

Enthusiasm, excitement, joy – these are difficult outcomes to capture in assessing an education program. Yet our students unmistakably display these kinds of emotions (and others as well) in our theatres at student matinees of MTC productions and in their schools when their own plays are performed by professional actors during a *Write on the Edge* playwriting residency.

The students' pleasure in the performance of their own work is relatively easy to explain and perhaps predictable: pride in accomplishment, the empowering experience of hearing one's words brought to vivid dramatic life by professionals, the positive reinforcement from peers and teachers – such benefits, while certainly not to be minimized or disparaged, are perhaps to be expected from a successful art-making experience.

What is more difficult to anticipate, and therefore of particular interest, is the rapt attention our student audiences give our performances and the spontaneous outpourings of appreciation that typify their responses at curtain calls. For the raucous cheers and standing ovations that greet MTC actors when they take their bows at student matinees clearly have been prompted not by lavish production numbers or dazzling stage spectacle but by challenging ideas and complex dramatic images.

Nilo Cruz's *Beauty of the Father*, which compellingly explored the mutability of relationships and the many forms of love; David Lindsay-Abaire's *Rabbit Hole*, which powerfully affirmed the possibility of prevailing even in the face of unthinkable tragedy; and Conor McPherson's *Shining City*, with its poignant depiction of lost souls desperately searching for connection and expiation – all these, along with the other plays in our season, moved our student audiences to laughter, to tears, to fascinated attention, and finally to standing ovations and thunderous outpourings of approval.

Our preparatory work in the classrooms – described in the following pages – mediates between the students and the ideas and images and images in our plays, making them more vivid and available than they would otherwise be. But ultimately it is the plays themselves that speak viscerally and powerfully to our young audiences and elicit their enthusiasm and excitement.

This phenomenon surely epitomizes the most exalted kind of learning experience, through which young people are literally uplifted by the expressive force of a challenging, illuminating work of art. Their excited responses affirm the powerful connection they have made with the new way of understanding the world embodied in the play they have attended.

Educational evaluators may rightly demand less ephemeral measures of student learning, but in this age of high stakes testing and quantitative assessment, the behavior of our students in our theatres and our classrooms must also be acknowledged as a valid indicator of our Education Program's resounding success.

David Shookhoff
Director of Education