even on those days it was really difficult to get students to do so. In Mr. Glowczwski's classroom we really only had one student who really participated as much as he could and was ready to perform.

Mr. Glowczwski and Mr. Blake expressed that one of the biggest positives of remote learning was that it opened up the idea of using technology more in their classrooms. Both teachers really liked using Google Classroom. Mr. Glowczwski had not used Google classroom before this year, but he said it was something he would like to continue using in the future. He really liked being able to have assignments all in one place and the easy access it provided for students if they were absent. Mr. Blake had used Google classroom at his old school but not to the extent that he has used it in his classroom this year. Something else that both teachers,

especially Mr. Blake, liked that they did this year as they were trying to come up with assignments that worked well for both in person and remote learners were video projects. Mr. Blake did four video projects with his students, and Mr. Glowczwski did one video project with his students.)

Zoomers

Kevin (*novice*)- [In second period] we had like kind of two people, but only one of them really participated. Jalon was great. [He had] a great attitude about everything, and he really wanted to participate, and that was great to see. It helped a lot too because there were different opportunities we had to use like the format of like Zoom or whatever and so that was pretty cool.

Naoma (*novice*)- Jalon is a god at [remote learning].

Ms. Trujillo- He did a whole scene and played like four different characters. He's in seventh period now.

Elizabeth (*novice*)- For being on Zoom, he actually participates.

Taylor (*novice*)- Actually I think Jalon is the only one we've seen. Like I don't know any of the other names. I've never seen them.

(Only the novice theatre students experienced having remote learners in their class. There were no remote learners in the Theatre Production class with all of the veteran students. The novice theatre student had both positive and negative experiences with remote learners in their class. They expressed how they were able to do theatre in creative ways because of remote learning. When doing improv. games they were able to interact with students online and use Zoom as part of their scenario for their improv. scene. Elizabeth (novice) had to quarantine and so she joined class via Zoom for a few days, and she experienced doing that as well. She got to play an improv. game with Jalon (remote/ novice) while they were both on Zoom.

Students had nothing but good things to say about Jalon. He was in both Theatre I classes, and because of that all the novice theatre students knew him. In the fall semester he was in the second period Theatre I class, and in the spring semester he was in the seventh period

Theatre I class. Students in both classes knew Jalon's name, what he sounded like, and what he looked like. They enjoyed interacting with him and watching his performances. They said he seemed to be really into it. Novice students also voiced their frustrations with other remote students not wanting to participate. The seventh period Theatre I class had seven remote students, and they would get visibly and verbally irritated when remote learners would not respond when called on to perform. They had to sit there and wait for students to not even respond. Many did not always connect so there was a lot of inconsistency there.)

One Man Show

Jalon (*remote learner/ novice*)- I guess that [theatre is] what you would expect it to be, doing it online, like some pros and cons and um overall a great experience I would say. You definitely won't get the most that you can get out of it, but it's a thousand percent possible. You're still able to get the fundamentals and stuff like that, and I even liked some of the improv. that we did when it came to like oh let's act like they're on a Zoom call with someone and you get the perspective of the person in person, and I would be the Zoom person and like we act with it where like this person can be in Florida, and this person can be in wherever. Just the whole improvisation when it came to like in-person and Zoom kids, it worked out really well. Yeah so I think it's definitely possible . . . You definitely still are very attentive when it comes to talking to us even if some of the other remote students aren't as interactive and all of that, but I always feel like you're an actual teacher and not just someone on a screen basically. Both you and Mr. Glowczwski. Some of my other teachers just don't talk to the remote kids at all. (*laughs.*)

(Jalon was the one remote student I was able to get to participate in this study. In an unfortunate way, only having him participate is a good representation of the engagement of the remote learner in the class. Even Jalon recognized that other remote students were not as responsive as they should have been. His first theatre experience was over Zoom. He acknowledged that his introduction to theatre probably was not the best since he was doing it remotely, but he still thought it was still pretty good considering everything. Jalon expressed that there were definitely things that could have been done to improve the remote learning experience on both the student and teacher side. He displayed a lot of grace for all his teachers this year as he talked about how they handled remote learning. He understood what teachers were up

against. He did not fault his teachers; he faulted the situation. Jalon felt that a setback of remote learning was that he was not able to fully realize himself as an actor because he was limited to a screen. He really could not participate that well in group activities done in the class because he could not interact normally, but what he could participate in was really fun for him and allowed him to get comfortable in the class. He said he would definitely do theatre again next year, and he hoped to do it in person.)

Human Interactions and Theatre Should Not Be Taken for Granted

COVID-19 brought to light the reality that they needed to be intentional with how they interacted with others. Peoples' lives were at stake. Being able to participate in theatre was a privilege, and they had to really think about how they needed to approach others in an effort to keep everyone safe and be able to do shows this school year.

COVID-19 Restrictions and Precautions

There were various expectations and precautions that teachers and students were held to in order to be given the opportunity to do shows. While many viewed masks as inconvenient, they understood that it was important that everyone wear a mask and keep their distance in order to keep everyone safe. Even with the various precautions taken, it was inevitable that there could still be the possibility of someone getting sick and everything having to be shut down.

The Show Must Go On (maybe)

Mr. Blake (*novice*)- Doing the shows, it's been such a struggle. I mean just not being able to sleep for the fear of I'm gonna wake up, and a kid's gonna tell me, "Hey, I have COVID; I can't do the show."

Laura (*veteran*)- I was always afraid I would get quarantined.

Xanara (*veteran*)- We had a few scares finding out someone had been exposed to a positive case or could have COVID. We even had a girl in *Hamlet* that couldn't perform due to COVID.

Mr. Blake (*novice*)- We had COVID scares all the way up to tech week [for the musical].

Fisher (*veteran*)- I had to learn a different lead than the part I already had and almost had to play two out of the three male leads during the show, but my friend could eventually go on.

Allie (*veteran*)- Since anyone can get sick at any moment you have to be ready for anything to happen.

(The reality that anyone at any time could need to quarantine loomed over both teachers and students. Veteran students, especially, understood the gravity of things. Students and teachers noted that they needed to be really careful with the way they interacted with others. Because of COVID-19, they felt a greater responsibility to interact with others in a safe way. There were instances when students had to quarantine and that was stressful on both the students and the teachers. If even one person had to quarantine or tested positive for COVID-19 then everyone in the show was affected. Mr. Blake (novice), who directed Little Women, expressed how much more stressful it was coming to grips with what it meant for the musical if a student was out of the show because they had to quarantine. In a musical, singing and dancing is involved and so it is a lot of work if someone has to be replaced.)

In an effort to eliminate a bit of the challenge of having to replace someone if they had to quarantine, and in an effort to be safe, Mr. Blake decided to double cast the musical. The four sisters and Marmee were double cast. Veteran students had mixed views on the double casting approach. While the students who were double casted had someone to relate to in terms of their character, they felt pressure to be at the same level, if not more, with the other person who was playing the same character. The double casting also affected students who were single casted. Fisher (veteran), who played Professor Bhaer, said he felt like he was in two completely different shows. He said that the two actresses who played Jo in the show gave him such different energy, and so he had to give different energy depending on who he was acting with.)

Double Standards

(Veteran theatre students and both teachers found it irritating that the district clearly had double standards when it came to who the COVID-19 restriction and precautions applied to. They expressed how the programs in the fine arts and the athletics department had distinct standards they were held to. In sports, they were able to do more this year and without masks to add to that. The students and teachers were not upset that they had to wear masks during performances; they knew how important it was to do so; they were just bothered by the fact that not everyone was expected to be safe. It was frustrating to them that they were being safe but not everyone was doing the same.)

Community

Students were still able to form meaningful relationships and connections with each other through participating in theatre. Students enjoyed coming together to do theatre in a year where it seemed that they maybe would not have the opportunity to do so.

We're All in this Together

Brinley (*veteran*)- I think that theatre was introduced to new obstacles, but if anything, it brought the theatre community closer together.

Kevin (*novice*)- During *Hamlet* I bonded with people, and it was really nice.

Libby (*novice*)- Despite this year, I still have friends in this class.

Fran (*novice*)- I have a lot of friends now. Like freshman year I only had one friend. This year I made a lot of friends.

Eddie (*novice*)- I love my classmates.

Laura (*veteran*)- It's been really tough, but the group has been great, especially the teachers!

Jane (*veteran*)- Everybody in this department like students and faculty was working for us to get to share our art form, and we get to share these stories which is what theatre is about, and it's worked really well I think.

(In this time of disconnection, students felt connected. Theatre was an avenue for them to come into community with other people. Students were able to keep or form new connections while participating in theatre class and while participating in shows. Veteran students expressed that a lot of their relationships were strengthened within their theatre friends and other friends. Novice theatre students actually expressed that they were able to make new friends in their theatre classes and bond with people while doing shows. Although masks and physical distancing could have created a larger divide among people, students found comfort in being able to do what they enjoy and love doing with others.)

I Would Do Theatre Despite Everything

Jane (*veteran*)- Theatre for me this year has been a solid experience in a time of turmoil. It's been different, sure, but being able to perform with my friends has provided a sense of stability that has helped my mental health.

Allie (*veteran*)- Doing shows during COVID was really a blessing because even though there was a few changes, we still had the opportunity to perform in front of an audience.

Xanara (*veteran*)- [Theatre is] my passion; I don't know what I would do if I wasn't doing it. Even if it's difficult to act with masks, I would rather deal with the masks than not do it at all.

Rory (*veteran*)- I still love theatre with or without COVID-19.

London (*veteran*)- I love theatre, and I would do it regardless of the circumstances.

Fran (*novice*)- I love how fun it has been despite the current events.

Brinley (*veteran*)- I'm still able to do what I love during a trying time.

Laura (*veteran*)- We persevere through a difficult situation, and I at least got to perform.

Fisher (*veteran*)- It was more challenging, but it was very fun to at least have some normalcy with doing shows.

Xanara (*veteran*)- I still experienced my love and joy for theatre. Things were different this year, and it could've been easier, but the fact that we still got to perform was all I could have asked for.

Mandi (*veteran*)- Although COVID has been challenging, I still love acting and theatre and wouldn't quit because of inconveniences.

(Veteran theatre students overwhelmingly said that they would have done theatre regardless of even knowing everything they would have gone through. This year was not at all what they expected it to be, but at the end of the day they were just thankful that that they had the opportunity to do a show. They would have liked to have experienced doing shows in a somewhat normal year where COVID-19 is not a thing, but that was just not the case. They were just happy that they even had the opportunity to do theatre when many other school districts had decided that their theatre programs would not be doing shows the 2020-2021 school year. The majority of the veteran theatre students this year were seniors, so they really wanted to make the most of the opportunity they were given to do shows because it would be their last time performing as a high school student, and they wanted it to count. Having to wear a mask did not discourage students wanting to participate in theatre and do shows. Veteran theatre students almost unanimously expressed that they would do theatre regardless of the circumstances because it is something that they love.)

Implications for Teachers

Many school districts made the decision to not allow their theatre programs to do shows. Theatre students and theatre teachers at Parker High School were fortunate enough to be given the green light to do shows during the 2020-21 school year even when COVID-19 was still very much life threatening. With this opportunity, came the responsibility and duty of theatre students and theatre teachers to abide by the widely held COVID-19 safety guidelines and restrictions. It was clear that teachers and students alike wanted to make sure that everyone was making safety a priority while in class and in rehearsals. For every show done, masks were worn by students, teachers, and audience members, even if the show was outside. Students and teachers knew that they would be in contact with a lot of people while working on a show, and so they knew they

had to abide by the COVID-19 restrictions and precautions or they could get each other sick and not be able to do shows.

This year students and teachers at Parker High School experienced a year filled with new experiences, positive and negative. They got to have so many unexpected and enriching experiences that they would not have had if it was not for COVID-19 and the restrictions that came with it. I think they were able to realize how much they were actually able to do this year. At first they thought we cannot do this, and we cannot do that, and it is not going to be the same, but then they realized that there was so much they could do and that they got to do because of the restrictions. It was a difficult year with so many unknowns, but the students kept moving forward and were optimistic of what they could do. They could do theatre and grow as actors. They had to act with masks on and many thought that they were really able to grow because of that (see Figure 2).

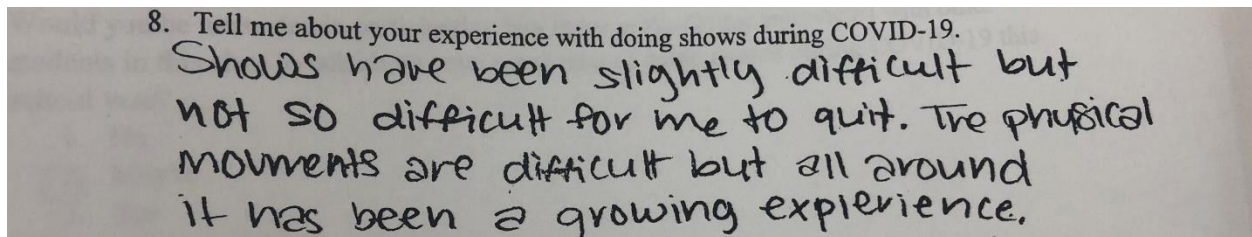


Figure 2. Mandi's survey response (veteran theatre student). "It has been a growing experience."

The veteran theatre students had a lot more to say about their theatre experiences this school year when compared to novice theatre students because they had more years to compare this year to. It is worthy to note that only the novice theatre student participants had remote students in their theatre classes; the veteran students did not. All the veteran students in the production class attended class in person. That is not surprising at all because veteran theatre students knew what theatre entails and doing it remotely would make things really complicated.

They knew if you are in a show, you have to be physically at school because it is a group activity.

Novice theatre students had a quite different experience than the veteran theatre students. Some of the irritation these students experienced stemmed from how masks were inhibiting to them as people rather than what veteran theatre students felt about masks, that they were more irritating because they were inhibiting to their character. Since novice theatre students did not have the previous theatre experience that the veteran theatre students had, they had a different perception of doing theatre for the first time during COVID-19. On the survey (see Appendix B), the vast majority of students said that they would do theatre again next year. They said they found theatre to be really fun, and they liked meeting new people and being able to express themselves (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Ego's survey response (novice theatre student). "In theatre I can be myself."

Novice theatre students really enjoyed the various projects they did in class. Many of these students also participated in shows this year, mainly on the tech side. They had a lot of fun participating in the shows in that capacity. The students who said they would not want to do theatre next year, which were very few, did not say COVID-19 and all the restrictions that came with it was responsible for why they would not do it again. For those students it stemmed from not liking performing and being in front of people.

In terms of how the Mr. Glowczwski (*veteran*) and Mr. Blake (*novice*) felt this year, they had very similar thoughts to share. Doing shows is a difficult thing to do during a non COVID-19 year, and they did shows with an extra layer of precautions and restrictions, so they had to step it up and consider things they had never considered before. They both expressed that there

was a lot of good that came from the inconveniences of this year. Masks were inhibiting but having students wear them and performing in them gave them the opportunity to help students grow as theatre artists. They got to have so many new and enriching experiences that they would not have had if it was not for COVID-19 and the restrictions that came with it. With remote learning, it was more about finding ways to include students in the class as best as possible and not necessarily making students the best actors. I think that it is safe to say that remote learning is not the best avenue for students to be successful in a theatre classroom. Mr. Glowczwski and Mr. Blake do not feel confident that they have figured out the best way to approach remote learning in a way that is effective. They do not think that remote learning is the best thing for theatre students moving forward. With remote learning everyone needs to buy in. Both students and teachers need to make the effort to make it a proper learning environment. To make remote learning the best it can be everyone needs to work together.

This year was a really good learning and growing experience for both teachers and students. The students and teachers have so much to be proud of this year. Doing shows is a difficult thing to do during a non COVID-19 year, and they did shows with an extra layer of precautions and restrictions. They were able to successfully do theatre in a way they had never done it. Teachers and students, especially veteran students, saw the challenges that were present because of COVID-19 as an opportunity to grow as theatre artists and as individuals. With everything considered, even though this year was anything but normal, theatre students and teachers were able to come together, while physically distancing and wearing a mask, to do theatre. Students understood what they were up against and were very complimentary of the teachers and everything they were able to accomplish this year as a theatre community.

The restrictions did not discourage students or teachers at Parker High School from doing shows. Students learned how to act with limitations. The limitations challenged students to become more physically and verbally strong actors. The masks forced students to hone in on the physical, emotional, and verbal connection that acting requires. Even though in many aspects it was unfortunate that students could not use their face as much to act and their voice was muffled by the mask, they were able to still tell stories and do theatre in a pretty effective way. I think that in the years that follow, theatre students and teachers will reap the benefits of the challenges they endured. I think students will be able to project better and be more cautious of how they use their bodies onstage. What teachers can take away from this experience is that students rise to the occasion. They are capable of so much. Allowing them to express themselves through the medium of theatre is so important especially in times like these (see Figure 4).

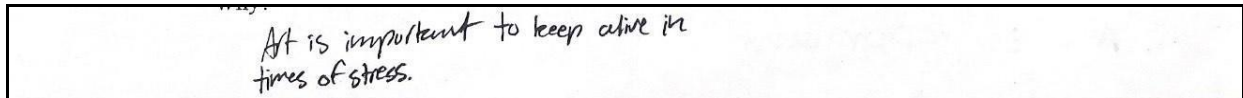


Figure 4. Jane's survey response (veteran theatre student).

Further Questions and Limitations

After conducting this study and analyzing the data collected, a few more questions have emerged. I wonder what the long term affects will be on theatre students after having experienced doing theatre with a mask on during the 2020-21 school year? Will students retain the growth they made, or will the transition to traditional forms of doing theatre be difficult on students? I also had a few questions that arose as a product of some of the limitations of this study. There were two clear limitations to this study. The first was that I only had one remote student participate. I would have liked to have heard about a theatre experience from a remote student who was less engaged online and what the cause was behind that. The second is that a whole group of theatre students was left out. The students in the Technical Theatre classes

experienced doing theatre during COVID-19 as well but were not included in this study. It would be interesting to know about what their experience was like doing theatre during COVID-19 from the perspective of students who were not focused on the performance side of theatre, but on the technical side of theatre.

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Appendix A

Survey (Theatre 1)

Please answer the questions below as honest as you can. I really want to know what your experience was like, good or bad.

Fake Name: _____

1. In one word describe your theatre experience this school year.
2. Now elaborate on why that word describes your experience this year.
3. If your experience doing theatre during COVID-19 was a musical, what would you call it?
4. What has been the most challenging part of doing theatre during COVID-19? Why?
5. What was your favorite thing to learn in class this school year?
6. What was the craziest thing that happened during class, a rehearsal, or a performance because of COVID-19?
7. On a scale of 1 to 4, how interested would you be in being in a theatre class again even after experiencing theatre during COVID-19?

1	2	3	4	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
Not interested at all.				I am very interested.

Why?

8. What could be done to improve your theatre experience this year? Elaborate.
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about doing theatre during COVID-19?
10. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group (group interview) with other students in this class to talk about your experience of doing theatre during COVID-19 this school year?
 1. No

2. Maybe
3. Yes

Why yes, no, or maybe?

Survey (Theatre Production)

Please answer the questions below as honest as you can. I really want to know what your experience was like, good or bad.

Fake Name: _____

1. How many years have you been doing theatre?
2. In one word describe your theatre experience this school year.
3. Now elaborate on why that word describes your experience this year.
4. If your experience doing theatre during COVID-19 was a musical, what would you call it?
5. What has been the most challenging part of doing theatre during COVID-19? Why?
6. On a scale of 1 to 4, how interested would you be in doing theatre during COVID-19 again next school?

	1	2	3	4	
Not interested at all.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I am very interested.

Why?

7. Do you think COVID-19 ruined theatre for you this school year? Elaborate.
8. Tell me about your experience with doing shows during COVID-19.
9. What was the craziest thing that happened during class, a rehearsal, or a performance because of COVID-19?
10. What could have been done to improve your theatre experience this year? Elaborate.

11. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about doing theatre during COVID-19?
12. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group (group interview) with other students in this class to talk about your experience of doing theatre during COVID-19 this school year?
1. No
 2. Maybe
 3. Yes
- Why yes, no, or maybe?

Survey (Remote Learning)

Please answer the questions below as honest as you can. I really want to know what your experience was like, good or bad.

1. The fake name you would like me to use in my study (The name needs to be a realistic name not something funny):
2. In one word describe your theatre experience this school year.
3. Now elaborate on why that word describes your experience this year.
4. What has been the most challenging part of doing theatre during COVID-19? Why?
5. What was your favorite thing to learn in class this school year?
6. What was it like doing theatre remotely?
7. On a scale of 1 to 4, how interested would you be in being in a theatre class again even after experiencing theatre during COVID-19?

	1	2	3	4	
Not interested at all.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I am very interested.

Why?

8. What could be done to improve your theatre experience this year? Elaborate.
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about doing theatre during COVID-19?

Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol (Theatre Production)

1. Tell me about your theatre experience so far. How has it been different from your experience other years?
2. Tell me about your experience doing Hamlet. How was it different from other shows you have been a part of?
3. Tell me about your experience doing Little Women the musical. How was it different from other shows you have been a part of?
4. What was it like having to wear a mask and physically distance on stage?
5. Tell me about the movement project you did at the beginning of last semester. What were your biggest takeaways from it?
6. What are some challenges you faced when doing theatre during COVID-19?
7. What has been the biggest challenge of doing theatre during COVID-19? Why?
8. How has COVID-19 made you focus on really learning how to use your body as a storyteller?
9. Tell me about something you learned about yourself and theatre because of doing theatre during COVID-19?
10. What is something that was different because of COVID-19 that you believe should be explored and really embraced even after the pandemic is over?
11. Has doing theatre during COVID-19 been what you thought it would be or has it been different from what you thought it would be?
12. In your eyes, how has your teacher been acclimating to doing theatre during COVID-19? Why do you think this?
13. In your eyes, how have your classmates been acclimating to doing theatre during COVID-19? Why do you think this?
14. Tell me about your takeaways from doing theatre during COVID-19.
15. Are you interested in doing theatre again next school year? Why or why not?

Focus Group Protocol (Remote Learners)

1. Tell me about your theatre experience so far.
2. What has it been like doing theatre remotely?
3. What have been some challenges you have faced because of doing theatre remotely?
4. What has been something you have learned because of doing theatre remotely?
5. Do you think it is possible to do theatre effectively in a virtual setting? Why or why not?
6. What is your favorite movement centered project we did in class? Why?
7. Tell me about something you learned about yourself and theatre because of doing theatre during COVID-19?
8. Has doing theatre during COVID-19 been what you thought it would be or has it been different from what you thought it would be? Why or why not?

9. In your eyes, how has your teacher handled teaching theatre during COVID-19? Why do you think this?
10. Tell me about your takeaways from doing theatre during COVID-19.
11. What has your experience been like with the non-virtual theatre students in your class?
12. Are you interested in doing theatre again next school year? Why or why not?

Focus Group Protocol (Theatre 1)

1. Tell me about your theatre experience so far.
2. Has doing theatre during COVID-19 been what you thought it would be or has it been different from what you thought it would be?
3. What has been the thing you have enjoyed most about theatre so far? Why?
4. In your eyes, how has your teacher handled teaching theatre during COVID-19? Why do you think this?
5. What is your favorite movement centered project we did in class? Why?
6. What are some challenges you faced when doing theatre during COVID-19?
7. Tell me about your takeaways from doing theatre during COVID-19.
8. Tell me about what it has been like doing theatre with a mask on.
9. What has your experience been like with the remote learners in your class?
10. What has your experience been like with the other students in the class?
11. Are you interested in doing theatre again next school year? Why or why not?

Group Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about what it has been like being a theatre teacher during COVID-19.
2. Tell me about what it has been like doing shows during COVID-19.
3. What has been the biggest challenge you have faced in your classroom because of COVID-19?
4. What is your favorite movement centered project you did in class? Why do you believe this project was so beneficial for your students?
5. What has been the biggest challenge you have faced in the rehearsal and performance space because of COVID-19?
6. What is something that you did differently in your classroom, rehearsals, and/ or performances because of COVID-19 that you would like to continue to explore and really embrace even after the pandemic is over?
7. Tell me about something you learned about yourself and theatre because of doing theatre during COVID-19?
8. Has doing theatre during COVID-19 been what you thought it would be or has it been different from what you thought it would be? Why or why not?
9. For Mr. Martin- As a teacher who has taught for over 15 years, tell me about how this school year has been different from other years. For Mr. Taylor- As a teacher who has

taught for two years, tell me about how this school year has been different from other years.

10. In your eyes, how have your students acclimated to doing theatre during COVID-19?

11. Tell me about your takeaways from doing theatre during COVID-19.

Questions varied and additional questions were asked depending on the answers of the participants.

Appendix C

Codebook

Level	Code Name	Definition	Example
1	Meet new people	Mention of meeting new people because of being in a theatre class or participating in a show	"Despite the year, I still have friends in this class."
1	Motivation and Confidence	Mention of student motivation and confidence in the classroom	"I believe a lot of the kids should be more motivated."
1	COVID-19 scares	Mention of someone needing to quarantine or possibly quarantine because of COVID-19	"We had a few scares finding out someone had been exposed to a positive case or could have COVID, we even had a girl in Hamlet that couldn't perform due to COVID."
1	Experiencing things for the first time	Mention of the newness of some of the things that were done this year	"I just would've liked to do everything normally since that is what I've always been used to. "
1	Class projects	Discussion of activities/ projects done in class	"Okay the silent film was cool because I kind of directed it, micromanaged the whole thing."
1	Theatre community	Mention of the students experiencing community in a theatre setting	"It's hard to connect with people during a time that requires separation but having a theatre family makes it easier."
1	Still able to perform	Mention of still being able to and happy to be able to perform in spite of COVID	"Doing shows during covid was really a blessing because even though there was a few changes we still had the opportunity to perform in front of an audience."
1	Masks change things	Mention and discussion of how masks came into play this year	"The masks are really difficult to breathe through when we are doing physical activities, it's also hard to project and have good diction with them on."

1	Positive theatre experience	Mention of how their theatre experience was a positive one	"Although this year was different, it was still fun will definitely stay with me for many years to come."
1	COVID-19 precautions and restrictions	Mention of necessary precautions and restriction taken during class and shows because of COVID-19	"This year has been great so far but with covid more precautions are being taken which can be inconvenient with masks, but it is important."
1	I can be myself/ Express myself	Mention of how theatre is an avenue of self-expression	"In theatre I can be myself."
1	Remote Learning	Mention of discussion of remote learning in a theatre classroom	"... of all of my remote teachers, it's the theatre ones who are um the most interactive but at the same time um it's theatre so I feel like you have to be kind of um social with the remote kids and all."
1	Acting differently	Mention and discussion of how students needed to act differently because of COVID-19	"Covid has made acting more challenging than it already is. It does not make it any less enjoyable or fun but us as actors had to focus more on bigger movements, and louder voices while also focusing on our characters."
1	Outdoor theatre	Mention of doing a theatre show at a park	"For our fall show we performed Hamlet in an outside ampli (?) theater, the rehearsal process was difficult in the Texas sun almost every afternoon. Having to be louder due to the masks and having to be louder since we were just outside was difficult as well."
1	Not COVID-19 related	Mentions of things that happened this year but were not related to COVID-19	"We did the improv. game you showed us where we had to pretend we were children at a birthday party and everyone stopped paying attention."
1	How teachers are adapting	Mention and discussion of how theatre teachers	"I genuinely think it was really good like the costumes were good, the set

		are doing with teaching and directing during COVID-19	was simplistic and um but like everything worked and we were able to just really really grow and really really and all of that is thanks to Mr. Martin and you and the tech and just it was really good."
1	COVID-19 musical names	Mention of what students would name theatre experience during COVID-19 if it was a musical	"Precautions! A COVID-19 Story"
1	Double standards	Mention of what other people/ sport are able to do during COVID-19 that the theatre wasn't able to do	"Quickly coming from someone who did both, who played volleyball, that did theatre and choir, it's totally different world if you walk into that gym."
1	Doing complex shows	Mention of the complex characters from shows that students got to portray	"Yeah and Hamlet doesn't yell the whole time. I would have liked to play a softer side of Hamlet but I couldn't."
1	Growth as actors	Mention of the growth students feel that they will endure	"I'm hoping that we all come out of this as like much better actors and more experienced actors."
1	Setbacks of COVID	Mention of things that did not go as planned because of COVID-19	"Everything that we have done and everything that we love has been distorted."
1	Expectations on everyone	Students and teacher expectations of this year/ Expectations of others	"I was a little bit surprised that they still did the plays and stuff. I thought that they probably wouldn't. I figured they wouldn't."
1	Classroom dynamic	Mention of different classroom environments	"So when it came to second period um they were like a lot more hahaha calm than seventh period."
2	Acting is Harder/ Different	Mention of how students are needing to act differently because of COVI-19 restrictions	"Um like we said you had to focus more on the physical aspect of it and I feel like masks even the clear masks muffled our sound too."
2	New and	Mention of the various	"We were outside and we had

	Unexpected Ways of Doing Theatre	environments that were introduced because of COVID-10 (example: remote learning, doing theatre outdoors, etc.)	permission to do it.”
2	Human Interactions and Theatre Should Not Be Taken for Granted	Mention of community, meeting new people, double standards, and setbacks	“With a normal musical um a normal play or just not having so many restrictions on us and it’s unfair that our district has double standards for our sports and our fine arts.”