

This past year marked the fifteenth anniversary of MTC's Education Program, and even a cursory "then and now" comparison suggests how far we've come. The program began in the spring of 1989 with one teaching artist (me) and one administrator (also me) collaborating with two teachers, one at each of two schools. We served a total of seventy students. This year the Education Department had four full-time staff members and two interns, employed fifteen teaching artists, and served 60 schools, 4,000 students, and 200 teachers. Our budget has grown from \$20,000 to more than \$1 million over this period of time.

But far more important and gratifying than mere growth has been our steadfast commitment to the mission the theatre's leadership and I articulated at the program's inception. From the outset we agreed that as its "core business," the Education Department would facilitate informed encounters between students and MTC productions. We believed in the intrinsic value of such experiences, and the program's work in the past fifteen years has confirmed and strengthened this belief. Encounters with the contemporary plays MTC produces constitute unique opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of themselves and the world.

The plays we produce are not, however, fully accessible to an unprepared audience – they require and repay study. Mediation is necessary if an audience is to apprehend the work on our stages fully; indeed the hallmark of any important work of art is that it becomes richer and more meaningful with continued examination. In our case mediation takes the form primarily of hands-on, theatre-based activities in the classroom. We believe that the best way to study theatre is to make theatre. Accordingly, students write scenes and do theatrical improvisations connected to key themes in the MTC play they will attend; they perform excerpts from the script and discuss these excerpts in relation to the original work they have created.

As a result of this preparatory work, our students over the years have consistently been the most knowledgeable and arguably the most perceptive and responsive audiences at MTC. According to the students themselves, their teachers, and outside evaluators, as a result of working with us students' interest in attending live theatre increases along with their ability to perceive plays more fully and to benefit from the wisdom and insight they contain.

While holding fast to these beliefs and practices, over the years we have steadily amplified and enriched the instructional services we provide with an array of new programs. We created each of these programs to address a need that arose as our work grew and evolved; each one is rooted in the core beliefs articulated above and each is connected to MTC's artistic mission, specifically to work that appears on our stages. Each one is described in the pages that follow.

David Shookhoff  
Director of Education