

Stage Production Training for
Preservice Teachers in Oklahoma:
A Case for Authentic Arts-Based Pedagogy

2022 OkMEA January Conference

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Abstract

Integrating many art forms and performance mediums, American musical theatre is a relatively new art form that often challenges our “deeply-held cultural attitudes and beliefs” (Jones, 2003). Given the current emphasis on social justice and interdisciplinary collaboration in education, musical theatre is “poised to be a fertile ground for teacher education and research” (Marshall, 2019). It has become an important part of the music education career—80% of high school music educators in Arizona and 83% in Ohio serve as directors/music directors for school musical theatre productions (Davey, 2010; Williams, 2003). However, empirical research and pedagogical resources in musical theatre training are limited (Marshall, 2020). Researchers have shown a lack of preparation for what teachers need to survive their first few productions (Davey, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how music education programs in Oklahoma institutions train preservice teachers to be successful in the area of musical theatre.

An investigation of MUED program requirements of Oklahoma’s 15 NASM-accredited institutions showed that 13 institutions offer opera, opera workshop/scenes, or musical theatre productions. Some experiences are a part the music education degree, and some are not. Six institutions had dedicated musical theatre degree. Only one institution required a course specifically designed to teach nonmusical elements of stage production. This course addressed stage blocking, staging, props, set design, finance, choreography, lighting, sound, rights, and publicity.

Semi-structured interviews with five practicing Oklahoma music educators who have musical theatre productions as a part of their teaching position revealed that none had formal musical theatre training during their undergraduate degree program. I categorized the results of this investigation into the following themes: 1.) a lack of formal education and training, 2.) the importance of colleagues and mentoring, 3.) the importance of informal and previous musical theatre experience or exposure, and 4.) a plea for musical theatre training in preservice music teacher education. Participants suggested integrating musical theatre content as an extension of current offerings (secondary methods, field experience, etc.). Also recommended were collaborations between musical theatre and music education departments. Because researchers have suggested that engaging in authentic learning projects fuses theory to practice for preservice teachers (Ogden et al., 2010), music teacher educators should strive to incorporate authentic opportunities for preservice teachers in order to meet the needs of the profession in this important and prevalent genre.

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