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THEATRE COMMUNICATIONS GROUP, INC.

CENTERPIECE

FOCUS ON: EDUCATION

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TAKING STOCK

BY DANIEL RENNER

Welcome to the new and improved annual TCG education survey. The response to last year's survey was very good; many education directors were thankful to have the statistical means to present their work in a national context to their colleagues and staffs. There were also suggestions from the field about how to make the survey a more useful tool when dealing with funders and boards. Laurie Baskin and the TCG staff expanded the 2000 survey to provide a more detailed profile of the expenses and manpower that make up the educational activities in TCG member theatres. Previous budget totals have been broken down to reflect overhead, production, personnel, student matinee, and training expenses. The profiling of part-time, full-time, teaching artists, interns and volunteers reflect a much more diverse staff than many of us realized. The addition of age demographics presents some interesting statistics and radical differences among the six budget groups.

Janet Allen, Artistic Director of the Indiana Repertory Theatre and Jessica Andrews, Managing Director of Arizona Theatre Company, have been active for many years in the development of educational programming in their theatres and in national advocacy. Both of them were sent all of the results, as well as a two-inch stack of completed forms with department highlights and long-term goals from each responding theatre. Many thanks to both of you for taking time over the holidays to wade through the forms and to writing your reactions when you probably just wanted to put your feet up and enjoy your families. Also a special thanks to the 101 theatres that responded to a "60-second survey" which now takes far longer than that. After reading the results, I think you will agree it was worth the effort.

Education *Centerpiece* curator: Daniel Renner, Director of Education, Denver Center Theatre Company
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AT THE CROSSROADS

BY JANET ALLEN

In reading over the volume of education surveys submitted by the field this year, I am struck by the simplest of observations — I wish it was a new or insightful one, but it's really just the same thing we've all known for a long time. Education programs are proliferating in theatres big and small across the country, regardless of size, population served, or even of dramaturgical focus. Everyone seems to share some kind of belief that education programs — whether they serve youth or adults or both — hold an important place in the fabric of non-profit theatre in this country.

The surveys don't express the reasons for this proliferation, or at least not directly, but it seems pretty clear that theatres are rushing in to fill the void left by public education systems that don't value arts enough to create state proficiencies or teachers trained in these arts disciplines. So theatres, motivated at least in some part by the ethics of wanting children to have arts opportunities (and, of course, wanting to create tomorrow's audience) are creating programs to meet the needs of children, their families and their teachers. It would be naïve of us to ignore the fact that education programming is also an excellent source of funding — one source of disquiet that I'm sure many of us share is the temptation to go after any and all education funding to create new programs while hoping to be able to use some of those dollars to support the core education programming and overhead.

A lot of the growth impetus comes from the people we serve and their articulated needs: Could you offer a class in stage combat? Could you offer a Saturday class for youth that includes singing? Could you offer an entry-level summer program that would fit the needs of working parents and be affordable? I know in our case, at least, these requests are hard to turn down, even when it's difficult to make all of our education components cost-effective.

A second observation I have — and one that I'm concerned about in my own institution — is the issue of staffing. As we add more programs, are we adding sufficient staff to realize these new programs efficiently? The answer, I think if we're really honest, is no. Or, if the rest of you are anything like us, we've added free-

lance artist staffing but not full-time staff. As I looked at the number of staff members running education programs around the country, the programs are growing at a disproportionate rate to the staffing. And while we know we all need to evaluate these things, it seems harder to do so when it means limiting access to children to an art form we love. Which gets us back to why do we do this and who do we do it for?

I've picked up, in reading some of the comments that the survey responders wrote in their highlights and long term goals sections, that many theatres are sitting at a crossroads that feels a lot like the one that we're facing these days. And that crossroads could be defined as simply as: "where do we go from here?" At Indiana Repertory Theatre we're well past viewing education as integral to the mission and values of the institution, we're past the discussion of education being anything other than core programming (some of us were lucky enough to never have to wade through that one), but we're not past figuring out how much, how many, which ones, when it comes to education components. Several of you have mentioned that you are doing something like what we're doing this season, and that is the creation of an education strategic plan.

Well, OK, it's not really a strategic plan. Our institutional strategic plan covers education in some detail, but not enough to answer some of the day-to-day prioritizing questions. What we're doing (with the help of a wonderful task force of Board members, educators, and volunteers) is an assessment process of just our education programs—prioritizing them, assessing their cost effectiveness (while remembering that many of the least cost-effective ones we're going to keep doing!!), looking at each program in terms of what else is offered in our community, examining who each program serves and how, etc. I knew we needed to do this, but was frankly hesitant to start into it, because I didn't want members of the committee to tell us we had to kill a program that was really important to me artistically (or continue ones I want to phase out!). But what has happened is that the committee has been invaluable in helping us see things and articulate things that we're too close to, and the process has been mind-

boggling and thrilling as all good strategic planning sessions are. I recommend it to all of you who are living in that mire of feeling unable to say no to the next great

Janet Allen is the artistic director of Indiana Repertory Theatre.

education program that comes onto your radar screen (although I still haven't figured out how to do that!).

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

BY JESSICA L. ANDREWS

When I started working professionally in the theatre in 1966, educational programs mostly consisted of student matinees and local tours into schools. As funding was directed to other artistic needs, educational programs were hard to maintain, but they never completely disappeared. We knew that it was necessary to keep the connection alive between our theatres and the educational community. Some of us expressed it as “developing the audiences of tomorrow,” sometimes it was a feeling of “community responsibility,” and sometimes it was a genuine artistic interest in involving education in the work that was being done on the stage. It is very exciting to see the recent education survey reflecting so many other interesting and important programs now taking place at our theatres.

One of the things that struck me in looking at the survey results is that the percentage of budgets committed to education varies greatly according to size of theatre. I'm not sure what that is telling us as a field, but I did notice that the budget group of the theatre I currently serve has the smallest percentage. In trying to assess what

Jessica L. Andrews is the managing director of Arizona Theatre Company.

that may mean, I examined our own situation and would like to relate what we have experienced.

Arizona Theatre Company, like many other theatres, offered student matinees and local school tours for a number of years. At the point where the theatre ran into severe financial difficulties during its development, the tour was ended and, out of necessity, any semblance of “educational programming” was kept at a minimum. For the last five years, we have been struggling with how to rebuild the educational component of the theatre, while at the same time addressing all of the other various artistic and institutional needs. In looking back, I realize that we have done it without setting out to create an end result and I know that people even within the ATC family aren't aware of all the efforts that now exist. That is because we have programs that are fragmented within the company. None are under the umbrella of an education director or department. The student matinee program is handled by the group sales managers; the high school summer acting and university internship programs are handled by the

associate artistic director; the playwright mentorship program is handled by the playwright-in-residence; the post show discussions are handled by our communications staff; etc. What this has done is accomplish a lot of “programs,” but has not resulted in setting an educational plan and strategy for the company. This must be our next step and must involve everyone at all levels of the organization if it is to be fully integrated into our institution.

So, where does this leave us as a field? I think all of us need to continue to pursue any and all educational programs that fit within our particular missions. And those of us who haven't completely sorted out how they work into our strategic planning need to take a closer look at where we are heading with these programs and what we are attempting to accomplish. I also encourage us to talk directly to the teachers and the school administrators. It is so easy to assume we know what they need, but I'm sure we don't have a clue what the educational community is dealing with. As we enter the year 2001, it is time to talk!