Examining the Interaction Between the University Interscholastic League One-Act Play Contest and Texas Theatre Curriculum

Thesis

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Abstract

The University Interscholastic League (UIL) One-Act Play contest in Texas is the largest interschool theatre competition in the world. Over 1300 high schools compete in this statewide theatre competition each year. This study investigates the ways Texas theatre teachers view the contest, and how the contest influences the curricula in their classrooms. Six teachers were interviewed on their classroom practice and their curricula, specifically on the curricula’s learner-centeredness, social responsibility, and comprehensiveness in theatrical disciplines as well as their attitudes toward competition and the One-Act Play contest. Interviews took place over the phone and Skype and were approximately an hour long.

Through the interviews conducted, teachers revealed that their curricula are not limited by the UIL One-Act Play contest. The curricula described by the theatre teachers were widely varied, and each teacher valued learner-centered practice, social responsibility, and comprehensive theatre education to different degrees. According to the results of the study most teachers are not hindered by the UIL when developing their curricula in these three areas and students’ experience in the UIL One-Act Play contest can be equally or more active and authentic as in other productions.
Vita

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Art Education
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Introduction

Personal Background

Confucius, as quoted by Bedichek (1956), endorses rival competition in principle as a means of encouraging achievement, recommending, “mutual friction or letting students admire the excellence of other students” (p. 8). Einstein, also quoted by Bedichek, continues this thought, saying that without such friction, “the individual would be isolated and unable to assert his convictions” (p. 10). We use friendly competition to incentivize performance. This is the philosophy of the University Interscholastic League’s One-Act Play competition, as they have encouraged the growth of several academic, athletic, and artistic activities through interschool competition (Bedichek, 1956). The University Interscholastic League (UIL) provides four “beliefs” in their statement of purpose:

- “That participation in extra curricular activities motivates students to place a high priority on attending school and making better grades.
- That most students enjoy the pursuit of excellence and seek opportunities to test themselves against their own accomplishments and the accomplishments of others,
- That such opportunities are best provided through properly conducted and equitably administered competitive activities, and
• That the classroom is enriched by the flow of student energy into the more intensified arena of competition and back to the classroom” (UIL, n.d.b.).

These beliefs reflect the views quoted above, that by allowing students to compete, the league motivates students to test themselves and provides a surge of energy that students will take into the classroom outside the competition. This thesis will examine the curricular effects of competition. Before looking at the data, I see the supposition that the best way to encourage student participation in theatre arts is by encouraging them to compete with one another as somewhat dour. By growing interest in this way, are we really fostering a love of art and learning, or is the art secondary to the contest?

As a high school student, UIL part time employee during the State One-Act Play competitions, and as a stage manager at a competition run by a personal friend at the school where he teaches, I have participated in approximately twenty different one-act play contests under the UIL. The UIL One-Act Play competition (or UIL One-Act Play) can be a similar experience to a theatre student as a big game is to a student athlete. High school companies spend months practicing before the first festival of the academic year, hoping to receive the judge’s permission to continue through the competition. It is an integral part of Texas high school theatre culture, and I wonder on its influence on curriculum and teaching. As a student, I never questioned the competition, but as an educator and someone interested in arts curriculum, I have to wonder about the impacts of such a pervasive program. Before starting this thesis, I had not read much on the impacts of competition’s
impacts on learning. Does such a wide-spread competition limit the learning experiences of students?

The UIL is an organization operating through the University of Texas at Austin under the Vice President for Diversity & Community Engagement that organizes and facilitates almost all extra curricular academic, musical, and athletic competition throughout the state of Texas (UIL, n.d.a.). This means that the same organization that crowns the state champion high school football or basketball team also presides over musical contests, such as marching band, choir, and orchestra contests and academic competitions, such as debate, spelling, and theatre. The UIL acts as a referee, ensuring that all districts, schools, teachers, and students are in compliance with the rules of each specific arena of competition, as well as universal rules such as “no pass, no play,” which prohibits a student failing any intra curricular subject from competing.

One academic competition is the UIL One-Act Play competition. According to UIL’s website, the UIL One-Act Play is the world’s largest high school play production contest or play festival (UIL, n.d.c). More than 14,000 Texas high school students in more than 1,000 plays participate in 300 plus contests” from March to the State contest at the end of the spring semester (UIL, n.d.c.). It is the UIL’s position that by participation in the competition will result in “lifelong enhancement to students’ perceptions and interpretations of the human experience” (Gotuaco 2006, p. 2).

My first experience with the UIL One-Act Play occurred when I was fifteen, as a sophomore at Randall High School in Amarillo, TX. I played a minor role in a
forty-minute production of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* by Dale Wasserman. After that I auditioned for the contest play every year, and every year I enjoyed my time as a cast member and contestant.

As a theatre educator, I have seen the mixed nature of the interaction between the UIL and theatre educators. I have had several conversations with theatre teachers that are frustrated with the competition. They often talked about the power held by the single contest judge, and how this one person’s personal aesthetic preferences can mean the difference between winning (advancing in the competition) and losing. They talked about the specific rules, which they felt interfered with creativity and directorial expression. However, the subject of how the contest influences what teachers do outside of the contest rarely comes up. I wonder about the “ripple effects” this large, important contest has on theatre teaching as a whole.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the link between the UIL One-Act Play competition and public high school theatre curriculum. I will investigate how teachers adapt what they teach in their theatre classrooms in order to be successful in the UIL One-Act Play competition and how the curriculum developed through this process is consistent with the aims of the UIL One-Act Play program. In order to address this purpose, I hope to answer the following question:
1. What does a focus on the UIL One-Act Play competition reveal about teacher views on competition and the learner-centeredness, social responsibility, and comprehensiveness of Texas theatre curricula?

In order to answer this question, I will investigate the following sub-questions:

1. What is currently being taught in Texas public high school theatre classes?
2. Are theatre classes in Texas learner-centered, non-discriminatory (or socially responsible), and comprehensive in their theatre content?
3. Do teachers treat the UIL One-Act Play differently within their curricula than other productions? How so?
4. How does the UIL One-Act Play competition influence extant theatre curricula in Texas, specifically in their learner-centeredness, their social-responsibility, and their content?

**Design of Study**

The purpose of the thesis is to investigate the link between the UIL One-Act Play competition and public high school theatre curriculum. I will investigate how teachers adapt what they teach in their theatre classrooms in order to be successful in the UIL One-Act Play competition and how the curriculum developed through this process is consistent with the aims of the UIL One-Act Play program.

The data I collect and analyze will come from in depth interviews with theatre teachers in Texas who participate in the UIL One-Act Play competition. Questions in the interview will be coded to address the teacher’s feelings on the UIL and competition as well as one of three curricular and pedagogical aspects:
learner-centeredness and democratic pedagogy, non-discriminatory teaching (socially responsible practice), and the variety of theatrical competencies students will experience and practice (Lazarus, 2012). Teachers will be asked about these three curricular and pedagogical aspects as they relate to both the contest and to their classroom teaching. I also asked teachers about their perceptions and attitudes towards competition in learning in general, as well as their opinions and practices related to the UIL One-Act Play contest.

I reached out to at least nine Texas theatre teachers. Of those nine, six agreed to participate in the study. I chose these teachers in order to discover a variety of experience according to the following criteria (Lichtman 2013):

• Classification of school (A-AAAAA)

• Socioeconomic status of school population

• Success within the UIL One-Act Play tournament

• Environment of the school (e.g. urban, suburban, rural)

Participants were found using my personal contacts from my time as a theatre education student at the University of Texas and Texas theatre educator and by using “snowball sampling” (Lichtman 2013, p. 192). The interviews took place using the distance communication Skype and over the phone.

Significance of Study

The UIL One-Act Play is a large part of Texas high school theatre culture. Because the state competition is in May, school theatre classes can spend up to an
entire semester honing skills for this single tournament. Studies have been done on theatre teachers’ perceptions of the competition (Gotuaco & Tunks, 2006) and the influence of the contest on graduation rates (Rout, 2010), but little has been done on the influence of the competition on subject matter. Ravitch (2011) discussed the deleterious link between standardized tests and curriculum; which is often referred to as “teaching to the test.” Due to the scope of the competition in Texas, I wonder if participating has a similar effect on theatre curriculum. I hope to see if a similar phenomenon is happening with Texas high school theatre.

**Scope and Limitations of the Study**

Because the contest takes place in Texas and I am studying in Ohio, there are limits on the data I am able to collect. If I were studying in Texas, I would be able to add more personal methods of data collection, such as rehearsal and classroom observation, which would help triangulate the data and make the study more reliable (Lichtman, 2013). Also, due to time constraints, the interviews are all from the teachers’ perspectives. In further studies, the perspective of the students and contest managers needs to be included in order to achieve a more well-rounded view of the situation.

As is the norm with research of this nature, generalization of the research findings is limited (Lichtman 2013). I am looking at one situation in a particular time and place. While some of the concepts may be transferable from one case to another, these findings cannot fully be separated from their context. The findings
on the UIL One-Act Play contest in Texas cannot necessarily be transferred to a different contest or state.
Literature on Curriculum Theory

In order to evaluate the effect competition has on curriculum, I must first define what I find beneficial in theatre curricula, and in curricula in general. In order to do this, I will be discussing three theorists in particular: Michael Apple, William Pinar, and Elliot Eisner. I will analyze the views of these theorists through the lens of Tyler’s three-pronged system of selecting learning objectives in curricula (focus on the student, on the community, and on the content) and the work of Joan Lazarus, a curricular scholar focusing on theatre curriculum in Texas.

Apple, Eisner, Pinar, and other Curriculum Theorists

Kliebard (1970) writes that a disturbing characteristic of the curriculum studies field is a lack of historical perspective. “New breakthroughs are solemnly proclaimed when in fact they represent minor modifications of early proposals” (p. 259). Often times in the field, the same issues and views will recur time and time again without critically examining their merit. He specifically names the “Tyler Rationale” as one the most persistent of these concepts.

Ralph Tyler (1981) believes that “curriculum development is a practical enterprise—not a theoretical study” (p. 18). According to this philosophy, the development of curriculum is a means to an end, a problem solving strategy that helps focus student learning. The aforementioned Tyler Rationale epitomizes this
idea. The Tyler Rationale refers to four systematic steps in curriculum
collection, which Ralph Tyler feels are essential. These four steps are: “(1) the
selection and definition of learning objectives, (2) the selection and creation of
appropriate learning experiences, (3) the organization of the learning experiences
to achieve maximum cumulative effect, and (4) the evaluation of the curriculum to
furnish a continuing basis for necessary revisions and desirable improvements” (p.
23). Tyler wants to know what you want to teach, how can you teach it, in what
order can you teach it, and did the students learn it?

**Educational Objectives and Curriculum**

Another concept of note from Tyler is his selection of educational objectives. He provides three sources of input when defining what should be taught: “studies
of learners, studies of contemporary life, and suggestions from subject-matter
specialists” (Kliebard, 1970, p. 269). This concept has garnered quite a bit of
discussion. Kliebard (1970) asserts that educational objectives developed from the
first two sources (the learner and the society) do not actually reflect anything but
the “philosophical screen that determines the nature and scope of the objectives”
(p.269). It is not the actual needs of the student or the community that determines
objectives, but the teachers’ own values, which renders the objectives developed
this way meaningless. Kliebard (1970) questions whether stating objectives at all
is helpful in curriculum development when those objectives “represent external
goals allegedly reached through the manipulation of learning experiences” (p. 270).
Eisner (2004a) also questions the validity of educational objectives, especially in the arts. He states, “in some subject areas, such as mathematics, languages, and the sciences, it is possible to specify with great precision the particular operation or behavior the student is to perform after instruction. In other subject areas, especially the arts, such specification is frequently not possible, and when possible may not be desirable” (p. 87). This view only takes into account the influence of content on educational objectives, however, and not the non-academic needs of the learner or the society.

Eisner (2004a) also argues that, while the traditional rational approach states that objectives should be set first and educational experiences be catered to those objectives, it is more "psychologically efficient" to “identify activities that seem useful, appropriate, or rich in educational opportunities, and from a consideration of what can be done in class, identify the objectives or possible consequences of using these activities” (p. 89). Because we cannot adequately prescribe a method of forming creative insights in curriculum development, imposing logical requirements on the process of developing curriculum is in error (p. 90). The formation of educational objectives does not need to precede the selection and organization of content.

This focus on the learner, on contemporary life, and on content, while not explicitly stated, is reflected in Joan Lazarus’s work on theatre curriculum *Signs of Change* (2012). In it, she focuses on learner-centered practice (focus on the learner), socially responsible practice (focus on contemporary life or on society) and comprehensive theater education (focus on content.) It is through this lens
that I will be evaluating the UIL One-Act Play contest. Studies on competition’s
effects on learning are often focused on student achievement on specific content
objectives and pay little to no attention on competition’s influence in students’
experience with objectives that focus on them and on their community.

The Human Element and Curriculum

Whereas Kliebart (1970) criticizes Tyler’s sources of teaching objectives for
being too easily politicized, and Tyler (1981) himself does not recognize the
influence politics or personal values can have on objectives, William Pinar (1981)
and other reconceptualists believe “in contrast to the canon of traditional social
science, which prescribes data collection, hypothesis substantiation or
disconfirmation in the disinterested service of building a body of knowledge, a
reconceptualist tends to see research as an inescapably political as well as
intellectual act” (p. 93). Even curricular research done through seemingly sterile
and apolitical means can still contribute to an oppressive hegemony.

Reconceptualists see education and curricular research as a means of social
empowerment. This belief echos Paolo Friere (1998) who states that “an active
educational method helps a person to become consciously aware of his context and
his condition as a human being as subject, it will become an instrument of choice.
At that point he will become politicized” (p. 92). Education isn’t only meant to help
students learn content; it is to help students realize the ways in which their world
needs to be improved. It is meant to teach students to think critically about their
world and their community.
Pinar, along with William Reynolds (1992) assert that curriculum must be evaluated as a deconstructed text. Like any text, curriculum is “laced with human purposes and cross purposes,” all of which are both stated and not stated (p. 6). We learn though a series of narratives that are layered on top of one another and to understand curriculum as deconstructed, we must “tell stories that never end, stories in which the listener...may become a character” or even the storyteller (p. 7). Michael Apple (1975) also discusses the deconstructed nature of curriculum. He refers to the “hidden curriculum,” or “the norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers’ statements of ends or goals (p. 96). For instance: the way that students change, or falsify, their behavior for the teacher, who is “the child’s first boss” (p. 96). This hidden curriculum can consist of things written (rules and policies of the school) and unwritten (social expectations for behavior. What is encouraged and what is not?).

According to Apple (1998), The curriculum, hidden and not hidden, contributes to an oppressive hegemony. In order to fight this hegemony, three things must be situated in their larger context: “(1) the school as an institution, (2) the knowledge forms, and (3) the educator him- or herself” (p. 112). All of these are the subject of “an interpretation of their respective places in a complex, stratified, and unequal society” all of which create a complicated web of cultural relations, or hegemony.

Pinar (1975) observes that many criticisms of education includes the assertion that the schooling experience is dehumanizing (p. 359). More
specifically, that the natural talents, perspectives, and resourcefulness of students deteriorates when those students experience school. He says that “to speak about American schooling is to speak about the ‘banking’ or ‘digestive’ concept of education” (p. 360). Students’ individuality is not celebrated or utilized when being educated. Instead, students are being ‘fed’ information from the teacher. Much of this comes from Paulo Freire’s (1998) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which is also a philosophical driving force behind Joan Lazarus’ (2012) *Signs of Change*.

Pinar (1975) sees the field of curriculum theory as an “environment-producing field” (p. 398). Those who study curriculum are not creating knowledge, they are affecting the environment in which knowledge is gained and transferred. He looks at the meaning of the Latin root of curriculum, *currere*, and proposes that the study of curriculum “involves the…individual experience of the pubic: of artifacts, actors, operations, of the educational journey” (p. 400).

**Democracy and Curriculum**

In *What In Curriculum Theory*, Pinar (2004) describes where he sees curriculum theory going: The synthetical moment –self mobilization and social reconstruction (p. 203). He states that, if curriculum theorists could have their way, there would be “no monolithic school curriculum” (p. 226). Different institutions have different needs and each should be able to implement the curriculum of its choice. Further, curriculum theorists would have “multiple sites of (ongoing) curricular experimentation” (p. 227). He rejects the standardization that comes with linking curriculum to standardized exams, as it creates inequities,
widens the education gap, and undermines academic standards (p. 229-230).

Instead of being based on distanced standards, curriculum should be based on the needs of the individual community.

Apple and Beane (1995) makes a case for a democratic curriculum. He states that, while local decision-making is glorified, curriculum is being dictated by national standards, and national tests (p. 3). Apple and Beane see a “democratic” school as one wherein:

1. The flow of ideas is open, regardless of popularity
2. There is faith in individuals and collectives to create resolutions to problems
3. Critical reflection is used to analyze and evaluate ideas, problems, and policies
4. Concern is shown for others’ welfare as “the common good”
5. Concern is shown for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities
6. Democracy is not held as an ideal to be pursued, but a set of values of which we must guide our lives.
7. Social institutions promote and extend the democratic ways of life (p. 7).

Democratic schools, they say, “are meant to be democratic places, so the idea of democracy also extend to the many roles that adults play in the schools,” meaning that educators, parents, community activists, and other citizens have the right to be fully informed in school business and should be personally invested in the wellbeing of the school (p. 13).
Assessment and Curriculum

A performance assessment is a form of authentic assessment, or one that “enables educators to determine students’ skills, knowledge, and competencies and to provide evidence of their learning... authentic assessment encourages greater understanding of concepts in a meaningful context” (Provenzo 2009). To put it simply, an authentic assessment allows for students to learn by doing. The learning and assessment come through participation in engaging, challenging, and enjoyable tasks.

On performance assessment, Eisner (September, 01 1999) says that “performance assessment is a closer measure of our children’s ability to achieve the aspirations we hold for them than are conventional forms of standardized testing” (p. 658). He praises these assessments for requiring students to practice multiple mental tasks simultaneously in order to complete their objectives (mental tasks such as assessing multiple outcomes, framing problems, formulating plans, and dealing with ambiguity). Performance assessment, such as a theatrical performance, allow students to construct meaning out of their environment to form an expression, a skill that Eisner (1999a) says is necessary outside of the classroom.

To Eisner (1999b), the beauty of performance assessments over standardized testing is that it “affords us, in principle, an opportunity to develop ways of revealing the distinctive features of individual students, to secure information about learning that can improve the quality of both curriculum and teaching—to use evaluation formatively and to treat assessment as an educational
medium” (p. 58). However, he believes that an authentic assessment, such as a performance assessment, is in contradiction with a competitive mindset. He states that “I believe we need not be motivated through competition to provide educational conditions conducive to our children’s development. We derive the most satisfaction not from competition, but from the quality of experience afforded by meaningful work” (p. 58).

**Eisner and Curriculum**

Both Apple and Pinar can be considered reconceptualists, for their revolutionary views on education and the roles of curriculum, teachers, and students in education. But where on this spectrum does Eisner sit? Eisner (1994), like Michael Apple and William Pinar, does not believe in the necessity of national standards for education (p. 3). He sees the appeal of nationalized standards, though. He sees that they are easy to create, they require less research as one does not need to look at specific schools and students when making “one size fits all” solutions, and they are cheaper than enacting localized, focused change. However, he argues “educational objectives clearly and specifically stated can hamper as well as help the ends of instruction and that an unexamined belief in curriculum...can easily become dogma which in fact may hinder the very functions” of teaching (Eisner, 2004a, p. 85). Because knowledge learned in school is “not something that teachers do and pass on to students, but something that students do for themselves” students are constructing knowledge (Eisner, 1994, p. 9). The outcomes will never be completely standard because knowledge isn't built in a
standard way. Standards don’t account for individual differences. Eisner asserts, “schooling and teaching cannot be treated as if they could be remote controlled from afar” (p. 10). He criticizes standardized tests as being ineffective at gauging actual learning, that what “test scores predict best are other test scores (Eisner, 2004b, p. 299).

In *Cognition and Curriculum Reconsidered*, Eisner (1994) recounts several traditional aims of curriculum. These aims include the transmission of theological values, the transmission of culture, and preparing children for the workplace by teaching them necessary skills and preparing them to deal with the “boredom” of the workplace (p. 14). One can find these goals stated throughout literature dealing with curriculum in America going back to the 1893 Committee of Fifteen Report on Elementary Education (1893) where the committee recommended focusing on rich culture in elementary literature education. Teachers were expected to read to their students The Bible, Shakespeare, Byron, and others in hopes of instilling a love of “the classics” in their students (p. 47). Further, because they wanted students to learn what they believed to be relevant skills, they recommended elementary boys learn ironwork, and girls learn sewing and fabric crafts.

Eisner calls these curricular goals “conservative in nature” (Eisner, 1994, p. 14). He echoes Giroux in saying that the main purpose of these goals is to perpetuate the dominant inequitable culture. He agrees with Giroux that schools should teach students to be sensitive to societal inequities, and that “value-neutral
education is an oxymoron” (p. 15). Many of these points are echoed by Apple and Pinar.

Eisner and the reconceptualists would disagree on the amount to which instruction can be student-centered and student lead. According to Eisner (1971), the reconceptualists emphasize the importance of “authentic personal experience” in instruction (Eisner, 1979, p. 71). Schooling can be superficial and unhelpful if it is lead from the top down, when it is teacher focused and not student focused; students learn best when they participate out of their own choice. While he understands this perspective, he questions whether or not children have the ability to make the best decisions concerning their education. He states that one is only able to make decisions about what is best for them when they know all available options, which he does not believe children do. “Do children of eight, ten, twelve, or fifteen really know what is in their best interest in the long run” (p. 71).

In evaluating a school’s effectiveness, Eisner criticizes a process he calls “highly rationalized procedures for improving schools” (Eisner 2004b, p. 298). This process of rationalization includes six steps: (1) clear specification of intended outcomes, (2) quality of a product or performances is assessed, (3) practice is predicated on the ability to control and predict outcomes, (4) downplays interaction within the schools, (5) promote comparison between schools and students, and (6) rely on extrinsic incentives to motivate action, such as vouchers and grades (p. 299). Eisner believes these criteria are rooted in outdated Enlightenment thinking, and these are just attempts to standardize the learning experience and leave the “deeper problems” facing education unattended (p. 299).
What are the “deeper problems?” Conversations happening in classrooms are not deep or challenging enough (p. 299). Teachers are isolated from each other and those who can help them (p. 300). Educators send the message that “what really matters in their education are their test scores” and we cut corners in their education (p. 300). I am interested in this recent text by Eisner, he does not mention race or socioeconomic status, which would be another difference between him and the reconceptualists Pinar and Apple, which comment on the concept of silencing often in their writing.

**Lazarus and Theatre Education**

In the revised edition of her book, *Signs of Change: New Directions in Theatre Education*, Joan Lazarus (2012) lays out her perceived problems with contemporary theatre education in America and prescribes actions and attitudes that will help resolve these issues. While she does cover issues regarding theatre education outside of the public school arena, such as community theatres, teaching artists, and theatre teacher education, when specifically discussing public school education she comments on three things: learner-centered practice, socially responsible practice, and comprehensive theatre education (p. 11). These three aspects of theatre curriculum deal respectively with the needs of the students, the student’s community and sociopolitical context, and the academic content. However, before providing solutions, Lazarus presents her problems with current theatre education.
What is Problematic in Theatre Curriculum?

Lazarus (2012) quotes Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) by saying that “if we really want to change student achievement in American schools, we must act directly on teaching and learning. More of the same is not the answer” (p. 29). She believes that what we are teaching in theatre now is fundamentally flawed. In order to fix theatre education, we must change the way we teach it entirely.

According to Lazarus (2012), schools are still “in the box” of Industrial Age thinking (p. 31). In this setting, theatre work in schools is very hierarchical with lessons and practice focused on the teacher. Many schools are entirely focused on production, and the students are used as tools through which the teacher achieves her goals. The teacher has a play that she wants to perform (though often the teacher will choose the text to suit the students) and the students will learn the skills necessary to perform this piece. In this model, which is pulled from a “dated version of college or conservatory study,” the students who act in the play learn more about acting, the students who are building sets learn more about building sets, etc. (p. 31). In some schools, productions performed are “almost exclusively chosen from the Broadway and regional theatre repertoire,” and often have little to nothing to do with the lives of the students and community (p. 31). The skills that students are learning are heavily limited, and are only taught from a western, Euro-American perspective.

Like other arts programs, theatre is often undervalued. Lazarus (2012) quotes the Presidents’ Committee on the Arts and Humanities 1997 report as describing arts programming as “impoverished or nonexistent (p. 31). She quoted
the same committee’s 2011 report in saying that “due to budget constraints and emphasis on subjects of high stakes testing, arts instruction in schools is on a downward trend...The classroom tasks and tools that could best reach and inspire...students – art, music, movement, and performing – are less available to them” (p. 32). This is even more true for lower-income schools, where the arts are disproportionately absent. Even in schools of higher socioeconomic status, theatre is often only available as an after school activity, thus being accessible mostly to white, middle-class, able-bodied students.

Other national surveys tend to back the assertion that arts programs, as well as theatre programs, are undervalued. In a 2005 study, forty seven state assessment officials (92% response rate) responded to a phone survey in which they were asked about what subjects were tested for accountability, what changes occurred in their stat assessment system, and about their opinion on the impact of No Child Left Behind on subject not required to be assessed through their state assessment system (Pederson, 2007). They found that officials from 25 states admitted to spending less time and resources for non-tested subject areas (such as the arts and humanities). Five states said they kept non-tested content by integrating content from untested and tested subject areas, such as requiring art teachers to include testable math content into their lessons. Five states stated there was no change in the focus of their teaching time. The specific states are not named in the study.

A 2010 study through NAEA had similar results. In a stratified random sample of 3,000 art educators from all 50 states and Washington DC, 67% of art
teachers reported that their teaching schedules had been affected by NCLB and 47% of art teachers reported that they had encountered increased interruptions, conflicts, and problems (Sabol, 2010). 51% of art teachers agreed that their funding had been affected by testing needs and 43% reported decreases in all areas.

**Where is Theatre Curriculum Going?**

To open the book, Lazarus (2012) describes a crossroads. Down one path is more of the same: more Industrial age thinking and less focus on arts. Alternatively, the other path is “ripe with hope and rich with possibilities” (Lazarus 2012, p. 32). She describes this alternate path:

> When I take on this view, I hear teachers and students speaking with a very different passion and vision. This practice involves the design and implementation of comprehensive, integrated curricula. It includes programs in which the students are engaged in the exploration of social, historical, and educational issues through the study and production of theatre. This theatre education is *learner centered, socially responsible, provocative, and connected to the world in which students live* (p. 32, emphasis added).

These ideas frame her book, particularly that ‘best practice in theatre education’ involves theatre instruction be learner-centered, socially responsible, relevant, and comprehensive. Lazarus pictures theatre curriculum moving in this direction, and features interviews throughout the work from theatre educators.
who she finds to be pushing the envelope this direction, or who embody these responsible, relevant, and learner-centered philosophies.

**What are Lazarus’s Assumptions on Learning?**

Lazarus (2012) finds this second path to be more beneficial in teaching and learning. She points to Zimmerman, Daniels, and Hyde’s (2005) *Principles of Best Practice Learning*, a list of thirteen principles for teaching across discipline that fall into three categories, student-centered teaching and learning, cognitive and developmental aspects of teaching and learning, and social and interpersonal aspects of teaching and learning in schools (p. 34). Before she read these principles, Lazarus developed the *Characteristics of Best Practice in Theatre Education*, (Figure 1) wherein she defines the terms “Learner-Centered,” “Socially responsible practice” and “Comprehensive Theatre Education.” Even though they were developed independently, and focus on different areas (Zimmerman, Daniels, and Hyde’s are for all content areas whereas hers was developed specifically for theatre) they have a similar framework and share attitudes regarding student driven curricula.
• **Learner-centered classroom and production work**
The students’ place at the center of the learning process is acknowledged, valued, and nurtured. Learning together, students and teacher-artists pose questions, investigate and consider multiple perspectives, and reflect on discoveries. Content is correlated with familiar ideas, lived experiences, and relevant social issues. There is shared decision making and individual collective action. Dialogue, collaboration, risk-taking, and experimentation are hallmarks of this practice.

• **Socially responsible practice**
Students learn in, through, and about theatre as members of society and citizens of the school and the world. Material studied and produced is relevant to students and their communities and is developmentally appropriate. Students and adults show respect for each other, the program, and the art form in all formal and informal communications and interactions. The program is physically, academically, and socially accessible to all students in the school, regardless of age, race, gender, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, physical ability, or disability.

• **Comprehensive theatre education**
Instruction is holistic, authentic, and allows for students to learn and practice collaboratively in the roles of actor, director, playwright, designer, technician, critic, researcher, and audience. Curricular and co-curricular work intertwines production, history, criticism, and aesthetics. Integration of theatre study and practice takes place across arts disciplines in other subjects, and the school and community.

**Figure 1:** Characteristics of Best Practice in Theatre Education.

**Learner-Centered Practice**

Learner-centered practice is not completely handing the reins of a classroom to the students, “regardless of their emotional, social, or academic maturity” (p. 56). It is, however, an attempt to make the learning environment more democratic. After assessing the skills and interests of the students, the teacher structures the classroom environment out of “meaningful learning
experiences that engage everyone.” This is the opposite of the Freire (1998) “banking concept” of education. In a learner-centered environment, both the students and the teacher raise questions, shape learning opportunities, investigate and discover answers, and learn skills and information in the curriculum (Lazarus, 2012, p. 57).

For theatrical contexts, this involves students helping drive the production process (p. 59). As the “guide,” the teacher may choose the subject of performance, but the students help drive the aspects of the performance. This may include designing technical aspects, like lights, sound, and publicity, acting and character development, and dramaturgy. A common refrain among theatre educators is the idea of a conflict between “process-centered” practice and “product-centered” practice. What is more important, creating a quality performance or engaging students’ critical thinking while learning about how to build a performance (p. 75)? While more difficult, a learner-centered environment that accommodates students’ diverse learning styles can do both.

Learner-centered practice also alludes to making the content of the course relevant to the students. Deb Alexander, a middle school teacher featured in Lazarus’ (2012) work, used a performance *The Diary of Anne Frank* as a springboard for exploring themes and topics of interest to the students. Yes, students learned about the building blocks of a production (The parts used by Alexander were “researcher, playwright, director, actor, critic/audience, designer technician), but they also, democratically, explored the themes of the book (p. 240). Her lesson plans are not strict schedules, but rough ideas of where the discussion
might go, and where (if) she might need to redirect it. Ideally, in a learner-centered environment, the subject matter would be relevant to the student, thus providing an intrinsic motivation.

**Socially Responsible Practice**

Socially responsible practice relates to the school’s context: its community and its place in the community (Lazarus, 2012, p. 121). In order to be socially responsible, teachers must:

- Recognize there is a need of some kind in their school or community
- Acknowledge that theatre could be a viable and powerful tool for addressing this need
- Accept, as theatre artists and teachers, they are in a unique position to address this need and bring about positive change
- Identify strategies to address the need and
- Take action to effect positive change (p. 123).

These steps require that the teacher is self reflective, that the teacher ask questions about who has ownership over the program, how does the program connect with the students’ lives, and the nature of the learning community (p. 124). Teachers respond to these needs in a number of ways: they may produce plays which feature subject matter relevant to the needs of the student community; they may restructure programs to include students from across the school population; or, they may engage in ongoing discussion and interaction with the students to
“heighten awareness, initiate dialogue, and move others...into action.” (p. 124.)

This section of the work contains things to think about when dealing with specific groups that have individual needs.

**Comprehensive Theatre Education**

Comprehensive theatre education deals mostly in the subject matter which students are taught. Lazarus asserts that students need to learn all disciplines of theatre, including (but not limited to) researcher, critic, audience, actor, technician, designer, director, and playwright (p. 225). This idea is central to Discipline-Based Theatre Education (DBTE) (Figures 2 and 3) (p. 225-226). She encourages the use of DBTE as a conceptual framework teachers can use when developing curriculum and lessons. It is structured to encourage “active exploration of theatre” through four methods of inquiry (production, history, criticism, and aesthetics) (p. 226). By doing so, students are encouraged to broaden their experiences by seeing theatre through multiple perspectives.

Comprehensive theatre education also means working interdisciplinarily (p. 231). That collaboration is part of a comprehensive theatre education and the theatre classroom should work together with other arts classes, and non-arts classes, toward common goals.
Figure 2: Disciplines of DBTE
Lazarus asserts that classrooms that engage in DTBE learning are inherently learner-centered and socially responsible (p. 228). I don’t necessarily agree, but I do see a great deal of blending between characteristics. In order for a classroom to be learner-centered, the teacher must ask questions about the students and their community. In order to accommodate individual students’ needs, a theatre teacher must use a variety of teaching strategies, and in order to teach a theatre class that is relative to many different student interests, the subject matter must be diverse, as in DBTE. Lazarus’ (2012) focus is on the students. What do students need, and how can we as teachers provide for those needs? I agree with her on this larger theme. I believe a well-constructed curriculum is focused on the learner, is
responsible in respect to that learner's situation and community, and comprehensive in scope.

Lazarus’ (2012) socially responsible practice focuses on serving the needs of the students as members of their community (Lazarus 2012). She explicitly mentions race and socioeconomic status. She cites Boal’s (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed* and Freirean philosophies when discussing the need for recognizing needs within the community and theatre education’s ability to serve the needs of those people. The themes of this section very much reflect the writings of Pinar, Apple, and other reconstructionists (Apple 1995, Pinar & Reynolds 1992, Lazarus 2012.). Lazarus advocates using theatre education to help end oppressive hegemony.

Lazarus’ chapter on learner-centered education echoes the writings of all three of these writers. Like Apple, Pinar, and Eisner, Lazarus outright rejects the “banking system” of education (Lazarus 2012). Learners construct knowledge as they needed, as the teacher guides them. This learner centered approach echoes the writings of Apple, Pinar, and Eisner who often call for a decentering within the classroom.

Lazarus’ section on a comprehensive theatre education focuses almost exclusively on the framework of discipline based theatre education (DBTE) which is philosophically similar to discipline based art education, or DBAE. One would think, with his aversion to national standards, that Eisner would not be behind DBAE, however, this isn’t the case. Eisner writes that he is behind DBAE, if the disciplines remain broad (Eisner 1990a, Eisner 1990b). They aren't specific,
detached standards, they are checks, ensuring that the teacher is not over-focusing on any one artistic discipline. In this, Lazarus and Eisner agree. They both hope to ensure that a teacher isn’t only teaching one discipline in a subject area that is diverse. Eisner doesn’t want art education to only include drafting, much like Lazarus doesn’t want theatre education to only include acting.
Literature on Competition and Learning

The University Interscholastic League

The University Interscholastic League is an organization operating through the University of Texas at Austin under the Vice President for Diversity & Community Engagement that organizes and facilitates almost all extra curricular academic, musical, and athletic competition throughout the state of Texas (UIL, n.d.a.). This means that the same organization that crowns the state champion high school football or basketball team also presides over musical contests, such as marching band, choir, and orchestra contests and academic competitions, such as debate, spelling, and theatre. The UIL acts as a referee, ensuring that all districts, schools, teachers, and students are in compliance with the rules of each specific arena of competition, as well as universal rules such as “no pass, no play,” which prohibits a student failing any intra curricular subject from competing. When it began in 1913, only 28 schools became members of the league (Dupre, 1936). In its first two decades, that number exploded, numbering 5731 participating schools in 1934. Today, it is the world’s largest inter-school organization of its kind; approximately 2.2 million students participate in at least one of its 70 activities (One Act Play, football, etc.) each year (UIL, 2011a).

According to UIL’s website, the UIL One-Act Play is the world’s largest high school play production contest or play festival (UIL, n.d.c). More than 14,000 Texas
high school students in more than 1,000 plays participate in 300 plus contests” between March and the State contest, usually held at the end of the spring semester (UIL, n.d.c.). In these festivals, student performers take part in 18-40 minute one act plays, hoping to advance through the levels of competition, Zone, District, Area, Region, and finally State. Many hours are spent rehearsing and ‘perfecting’ the play.

The UIL has several aims of the One Act Play program listed in its Constitution and Competition Rules (2012). Through the contest, UIL aims to “foster appreciation of good acting, good directing, and good theatre; satisfy the competitive, artistic spirit...; learn to lose or win graciously...; promote interest in theatre during adult life...; [and] increase the number of schools which have adapted theatre as an academic subject in school curricula” (UIL, 2012, Section 1033). The first and last goals are of particular interest. Is the contest, as it is currently operating, rewarding, and thereby fostering, “good” acting and directing? What does “good theatre” mean? What is “the competitive, artistic spirit?” How effective of an advocate has UIL One-Act Play been for educational theatre in Texas?

The One Act Play contest started in 1927 (UIL, n.d.c.). However, “earnest discussions” about including theatre as a UIL event began in the early 20’s (Bedichek, 1956 p. 284). Opinions over the matter among League members were starkly divided, while member schools were only luke-warm to the idea of a theatre contest. Those who were against the formation of a dramatics competition cited mostly institutional factors. A vast majority Schools did not have adequate stage facilities, and if a school did have a stage, most likely it was afterthought built into
the basketball court. Few Texas universities “even pretended” to train teachers in theatre or dramatic direction, and, except for Commencement performances, play production in high schools was rare (p. 284). Outside of large urban centers, theatre as a subject of curriculum was almost nonexistent, and play scripts were expensive for teachers to acquire and perform.

Those in favor of the formation of a dramatics competition argued that interest does not necessarily have to precede the competition; the competition produces interest. They pointed to other areas where they have developed an interest by instituting a competition. They conceded that in the early stages of the competition, “atrocities” would occur (p. 285). However, atrocities were already regularly occurring among the few performances that are happening in Texas high schools, and a competition would force them “out into the open” (p. 285). They believed, as they had seen in other disciplines, that there was no quicker way to develop interest and artistic quality in an extracurricular activity than through comparative judging and agreed-upon standards.

Early in the contest’s existence, Universities in Texas were slow to institute summer courses in play production for teachers. Because teachers couldn’t acquire the theatrical skills from home, they began to seek instruction in out-of-state institutions. After seeing so many teachers leave the state for instruction, universities started to offer summer courses in dramatics. Now, “hardly a college or junior college worthy of the name in Texas that does not offer some training in dramatics; and a large number of departments offer courses especially designed for high-school directors” (p. 287).
Today, the UIL claims to format their contest so that the “contest knowledge and skills” correlate to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (or TEKS) in not only theatre, but other academic areas such as world history, English language arts, art, music, mathematics, and more (UIL 2011b). Though, when reading through the correlated TEKS and contest practices, I wonder how strong the correlation is, and how often students are the ones performing those tasks. For instance: The UIL states that students fulfill TEKS ELAR 1-4 (English Language Arts level 1 number 4) in that they “analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary context and support their understanding” by “read(ing) a selection of plays to determine” if the text has “literary merit and a theme appropriate for the school and community,” will work for the school given the school’s resources and cast, and “can it be cut to meet One-Act Play time constraints” (UIL, 2011 p. 1). One has to wonder if these competition skills are a) actually correlated with the given TEKS and b) being done by the student. (Are the students participating in choosing a play, or do the teachers decide on the play for them?)

In another TEKS objective, students are supposed to practice in the contest is “plan[ning] projects considering time and resource management, utilizing current and emerging technologies” The UIL asserts that students will do this by through practicing setting up and striking the UIL Unit Set and renting and managing costumes and props. The questions remain: are these tasks a) correctly correlated with the given TEKS and b) being done by the student and not the
director? See Figure 4 for a sample chart of TEKS and knowledge and skills required for the contest as prescribed by the UIL.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contest Knowledge and Skills</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation/Play Selection:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Preparation/Play Selection:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)(C) Consider script selection, casting, and directing skills. (TR 2)</td>
<td>- Read a selection of plays to determine the following:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)(D) Analyze dramatic structure and genre. (TR 3)</td>
<td>- Does it have literary merit and a theme appropriate for the school and community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Reading/Comprehension of Literary Text/Theme and Genre. Students analyze, make inferences and draw conclusions about theme and genre in different cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts and provide evidence from the text to support their understanding. (ELAR 1-4)</td>
<td>- Can it be cut to meet the One-Act Play time constraints?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Is it appropriate for the available cast, the theatre facility, and available resources?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage Mechanics/Scenery &amp; Properties:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stage Mechanics/Scenery &amp; Properties:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26)(A) Use a problem-solving process to identify a problem, gather information, list and consider options, consider advantages and disadvantages, choose and implement a solution, and evaluate the effectiveness of the solution. (B) Use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision. (US)</td>
<td>- Use the UIL Unit Set and stage curtains plus furnishings and/or exterior set pieces to establish the world of the play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)(A) Plan projects considering time and resource management utilizing current and emerging technologies. (1)(B) Compare and contrast the use of art elements (color, texture, form, line, space, value) and art principles (emphasis, pattern, rhythm, balance, proportion, unity) in personal artworks and those of others, using vocabulary accurately.</td>
<td>- Practice setting and striking the set during the rehearsal process within the prescribed time limit. (7 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rent, buy, borrow, and/or construct set, hand, and costume properties needed to successfully support the time, place, and style of the play.</td>
<td>- Develop a properties plot which fulfills the needs of the play and practice its implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: TEKS and the UIL One Act Play
Figure 4 Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(AT 1)</th>
<th>(1)(F) Analyze and describe the interdependence of all theatrical elements. (TR 1-4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(3)(A)</td>
<td>Develop and practice stagecraft skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(B)</td>
<td>Safely apply technical knowledge and skills to create and/or operate functional scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, makeup, and publicity. (TR 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)(B)</td>
<td>Examine cultural, social, and political aspects of a script to depict appropriately technical elements. (TR 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)(B)</td>
<td>Analyze and evaluate dramatic texts as a basis for technical discussions, considering themes, settings, times, literary styles, genres, and characters. (TR 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)(A)</td>
<td>Design, construct, and operate appropriate technical elements of theatre, safely and effectively, collaboratively and individually. (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyze production plans that include research, rehearsal plans, technical designs, and blocking. (TR 4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through my experiences as a student, student teacher, and educator in Texas, I have never observed students participating in this way. I have never seen or heard of students reading selections of plays to determine if they were appropriate to perform for the UIL contest, nor have I heard of students having a hand in time or resource management. In my observations as a practitioner, these tasks are reserved for the teacher, who decides on what text to perform and prescribes the rehearsal schedule. While the described student tasks do reflect a
learner-centered practice by allowing students a voice in the curriculum, the interviews will help me to determine if they reflect reality.

**Competition and education**

Kohn (1992) asserts that, in a competition, “some people must fail in order that others can succeed” (p. 1). Kohn asserts that competition is not more inclined to promote excellence because “trying to do well and trying to beat others are two different things” and suggests that “intergroup competition—the creation of a common enemy, a We-versus-They dynamic, is not necessary for group feeling...so cooperative activities are twice as desirable” for promoting teamwork (p. 55, 89). Kai (2012) has noted, in China, an overemphasis on competition is deteriorating the state of education. Kai (2012) asserts that competition narrows curriculum, discourages well-rounded development of students, and hinders the “cultivation of a spirit of cooperation” (p. 17).

Locke (2013) dispels the commonly held idea, which is reinforced by Kohn (1983), that competition and collaboration are binary opposites. The word “competition” comes from the Latin *cum petito*, meaning “striving together,” and competition can promote joint advances in its participants, and can encourage cooperation of team members in achieving a goal or solving a problem. Ediger (2001) notes that neither teaching approaches that emphasize cooperation and those that emphasize competition “are in and of itself good” and “merely having
cooperative learning or saying that one has cooperative learning does not make for goodness or badness.” (p. 12).

Another binary which is challenged by Locke (2013) is the effect of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation on creativity and learning. A long held belief in education is that intrinsic motivators are “conducive” to creativity whereas extrinsic motivators are “detrimental” (p. 278). Amabile (1983) writes that motivation orientation can have a drastic effect on performance and creativity; extrinsic goals undermine creativity and performance. She called the detrimental effects of extrinsic motivation “startling” (p. 156). However, while competition is an extrinsic motivator, there is now recognition that not all extrinsic motivators function the same way. 17 years later, Collins and Amabile (1999) write that there are positive effects on performance associated with some extrinsic goals. Locke (2013) quotes Collins and Amabile (1999) who contrast two different kinds of extrinsic motivators: “synergistic extrinsic motivators,” which interacts with a person's intrinsic motivation and enables a person to better complete a task; and “non-synergistic extrinsic motivators” which lead a person to feel controlled and are incompatible with intrinsic motives (p. 278). After conducting a case study on a poetry contest, Locke concludes that competitions can act as synergistic extrinsic motivators because it “prompted situational interest that was built on by teachers…and fostered a supportive environment for learning (p. 289). Clark and Nilssen (2011) remark that contests help students learn because they encourage to maximize their efforts. Contests necessitate active engagement, and students “learn by doing” (p. 329).
Among education researchers, four pedagogical structures concerning competition and learning have been commonly examined (See figure 5): Cooperation, cooperation with intergroup competition, interpersonal competition, and individualistic efforts (Reid, 1992; Johnson, et al, 1981). These four categories are defined by their goals and how the goals are achieved. In the first two structures (the cooperative learning environments) are defined as “[an environment] where the individual goals are linked together and there is a positive correlation among their goal attainments” (p. 2). The third structure is a situation wherein “the goals of the individual are attained at the expense of the other participants,” and in the fourth there is no correlation between how individuals achieve their goals (p. 2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Pedagogy</th>
<th>Competitive Aspects</th>
<th>Cooperative Aspects</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>No competition involved</td>
<td>Students cooperate to achieve common learning goal</td>
<td>Students in an art class work together to design and paint a school mural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation with Intergroup Competition</td>
<td>Students compete (in teams) to achieve common goal</td>
<td>Students cooperate with their teams to achieve common goal</td>
<td>A football team works together to win a game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Competition</td>
<td>Individuals compete with one another to achieve common goal</td>
<td>No cooperation involved</td>
<td>Individual students compete one-on-one in a debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Efforts</td>
<td>No competition involved</td>
<td>No cooperation involved</td>
<td>A student completes a math assignment on her own</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: A Comparison of Curricular Frameworks

Johnson, et al (1981) performed a meta-analysis of 122 studies on competition and learning to determine which of these four pedagogies was most effective in encouraging student learning. The procedures used in the meta-analysis were three fold: voting method, effect-size method, and z-score method. According to the researchers, the studies involved in the meta analysis involved every study that “(a) was available to [the researchers], (b) was conducted on North American samples, (c) contained achievement or performance data, and (d)
compared two or more of the four goal structures” (p. 49). The description of the researchers’ selection process was not more specific than this. The purposes of the meta-analysis including determining the efficacy of the four goal structures in influencing achievement over content material and to examine correlates or differences between goal structures. They found the following:

1. Cooperation is superior to [interpersonal] competition in promoting achievement and productivity.

2. Cooperation is superior to individualistic efforts in promoting achievement and productivity.

3. Cooperation without intergroup competition promotes higher achievement and productivity than cooperation with intergroup competition. (though, they note that this assumption is “tentatively advanced” because “the number of findings that directly compared the two conditions is too small for a firm conclusion” and “considerably more research is needed on the relative merits of these goal structures.”)

4. There is no significant difference between interpersonal competitive and individualistic goal structures on achievement and productivity. (Johnson et al, 1981, p. 57)

However, Cooke, et al (2013) tested the performance and self-reported enjoyment of participants performing physical education tasks. In this study, sixty four participants enrolled in an undergraduate sports science course performed a physical task (squeezing a handgrip dynamometer continuously with the aim of maintaining a certain level of pressure) and reported their enjoyment, anxiety, and
effort as well as having physiological measures taken by an electrocardiogram. All participants took part in four runs of the experiment: “time-trial, one-on-one, two-on-two, and four-on-four” (p. 136).

The researchers found that both enjoyment and performance improved from individual efforts to one-on-one, and again from one-on-one to intergroup competition, though the size of the team did not affect the results. Tauer and Harackiewiez (2004) also found through four field experiments that intergroup competition “led to higher levels of task enjoyment and performance than pure cooperation and pure competition” (p. 852).

Reid (1992) suggests that it is not the pedagogical structure used, but the type of rewards given for content mastery. In his own study, he finds that “the emphasis of the incentives (rewards) and individual accountability had an impact on the effectiveness of the cooperative learning structure” and that the structure itself, without a difference in reward, suggest teachers “using cooperative learning strategies will not obtain significantly higher...achievement scores...than those using whole group (individualized/competitive) strategies” (p. 10). He does not discount cooperative learning strategies, but there must be “properly employed incentives and individual accountability factors” and “cooperative learning with intergroup competition may have the potential to significantly impact education” (p. 12).

Competition-based learning is “a methodology where learning is achieved through a competition, but the learning result is independent of the student’s score in such competition” (Burguillo, 2010, p. 567). Ideally, the students will gain
knowledge and skills in the competition regardless if they win or lose. Competition acts “as a spur” for both teachers and students. For students, it prompts interest in learning (Locke, 2013). Competition encourages teachers to not “work from identical pedagogical scripts,” but to cater their teaching so that even the most “reluctant” students are motivated (p. 289). This methodology can be combined with project-based learning or problem based learning, wherein the learning is a side effect of students trying to achieve a given goal, and collaborative-based learning, where students learn through activities that “maximize the collaboration among students” in pairs or groups (Burguillo, p. 566.) Competition-based learning is a form of cooperative learning with intergroup competition. The UIL One-Act Play is a medium for such intergroup competition.

Contests “can be used to strengthen and augment the curriculum” in ways that will “not only motivate students and allow them to develop their talents, but also be an effective tool to further public relations (Zirkes & Penna, 1984, p. 97). Blair (1995), an art teacher and contest judge, notes that “My principal didn’t understand the arts, but he understood a winning football season all too well” (p. 63). Contests aren’t only a way to improve student performance, but they can act as a means of self-promotion, campaigning for a place for theatre and arts education to those who are not intimately involved with arts education. The UIL started the One Act Play contest for this reason, and they believe that contests in academics and the arts can build support for these subjects (Bedichek, 1956; UIL, n.d.a)
A UIL One-Act Play performance is a collaborative effort, wherein a “team” (the cast of a school) is in competition with other teams. The contest offers synergistic external incentives that emphasize individual accountability (such as individual acting and technical awards) as well as cooperative group accountability (advancement through the tournament, placement at the State competition).

Within the discussion on competition’s effects on education and learning, there are several factors to consider beyond the competition itself. As mentioned above, the types of incentives or motivations offered by the contest can influence the enjoyment, performance, and creativity of those who participate in the competition (Collins & Amabile, 1999). The UIL One Act Play contest does not offer any rewards to students beyond continuing in the competition, and recognition (and a small medal) for individual acting and technical performance thus rendering Kohn’s (1992) assertion that a winner-take-all rewards have no effect on performance moot. This also negates Reid’s (1992) conclusion that focusing on incentives increases performance.

Several questions remain about how the rules and procedures of the contest effect teacher practices. By regulating how much time casts are allowed to rehearse in preparation for the contest, do teachers feel pressured to take the responsibility away from students, thus resulting in a less learner-centered environment (UIL, 2012)? If so, how could this be rectified? What types of tasks are students performing in their rehearsals: are they learning about several types of theatrical disciplines, thus acquiring a comprehensive theatrical education, or are they only focusing on one discipline (Lazarus, 2012)? Further, what types of
play win the contest? Do winners tend to be dramas? Comedies? Do they tend to favor plays that bring up issues of representation and oppression, or do they tend to favor plays that support the status quo (Lazarus, 2012)?

Through my research, I have found several studies (including those mentioned above) that discuss the ways competition influences achievement in content learning. However, I have not found an in depth discussion on the impacts of competition on the democratization of learning, nor the influences of learning on social responsibility. Does competition lead to more learner-centered classrooms? Or does it further focus the control of the class on the teacher? Can teachers use competitions as opportunities to breach subjects of oppression or increase the opportunities and representation of students without institutionalized privilege? As demonstrated in previous chapters, the effectiveness of curriculum cannot only be determined only through student mastery of content (Pinar, 1975; Apple & Beane, 1995). Students must also have a voice in their education, and the needs of all students, regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender, or socioeconomic status must be met. How does competition influence curriculum in these aspects? Does the UIL One Act Play contest encourage teachers to broaden the curriculum? Does the contest encourage teachers to give their students more responsibility through a learner-centered environment? The interviews in this thesis will help us understand the curricular impact of competition in learning beyond its effect on content mastery.
Design of Study

Introduction and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the link between the University Interscholastic League One-Act Play contest and theatre curriculum in Texas high schools. The data consisted of teachers’ descriptions of their experiences as a theatre teacher both in and outside of the UIL One-Act Play contest. These data were collected through interviews with Texas theatre teachers. This chapter will outline the methodology used to answer the following research question and subquestions:

1. What does a focus on the UIL One-Act Play competition reveal about teacher views on competition and the learner-centeredness, social responsibility, and comprehensiveness of Texas theatre curricula?
   a. What is currently being taught in Texas public high school theatre classes?
   b. Are there theatre classes in Texas learner-centered, non-discriminatory (or socially responsible), and comprehensive in their theatre content?
   c. Do teachers treat the UIL One-Act Play differently within their curricula than other productions? How so?
d. How does the UIL One-Act Play competition influence extant theatre curricula in Texas, specifically in their learner-centeredness, their social-responsibility, and their content?

Selection of Participants

A purposeful sampling strategy was used in selecting interview participants (Bryman, 2012). In addition to participation in the UIL contest and willingness to participate in the study, participants were chosen in order to ensure a variety of perspectives according to the following criteria:

1. School’s UIL classification (A-AAAAA)
2. Socio-economic status of the school
3. Success within the UIL One-Act Play tournament
4. Environment of the school (e.g. urban, suburban, or rural)

By pursuing maximum variation between participants on these specified criteria, I “increase the likelihood that findings will reflect...different perspectives” (Cresswell, 2007 p. 126). Schools in Texas belong to one of five, soon to be six, categories according to their student population: A, commonly called “one A” with the smallest population and AAAAA, or “five A,” with the largest population (UIL, 2012). My personal contacts from my time as a theatre teacher helped me in the beginning of my “snowball sampling” process (Lichtman, 2013, p. 192). Before a participant was selected, the schools and teachers were researched over the internet in order to find a heterogeneous mix of participants. Teachers were initially contacted through e-mail. Of the nine teachers that I reached out to
participate, seven responded. All teachers who responded consented to be interviewed, but one did not respond to requests to schedule an interview. The participants will be referred to using a pseudonym in order to ensure their anonymity.

Participant A is the only theatre teacher in a AA school in a very small town in central Texas. The town is in a rural setting and has a student population that is primarily white and has a primarily low socioeconomic status; the participant is the only African American employee in the district. The teacher has been teaching theatre for five years and has been at this school for four years. The participant is very successful in the UIL contest and, of his four years at his present school, has won the state contest for AA schools twice.

Participant B is one of two teachers in a AAAAAA school who teach theatre full time. The school is in a wealthy suburb outside of a large city in central Texas. The students are primarily white and from a high socio-economic environment. The participant has been teaching for six years, and all of that time has been spent at this school, which opened six years ago. The participant has never won the AAAAAA state contest, but has been to state once in his six years.

Participant C is one of two theatre teachers in a AAAA school, though he is the only one that currently teaches theatre full time. The school is in a suburb near a small city in the Texas panhandle. According to the participant, students fall into either a high or low socioeconomic status and are primarily white, but with a “fair amount” of Hispanic and black students. The participant has taught for eight years, but has only been at his present school for two years. He won the state contest
while teaching in his previous AA school and in his first year at this school the participant won the AAAAA state contest.

Participant D is currently English teacher in a suburban AAAAAA school in a large east Texas city. The school has two full time theatre teachers whom the participant assists in productions. Her previous school where she taught theatre, which had a school population that was primarily lower class and Hispanic, differs from the school she started teaching in this year, which is predominantly white with middle to upper class students. The teacher has won the middle school UIL contest in her district.

Participant E teaches in a AAAAA with a very large student population. She is one of four teachers who teach theatre full time at this school. According to the participant, the suburban/urban school population is “probably 48%-50% white, 35% Hispanic...15% Black, and the rest are Asian or other.” The participant has been teaching theatre for 36 years and has been at her present school for 26. She has never won the state contest, but advanced to state this year.

Participant F is a first-year teacher, and is one of two full time theatre teachers in her suburban AAAAAA school located in a large central-Texas city. The school’s student population consists mostly of students from a lower socioeconomic status, many of whom have after-school jobs that contribute to the family finances. The school is primarily white with sizable numbers of African American and Hispanic students and has a particularly high number of English language learners and special education students. The school has not been successful in the UIL and has not advanced in the past two years.
Data Collection

My primary goal as a qualitative researcher is to allow, “the participants perspective on the phenomenon of interest [to] unfold as the as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011 p. 144). In order to gain this perspective, I used semi-structured interviews with questions that fell into one of five categories, with the last three directly related to Lazarus (2014):

1. Background information on the teacher and the teacher's school
2. The teacher’s beliefs on competition in education and attitude toward the UIL
3. The teacher’s attitude regarding learner-centered and democratic teaching practices
4. The teacher’s attitude regarding socially responsible practice
5. The comprehensiveness of the theatrical content in the teacher's curriculum.

These questions directly related to my research question because, through the responses of the participants, I was able to learn about the ways theatre teachers in different situations in Texas conducted their classrooms. Teachers talked about their students' roles and responsibilities in their classrooms and productions as well as the differences and similarities in how they conducted preparation for the UIL One-Act Play competition. While I did ask if they felt their
classrooms were learner-centered, I tried to avoid questions with educational jargon, as they could be considered to be leading questions (Lichtman, 2013).

The interviews generally lasted about an hour, depending on how much the participant wanted to say. The shortest interview was with Participant E, who's interview lasted for 38 minutes. The longest interview was Participant F, who's interview was 1 hour and 26 minutes. As all of the participants are currently teaching in Texas, interviews had to happen over a distance. Due to the technology available to me, participants were offered the choice of phone, Skype, or Facetime for the medium of the interview. Other than Participant B, who chose to be interviewed over Skype, all participants chose to be interviewed over the phone. Participants chose the date and time of their interviews. After the interviews were transcribed, I e-mailed each transcript to each respective participant, asking for them for a member check (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Data Analysis

After the data were recorded, the process of analysis began. I took a generic approach to coding the interviews (Lichtman, 2013). In this approach, I “collect[ed] qualitative data, analyz[ed] it for themes or perspectives” and report on those themes (p. 258). There were four coding categories used in this process when analyzing the interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2011):

1. Learner-centered practice / democratic teaching
2. Socially responsible practice / anti-hegemonic teaching
3. Comprehensive Theatre Education / DBTE
4. Feelings on the UIL competition / competition in general.

Each interview was read four times: once for each coding category. As I read, I wrote my impressions of the data within the transcript using a color-coding system. In addition to general impressions, I made a note of any time the participant mentioned something the students actively do, any time the teacher mentioned something they actively do, any time theatre was compared to a sport, any time the UIL One-Act Play contest was mentioned in a question that does not deal with the UIL One-Act Play contest, and anytime the teacher mentioned winning or losing regardless of whether or not the question was on a competition. This systematic process ensured that I was analyzing the interviews the same way, and that I was obtaining the teacher’s perceptions and experiences with the UIL One-Act Play and their curriculum, not mine (Cresswell, 2007). After each read-through, I documented the general themes for each category in a summary at the end of the transcript. In this summary, I related the data recorded from the interviews to the literature.

Once each interviews as coded on its own, transcripts were printed and laid out side by side. By doing so, I was better able to compare and contrast the perceptions of the each participant.
Data Analysis

The data are analyzed according to four categories: learner-centered practice / democratic teaching, socially responsible practice / anti-hegemonic teaching, comprehensive theatre education / DBTE, and teacher attitudes toward competition and the UIL contest. (Lazarus, 2012; Apple & Beane, 1995; Apple 1981; Eisner, 1994; Pinar, 1981).

Learner-Centered Practice and Democratic Teaching

Lazarus (2014) defines learner-centered practice in theatre education as a classroom and production practice where “the students’ place at the center of the learning process is acknowledged, valued, and nurtured” (p. 35). In a student-centered classroom, students control their own education. Through dialogue and collaboration with other students and teachers, they share in the decisions of the curriculum, including material and skills studied. A learner-centered classroom is inherently democratic where all student’s opinions are heard, valued, and acknowledged (Apple & Beane, 1992). I asked teachers questions that related to their learner-centeredness in their classroom practice, their production and rehearsal practice, and for the UIL explicitly.

- **Participant A:** The practice at this school seems to be very learner-centered. Projects are initiated by the adult, but student decisions guide the
development of the work. According to the Roger Hart "ladder of participation" (as quoted by Lazarus) this program seems to fall between Levels 5 “Consulted and informed” and 6 “Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth." (p. 62). Participant A has the final say, but the students are given a wide variety of decisions that have drastic influences over the production of the plays and over the course of the class, including material covered in class, what plays will be performed, and what the plays will look like. Michael Apple's seven criteria of a democratic practice (including the flow of open ideas, faith in individuals and groups to solve problems, critical reflection, and concern for common good) are all represented in the teacher's practice as described in the interview. Lazarus says “Like learner-centered classroom work, learner-centered production work engages student performers, playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, and dramaturges in dialogue, decision making, and individual collective action. The student’s place at the center of the production process is acknowledged, valued, and nurtured” (p. 71). The learner-centered nature of the program in combination with the program’s UIL success, challenge the “product vs. process” dichotomy.

- **Participant B:** Participant B teaches through a “two heads are better than one” perspective. He values democratic teaching and tries to incorporate it into a learner-centered classroom. A lot of the activities described are teacher initiated, and student lead (it seems that this class hovers between levels 5 and 6 on Hart’s scale). The teacher will decide what they do, and the
students will take the lead (or will have exploratory freedom) in accomplishing that objective. Students have an influence in the pedagogy and the content of the course, and this input is sometimes Students regularly create content for the class by writing their own play. They also produce their own work for others to see, validating their efforts (Lazarus 2014).

This teacher clearly meets 6 of the 7 democratic criteria. The 7th, “the flow of ideas is open, regardless of popularity” seems to be challenged a little bit by labeling some input as “far fetched” and others not, but without knowing how the teacher responds to student suggestions I can’t be sure (Apple 1990, p. 7). For this participant, the UIL does not alter the process of rehearsal. This means that the contest play is not any more or less democratic than other productions.

- **Participant C:** Participant C is hit or miss as far as democratic teaching is concerned. There are areas wherein the students are allowed more of a voice, such as having a hand in choosing the play they perform for the UIL One Act Play contest and given more responsibilities in the design of productions. However, these expanded responsibilities are only for certain students, if the student is particularly interested in that design area. Of particular interest, rehearsal for the UIL is actually more learner-centered and democratic than other, “less important” productions. The UIL production seems similar to Level 6 on Hart’s ladder of participation: “Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth,” whereas non-UIL productions seem to be Level 4: “Assigned but informed,” where adults tell youth how
and why they are involved, but involvement is up to the students, and they are given tasks to perform (some with more freedom than others) (Lazarus 2014, p. 62). Lazarus says that dialogue “is fundamental, as is consideration of students’ academic, artistic, social, developmental, and emotional abilities” in a learner-centered classroom (p. 61). This teacher makes clear that students are welcome and able to discuss issues with him, and he seems to try to take in student’s academic, artistic, and developmental needs in mind when choosing intentional curriculum, as he focuses on scripts that will challenge them academically and artistically, while spreading a “positive message.”

**Participant D:** Instruction in Participant D’s classroom is primarily learner-centered. The teacher chooses learning objectives for the students, but the students decide how to best reach those objectives. Also, by placing herself under the same rules as the students (putting her cell phone in the lock box with the students’ during rehearsal) and by giving students “jobs” during class that affect the participant's facilitation of the class, students are given ownership of the pedagogy, the hidden curriculum, of the class (Apple 1975). Participant D provides students an opportunity to reflect on their work (self assess, reflection period at the end of each rehearsal, journaling) the teacher is creating “a dynamic classroom environment monitored by the teacher, but shaped by all involved in the learning community” (Lazarus 2014, 63). Students are able to see their input change the course of the curriculum. Because their input is valued (allowing them to help choose the
play, allowing them to help design the shows, allowing them a say in what is taught) the teacher engages in a dialogue with the students. This democratizes the production of curriculum in the class.

- **Participant E:** Participant E has clear democratic goals, but falls short of having the fully learner-centered classroom like she would like. There are times when she emphasizes learner-centered practices, such as allowing students to direct their own learning or assess their own work, but there are also times when the derived curriculum is very teacher-centered. Participant E and the other teachers decide on what plays are produced and what material is covered in class. The UIL production is less democratic than other productions, as the teachers in this school allow their students less artistic freedom than with other productions. However, the program does allow for some theatrical projects that are learner-centered. The Participant’s season is divided into five production blocks, two of which are student directed. In these plays, the students take a leadership role and decide on what plays to perform, with teacher oversight.

- **Participant F:** The program is not very democratic or student-centered. The students do not have a voice in what they learn or the productions they make. The activities in class for Theatre 1 are based on rote memorization and inauthentic assessments. This anti-democratic practice is resulting in behavioral problems, which prevents students from mastering the subject; the authoritarian approach is actively preventing the students from achieving. Actors do not have a say in their performance either as the head
teacher is very specific over where students are supposed to go and what they’re supposed to do. Students are only given a voice at the discretion of the teachers. Technical students have a bit more freedom. They still do not have an adequate voice in choosing the play, and they do not take the lead in designing the show, but the participant takes a democratic approach to design the shows. On Hart’s scale, the program floats between levels 3 and 4 “Tokinism” and “Assigned but informed.” (Lazarus 2014, p. 62) It isn’t only the in-class environment and the rehearsal process that is not democratic, but the relationship between the teachers as well. The participant does not feel that she has an adequate voice in the program. She cannot affect any sizable change in her curriculum, she does not have an adequate voice in the productions that the school puts on, and does not even know what the other teacher is doing in her class. The teachers do not cooperate, and they do not develop a cooperative environment in their classrooms.

- All teachers valued a cooperative process in the production of their plays. Most participants allowed student actors to make their own blocking decisions in productions. Blocking is the coordination of actor movements and physicality on stage (Taylor, Strickland, & Abel, 1999). According to Participant B, “What are we out if we don’t let them try? All the heads are better than just one head yelling ‘no’ all the time.” By allowing students to make decisions on their own blocking, rather than dictating their acting choices to them, students take more ownership in their work and motivates
them to do better (Lazarus, 2014). The biggest exception to this trend is Participant F. Participant F values a learner centered practice in her own curricula, but due to struggles with her cooperating teacher, the practice in the classes where she doesn’t write the curriculum and in their productions are not learner-centered. Students in this school don’t have an adequate say over what they learn about, how they practice, or their acting. Participant F sees this as a problem and is trying to change it.

- Participant A was the most successful in the UIL One-Act Play; advancing to the state contest three times in the past three years, and winning state two of those three times. He also ran the most learner-centered program. Performances were entirely designed and directed cooperatively by the students. In his classroom, the teacher has high expectations of the students, and the students are self-driven to meet these expectations. They prepare themselves for rehearsal without being prompted, they design the show without supervision, and they will block their own scenes (after being reviewed by the teacher.) In his rehearsals, he “engages student performers, playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, and dramaturges in dialogue, decision making, and individual collective action” (Lazarus, 2014, p. 71). This participant stuck out to me due to his production-by-committee style and his success in the One-Act Play contest.

- I was surprised by how many participants produced scripts chosen by students. Participants A, B, C, and D all mentioned specific times when students chose the play that they were to perform. Participants A, C, D have
written into their intended curriculum that students choose what play to perform for certain productions. Students in these three classes will read and discuss multiple scripts and engage in a dialogue about what play is right for them. My previous prediction that the TEKS objective of students reading and evaluating scripts not being a part of the UIL process was incorrect for these schools. Dialogue and collective action is key to a learner-centered classroom according to Lazarus (2014). Because students have a voice in their intended curriculum, they become a “community of learning” (Apple & Beane, 1995).

• Another theme in the data that surprised me was the fact that the UIL One-Act Play did not play a large, consistent role in how learner-centered the rehearsal process was for the production compared to other productions. I was expecting, due to the restrictive rules and standardized format, that the competition would constrain teachers and students, leading to a more restrictive and teacher-centered curriculum (Kai, 2012, Ravitch, 2010). This was true for some participants. Participant F says that during UIL the students are “micromanaged within an inch of their lives,” and are not often offered the chance to contribute to the decision making process. Participant E says that “other than time management” she couldn’t think of any student decisions that affect UIL productions, whereas for non-UIL performances, directors in the program will open the floor to student input more often. However, One participant uses a more learner-centered approach for UIL than other productions. Participant C, or example, always conducts a
dialogue with students when choosing a play for the contest, but for non-UIL performances the teacher chooses the play for them. Participants A, B, and D all said that there was no difference between the ways they directed their UIL One-Act Play and other productions. Apple and Beane (1995), Kohn (1992) and Kai (2012) all state that competition discourages the building of a cooperative, democratic, and learner-centered environment. It appears with the UIL One-Act Play contest, this is not necessarily the case.

**Anti-Hegemonic Teaching / Socially-Responsible Practice**

Curriculum, both hidden and non-hidden, can contribute to attitudes that reinforce prejudiced hegemony and can dehumanize students (Apple, 1981; Pinar 1975). To combat this hegemony, Lazarus (2012) lays out a set of pedagogical values she calls “socially responsible practice.” She defines this practice as one where “students learn in, through, and about theatre as members of society and citizens of the school and the world” (p. 35). In a socially responsible practice, all students are able to participate, regardless of their age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, physical ability, or sexual orientation. According to Lazarus (2012), theatre should be used as a tool to begin a dialogue that can “reach beyond the school” and “lead to awareness, action, or change” (p. 124). I asked teachers about these issues as well as how willing they were to challenge oppressive attitudes with their productions and curriculum.

- **Participant A:** As far as anti-hegemonic teaching goes, this teacher is much more conflicted than he is with student-centered learning. He recognizes
the power theatre can have in confronting hegemonic, oppressive society, but he shies away from it for fear of imposing his views on others. Pinar (1981) and Friere (1998) explain that when we teach we inherently impose a view, whether though intentional or operational curriculum. He feels that confronting his community too harshly would do more harm than good. Apple (1995) indicates that to have a democratic and anti-hegemonic classroom, the teacher must allow the community a voice in the curriculum, which this teacher does, and must also use the classroom to challenge hegemonic power structures. In order for a teacher to have a socially-responsible curriculum, they must be self reflective (Lazarus, 2012). One question which must be asked is, “how am I using the implicit political nature of theatre to engage students and the community?” (p. 124).

Participant A does not see theatre as inherently political, and avoids some anti-hegemonic scripts.

- **Participant B:** Participant B has two main avenues of utilizing an anti-hegemonic curriculum. First, in his teaching and directing practices, the teacher values a cooperative process. He decenters power through self-deprecating humor and by asking students for their input. He recognizes that he’s “not the best at design” and allows students to volunteer their ideas, even design shows by themselves. He provides feedback, but the design and direction of the plays gives students ownership of their work. He often asks for student help. Second, the scripts he chooses to direct and study in class often contain within them anti-hegemonic themes. This way,
challenging these oppressive structures is a part of the curriculum. The students themselves write a play that is intended to challenge stereotypes that the students experience every day. The operational and intentional curricula are directed at strengthening cooperation and challenging things that infringe on rights and respect. The environment of his classroom is such that students are taught to challenge and question power structures, and students will sometimes direct plays of their own anti- hegemonic plays. He says that UIL increases his chances of performing a play on topics of race, gender, ability, and sexuality. He feels that the contest encourages teachers to direct with these topics because it rewards these plays.

- **Participant C:** Participant C pushes for anti-hegemonic curriculum. He encourages his students to be more accepting of each other, as exemplified by a student explicitly telling the participant that he felt safe in the theatre class. Developing relationships between students establishes a safe space where students are free to explore and experiment, which is an anti-hegemonic practice. Each individual student is valued, and educated (Pinar 1975, Apple 1990). The teacher could do more, however. Though the exclusion of non-Euro American stories, stories about non-heterosexual people, and stories on race (which he omitted to mention,) the teacher is not confronting oppressive heteronormativity or hegemony. However, he does expressly mention performing plays that deal with socioeconomic class, which would be relevant to the students given his description of student demographics.
• **Participant D:** Participant D uses theatre (and literature) to facilitate conversations on issues of prejudice and oppression. She feels that plays can be a useful tool to enact social change or to provide an avenue of representation for students. The example of this includes producing a play on a biracial family searching for identity starring students in that situation in their own lives. Theatre as a catalyst for dialogue, as a means of representation, and theatre that challenges prejudice can all be described as socially responsible practice. The teacher feels more free to pursue these sorts of plays during the One-Act Play competition. She believes students are more willing to have these conversations because of the contest. The teacher challenges the dehumanizing effect of education by providing a period for self reflection and self analysis (Pinar 1975). Students construct knowledge in many instances in this teacher’s class. This falls in line with the Freirian (1998) concept of challenging the “banking” model of education. Granted, in her productions the teacher has set up a clear hierarchy of authority (teacher → stage manager → actor → technician) allowing students freedom in their art and in their classroom is a good step in this direction.

• **Participant E:** This teacher values equality and equal opportunity. She is focused on making sure that students treat each other with respect, and that other students are not seen as someone to domineer. The intentional curriculum is focused on fighting hegemony this way, and the plays chosen (intentional curriculum) is also not afraid to be anti-hegemonic, and can
feature stories about non-heterosexual and non-white people. However, the operational curriculum for productions does not fully reflect this. The directors are clearly in charge, and the students are under the power of the teachers. Students have relatively little say over the projects where they are not named the “director”.

- **Participant F:** According to Lazarus (2014) a socially responsible program is one that is “a safe place for students to talk, be heard, and feel appreciated” (p. 159). In it’s current form, Participant F’s program doesn’t do that. Lessons are dedicated to a prewritten regimen devoted to vocabulary memorization. Students do not have adequate input or control over their learning. Knowledge is passed down through a “banking” system that interferes with students’ taking responsibility for constructing knowledge (Freire, 1998). In the few instances where they are given that opportunity (in the technical classes) students have done well. The teacher interviewed values a number of anti-hegemonic practices (play selection, decentering of power) that the coteacher does not support. The program is not, for the most part, seeking out the needs in the school or community, acknowledging that theatre can address this need, or taking any steps to enact positive change (Lazarus, 2012 p. 123). The teacher interviewed does take into account student experiences in the pedagogy of her class. She recognizes the psychological and financial needs of her students that are in lower SES populations and ensures that they will be able to take care of themselves. She does this by ensuring the time that students spent out of
school are not focused on projects for her, these students can spend this time working if they need to. The school even pays students for their services in some cases.

- Every teacher interviewed discussed steps they take to ensure that their classroom is a “safe space” for discussion, a necessary first step before employing anti-hegemonic curricula (Lazarus, 2012; Apple, 1995; Pinar & Reynolds 1992). Participant B uses the term “safe space” explicitly when talking to students:

  I talk about this in the first week of school I have with the students, about how this needs to be a safe space. I actually use these words. That this has to be a space of coming together to create art and create community, and we need to be able to trust each other in that process.

All participants discussed the importance of cooperation and community among the students. When discussing the responsibilities of the students in the classroom and in productions, participants mention respect early and often. They feel that this emphasis on respect helps develop a safe space. Two participants, A and B, also described their process of making themselves look foolish as a way to ensure students feel safe in experimenting. Lazarus (2012) describes community building in a classroom to be an “overarching aspect of socially responsible theatre education” (p. 157). Students who feel safe will be more likely to challenge their preconceptions and grow.

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As I anticipated, all teachers interviewed could not recall a time when their school produced a play that was written outside of the US or Europe. Theatre has the potential to “liberate young people from the boundaries of an English-only, Euro-centric curriculum” (Lazarus, 2012, p. 136). Theatre teachers focused exclusively on a Euro-American aesthetic in their productions, which can increase prejudice towards cultures that don’t reflect western values (Freedman, 2000). Only two teachers came close to challenging this mindset. Productions in Participant E’s school are grouped into themed “blocks.” When asked about producing plays from outside the US or Europe, she could not remember producing one from outside those areas, but she did remember producing a block that had a “Hispanic series” wherein most of the plays were bilingual. Participant D also remembered producing a bilingual play about a family of Mexican immigrants because she saw students in her school going through a similar experience of “struggling to find an identity in America” as the characters in the play.

These teachers, while not pushing the aesthetics of their program outside of the Euro-American experience, are still finding those students of different cultures within their schools and are finding ways to “foster inclusion and an open sharing of cultures” in their classroom (Lazarus, 2012, p. 137).

Like producing plays written outside of the US or Europe, most teachers also said that they have never produced a play where the main character was not heterosexual. This exclusion of a portion of the population was not unexpected, and feeds into the heteronormative hegemony (Thorton, 2004).
This curricular heteronomativity “paints an inaccurate picture of social life and perpetuates intolerance, sometimes with tangibly destructive consequences such as harassment and physical violence” (p. 308).

Participant E again challenged this hegemony by producing plays such as *The Laramie Project* by Moisés Kaufman, which explicitly challenges societies that allow and perpetuate violence against homosexual people. Participants B and D also mention performing plays that feature homosexual characters that examine the heteronormative ways society views family structure. Participants A and F mention that they would like to perform plays that challenge hegemony in this way, but feel that they would not have the community support to do so.

- One view that had some disagreement among the teachers was the UIL One-Act Play's influence in producing anti-hegemonic plays. Participant E said that the UIL has no influence on whether or not they produce anti-hegemonic scripts, and that the theme or message of the play has no influence on whether or not they would produce the play for UIL. Participant A said that his decision on what to produce for the contest is completely dependent on his school’s community. The UIL requires school administrators to ensure “the play does not offend the moral standards of the community” (UIL, 2012). According to Lazarus (2012), a socially responsible program does have to take the wishes of the community in mind, and Apple (1995) does say that a school needs to be conscious of the wishes of the community in its curriculum, but these scholars also value a
school’s (and a theatre program’s) ability to challenge community preconceptions. Participant A is allowing the UIL to actively work against a socially responsible curriculum. Participants B, C, D, and F, on the other hand, said that they were more likely to produce anti-hegemonic scripts for UIL. Each of these participants expressed a belief that, despite the community-standards requirement from the UIL, that they were more free to pursue these topics for the contest. They feel that, due to the competitive nature of the contest, their communities and administrators are more likely to be comfortable with them producing plays that “push the boundaries.” Participant B even said that he believes the UIL favors these types of plays because they are “edgy.” I didn’t know what to expect in how the UIL influenced curricula in this aspect, but it appears that the contest doesn’t have an overwhelmingly limiting aspect on the topics explored in plays.

**Comprehensive Theatre Education / DBTE**

The third lens I used in evaluating the interviews is on the comprehensiveness of the participants’ theatrical education. According to Lazarus (2012), a truly comprehensive theatrical education is one that involves instruction that “is holistic, authentic, and allows students to learn and practice collaboratively in the roles of actor, director, playwright, designer, technician, critic, researcher, and audience member” (p. 35). In order to achieve this goal, Lazarus (2012) proposes using a curricular framework called discipline based theatre education, or DBTE. DBTE is a curricular framework that “integrates many instructional
approaches” that provide “a variety of strategies for experience, understanding, reflecting upon, and valuing works of theatre” (p. 224). DBTE is similar in structure to discipline based art education, or DBAE in structure. I asked teachers about what disciplines of theatre their students experienced and how authentic their experiences were.

- **Participant A:** Because the program is so learner-centered, the students practice many different disciplines of theatre. The students are responsible for more aspects of the production, so naturally they will learn to do more. Students in Participant A’s program will have a working knowledge of not only acting methods but of technical and building skills as well. The content portion of the curriculum seems very strong, though I haven’t observed a lesson. The conceptual framework for DBTE includes eight disciplines: researcher, playwright, director, designer, technician, actor, audience, and critic. The teacher has described examples of the students learning each one of these content areas, and times when students practice or demonstration of their learning in these areas is displayed through a product the of the students design. Their learning directly alters the play. Eisner (1990) says that curriculum should, “teach skills, ideas, or forms of perception that are educationally important; intellectually challenging to students and stimulate higher order thinking...; presented through various forms of representation...; help make connection with learning in other areas both in and out of the school; provide multiple options for teachers to pursue” (p. 68). The curriculum as described by the teacher fits all of these criteria.
**Participant B:** Participant B encourages his students to get as wide of a variety of theatrical experiences as they can. The technical opportunities available for students offer a wide range of theatrical experiences and expertise. Students develop knowledge of these technical skills that they are able to produce their own work and contribute meaningfully toward the completion of a performance project. Students are charged the maintenance of their technical equipment and are tasked with ensuring that everything is ready for performance. All students act as director and are able to give meaningful feedback that they can see altering the course of the show. 

Students also learn about acting through the lens of a historian by researching the etymology of acting methods. Students act as a critic of literature (by writing on and reading plays) as well as performance. Participant B seeks out challenging literature for the students to digest. However, while students are encouraged to branch out and explore both acting and tech, there is a clear divide between the two. There are students who are referred to as “actors” and “technicians.” Classes and jobs are divided between these two groups. The teacher works to challenge this divide, but it seems that it is still there, and is entrenched in the operational curriculum.

**Participant C:** Acting students have some rudimentary experience with technical theatre, but for the most part students specialize in one competency or another. If a student expresses an interest in a specific aspect of theatrical design, they are free to explore that, but all students are
not required to diversify their theatrical experience. The theatrical education is not comprehensive. Students do not act as director, critic, playwright, or researcher, and students' learning is primarily focused in production and aesthetics, only two of the four frameworks described in DBTE (Lazarus 2014, p. 226). Students do not look at theatre through a historical or critical lens.

• **Participant D:** Participant D tries to create a balance of theatrical competencies. The teacher makes sure to give students opportunities to learn about set, lights, sound, playwriting, acting, directing, stage managing, dramaturge and more. Students act as a performer, a critic, and an audience member. They look at theatre through the lens of a researcher (discussing topics of the play) as a performer (performing the play) and as a critic (both of performance and of literature). The offered theatre curriculum is very comprehensive. Further, the fruits of student labor can be seen in productions, resulting in authentic performance assessments of student learning (Provenzo 2009). However, not all students will receive instruction in all these areas. Students specialize in some areas over others, possibly resulting in a deficit of learning in a specific category of DBTE's theatre competencies. This is fine if the students choose this, but they need at least a basic introduction to the content area, and must be made aware of the choices available to them.

• **Participant E:** Participant E keeps a theatrical competencies relatively segregated. Technical students do not act and acting students do not learn
technical skills in a meaningful way. A balance between disciplines is not valued, though the teacher is dedicated to teaching dramaturgy, which is not valued as much in other interviews. This balance is even less evident in the UIL performance, where students are responsible for fulfilling their jobs as actors or technicians, and the directors are in charge of the direction of the play.

- **Participant F:** There is a stark difference between the comprehensiveness of the tech class and the non-tech classes. The tech classes receive a more comprehensive theatrical education. They perform as painters as well as constructors and designers for set, lights, costume, sound, and more. They learn-by-doing and become capable in their abilities. Student work is primarily student-lead and, therefore, requires a more comprehensive knowledge of theatre tech. However, the acting students are not. Lazarus (2012) defines comprehensive theatre education as “an interwoven study and exploration of all aspects of theatre” that “encompasses a core of holistic study of the theatre disciplines and then expands and intersects with work across other arts disciplines and academic areas” (p. 223). According to the teacher interviewed, the acting curriculum fails in the first of those three qualifications. While the musical is an interdisciplinary endeavor, students are not required, or even asked, to interact with disciplines of acting that are not acting and playwriting. They have to learn about vocab of these disciplines, but this activity does not require students to perform, integrate the learned information into a relevant activity, or solve problems (Eisner
1999). The UIL does not change reduce the barrier between tech and acting. However, the curricular focus on history presents an interesting opportunity. Not only does it allow students to interact with theatre as historians, if the history studied is wide ranging it would encourage an anti-hegemonic practice.

- In a comprehensive environment, students would experience theatre from the perspective of a technician and as an actor (Lazarus, 2012). Students should not be segregated into “technical” and “acting” groups. The participants ranged in their belief in this concept. Participant A thinks of his program as an “ensemble company,” meaning that shows were directed, designed, performed, and sometimes written by everyone. While students in Participant A’s class engaged in a wide range of experiences, students in Participant E’s class tended to be more strictly segregated into acting and tech. Students do not get experience in technical theatre until the more advanced general classes or in the technical theatre classes. When plays are being produced, students are given their specific job and they must perform the duties of their job. The size of the program did not affect how strong the separation between students’ experience with a diverse range of experience. Participant B comes from a large school, but he and his cooperating teacher make a point to encourage students to explore a wide range of theatrical disciplines. It is not a requirement, but due to the culture of cooperation he has fostered, students develop a working knowledge of several technical disciplines in order to help one another during productions.
• The level of reverence that a teacher has for a learner-centered education seems to be reflected in the teacher’s beliefs on DBTE and comprehensive theatre education. This isn’t surprising, as Lazarus (2012) explains that “DBTE is inherently socially responsible and learner centered” (p. 228). The schools that most valued student input in their productions (Participant A, B, and D) generally have a weaker separation between tech and acting than those participants that did not regularly practice a learner-centered practice in their productions. Two practices that I felt best reflected this correlation between learner-centered practice and comprehensive theatre education came from Participants A and B. Participant A’s practice of regularly using an ensemble approach to directing has already been discussed. Participant B described a yearly class project where the students write, design, and perform in an original play. The production is learner-centered and comprehensive in it’s theatrical content. Additionally, the students are prompted to write a play that challenges the stereotypes they encounter, so the play is anti-hegemonic as well.

• I was surprised how many of the participants allowed students freedom to design productions. All teachers allowed students a hand in designing their shows, even the participants who did less to actively encourage a learner-centered environment offered students this opportunity on at least a case-by-case basis.
Similar to the other two curricular areas, the UIL One-Act Play contest had a mixed effect on how comprehensive each participant’s practice was. For Participant E, students have no hand in the design of the UIL production, whereas they do get an opportunity to assist in the direction and design in other productions. For Participants A, B, and F, student experience is similar to other productions. Participants C and D allow students more responsibility in the design, research, and responsibility of the UIL production than other productions. I expected the UIL competition to make the production practice less comprehensive for students. The data from the interviews seems to indicate that this isn’t really the case: The UIL One-Act Play contest does not have a regular effect on the practice of teacher.

Attitudes on Competition and on the UIL One-Act Play

In addition to these three curricular typographies, I also analyzed the participant interviews for their views on competition in education in general as well as their views on the UIL One-Act Play contest. The following are the key issues that I found in all interviews:

- **Participant A:** The UIL contest is Participant A’s primary focus is the UIL One Act Play. It is the main production he does, and it is the production the town gets together for and supports, and it is the production his students are most excited about. The way the production calendar is set up, the UIL One Act Play is the climax of the school year for the theatre program. This is in part because it is an opportunity for the students to participate in theatre
in a performance space designed for that purpose, instead of a cafetorium.

Participant A is a very vocal about his support for competition in education. He feels that it motivates his students to do well, and uses both intergroup and interpersonal competition regularly in his classroom practice.

- **Participant B:** Participant B values cooperation over competition. He does not value competition, and does not use it in his teaching practices very often. When he does, he mentions that it is always for a pedagogical reason, and not as a motivator. In the newspaper game, which is a competitive game, the students are told that the game is meant to teach them something about how to analyze a script. He plays the game because it is an authentic learning exercise, not because it is motivates the students to do something. He sees theatre as naturally cooperative, and encourages and fosters the spirit of cooperation in each class. Towards competition itself, the teacher is apathetic. He does not think that competition is damaging, as Kohn (1984) does, and does not think it benefits students like Reid (1992) Johnson (1981) and Cooke, et al (2013). He is fine with the UIL competition as far as the awards and advancing go. He has a problem with the way the UIL is facilitated. He does not like the criteria used by judges to determine winners, and he doesn’t like that there is only one judge per contest. He thinks the rules are too constrictive, and doesn’t appreciate feeling that he has no choice in participating in the contest. It is interesting to me that this teacher tries so hard for a democratic practice, but feels that the UIL is not democratic in the way that it works with teachers.
**Participant C:** Participant C is very big on the UIL One Act Play contest. He focuses his production year on the contest. The teacher equates success in the contest with program success, and sees an increased interest in his program. This echoes the views of those who founded the contest, thinking that a contest in theatre would increase interest in the art (Bedichek 1956). The administration in his school is also focused on success in UIL. He has specific things he thinks that increase his chances of advancing in the contest, such as producing dramas with complex themes and aesthetic accomplishment, but he also acknowledges that a lot luck is required to do well. He was very anxious to tell me that he likes the contest, he thinks it's a good idea, and he thinks it offers opportunities for students to participate in theatre. He was very clear that he “a big proponent” of the contest. His view of competition in education was very balanced. He personally likes competition, and thinks it can motivate students as suggested by Johson (1981) Ediger (1996) and Cook, Kavussanu, McIntyre, & Ring (2013). However, he also recognizes that it can make students discouraged about learning, as reflected in Kohn (1984). It’s almost as if this teacher was the personification of the literature.

**Participant D:** The teacher says that she likes competition, but she downplays all aspects of competition that differentiate “winners” and “losers.” She only sees competition as helpful when all students who enter know that the results of the competition do not reflect their ability, or the ability of others. To this teacher, equality is more important than winning.
This teacher was successful in the contest in her previous location (where she won district) but not as much in her new school (they have only gotten out of the first round). However, she is not in control of the program nor the theatre classes in the school where she teaches now. The teacher is not less likely to use learner-centered or socially responsible teaching when rehearsing for the UIL contest. She is either equally or more concerned with teaching anti-hegemonically when directing the UIL contest play as she is other productions.

• **Participant E**: Participant E does not like the UIL competition or any competition in arts education. She views competition as hurtful to student psyche (it’s “skewed”) and does not see an increased production value or increased competency in theatrical skills. The UIL competition is stressful, distracts from other productions, and is not enjoyable for her, though her students do enjoy it. She describes the ways that competition can motivate some parents and teachers, but downplays the importance of this type of motivation.

• **Participant F**: Participant F bears no ill will toward the UIL. She does not particularly like the UIL, but she doesn’t think that it is impossible for her to like it. She thinks her problems with the UIL contest this year are based in the way her school company rehearse, not in the contest itself. She says she is not competitive, however she bases her definition of program quality on how a school does in the UIL contest compared to other schools. She sees her job as making students “competitive” and choosing plays that are
“competitive” is important in the program. “Competitiveness” is the most important aspect of choosing a play for the UIL. This teacher’s views on competition in general most reflect Reid (1992). The competitive aspect itself doesn’t make the most impact, it is the rewards given and the emphasis on the rewards. This teacher would agree with Reid in that “properly employed incentives and individual accountability factors” with “cooperative learning with intergroup competition may have the potential to significantly impact education” (p. 12). The example she gives (“First period is going to do better than you!”) fits this description well. She does not feel that competition is a natural part of theatre, but does feel that it is a large part of theatre in America.

- The first, and most prominent, similarity between the participants is that all participants said that they had no choice in participating in the UIL contest. Whether by cultural expectation (Participant A), literal requirement by employing district (Participants E and D), or a fear or retribution from the University Interscholastic League (Participant B), all participants interviewed said that they were not given a choice in participating in the contest. I expected to see this before starting the study. In this way, the contest functions as a standardized assessment, which have the tendency to limit curriculum (Ravitch, 2010).

- All teachers also agreed that their students enjoy participating in the UIL One-Act Play contest. While some teachers were more measured in their description of how much the students enjoyed it (Participants B and F), all
teachers describe their students as enjoying the contest. This is not surprising, given Johnson’s (1981) meta-analysis and the study by Tauer and Harackiewicz (2004), where students were more motivated and enjoyed themselves more when completing a task competitively in a team than when not competing in a team. The two teachers who were more measured in their description of students enjoying the contest said that it was not the contest itself that colored the students’ perceptions, but the teacher’s view of the contest “feeding” the student’s perception (Participant B) and the extended amount of time the students spent rehearsing the show (Participant F). Eisner (1999) says that we derive enjoyment not from competition, but by doing good work. The statements of the participants seem to point to these two concepts, enjoying the competition and enjoying the meaningful work, are not contradictory.

• Something I was not expecting where most participants mostly agreed is that competition is not a natural part of theatre. As an actor, I had been told that theatre is competition. That finding a job required me to compete (or audition) and once I do have a part, my team (or cast and crew) had to compete with other productions for audience members. I was surprised when only one participant (A) agreed with this sentiment. While Participant D conceded that it is a natural part of acting (auditions), every participant but A sided with Eisner (1999) that competition is not part of the art form. I was particularly impressed with the practice of Participant B, whose
teaching philosophy seems to be built and focused around student and
teacher cooperation.

• The original justification behind the founding of the UIL One-Act Play
contest was that it would encourage schools across the state to start and
maintain theatre programs (Bedichek, 1956). Three directors mentioned
this unprompted. All three of these directors felt that the UIL was
responsible for the number of theatre programs in the state of Texas. All
three who saw this connection said that this was a good thing.

• While all teachers mention their students enjoying the contest, the teachers
were split in whether or not they liked the contest. Three participants (A, C,
and D,) said that they really enjoyed participating in the contest, with
Participant C adding at the end of the interview that he is “a big proponent
of [The UIL One-Act Play Contest]” and that “it does a lot of good things.”
Two participants (B and E) were very harsh critics of the contest, though
Participant B was not concerned with the fact that it was a competition. His
hang-ups on the contest deal with the way that it is run: that one judge
decided each advancing play rather than a panel of judges and that the ways
rules were enforced have moved “away from the spirit of the rule” and made
the process frustrating. Participant E does not like the concept of
competition in education. She would agree with Eisner (1999) that
producing art for competition is not as meaningful or as enjoyable as
producing it for its own sake. Participant F said that she “could” enjoy the
contest, but she doesn’t currently due to that the way her cooperating
teacher facilitates their participation in the contest.

- Teacher views of competition in learning is varied as well. Participant A
  whole heartedly endorses the use of competition in his practice, and
describes pitting his students against one another in mini-competitions in
his every day practice. He describes the process of student auditions for the
UIL One-Act Play:

  “50 kids will audition for One-Act Play, and half of them will
not get in the play. And half of those that do get in the
play...half of them won’t be in the play, some will be on crew.
Of those 15 actors that do make it to the stage, one may get
the role they wanted. So, out of the 50 that started this, only
one person doesn’t feel like they failed. And that one person
in the lead role doesn’t get the acting award that they felt they
deserved, so they too have failed.”

This quote perfectly sums up the problems Kohn (1992) has with
competition in education. The participant is complicit in a system where
students regularly feel that their success is dependent on the failures of
others. The other participants had varying degrees of esteem for
competition in education, but they all seemed to be aware of the issues
brought up by Kohn (1992) and Eisner (1999). They described the steps
they take to ensure that when they do use competition in their classrooms,
that the competition is not overvalued or framed in such a way that winning
equates to succeeding and losing is equated to failing. Some participants discussed the importance of a “healthy environment” in competition to ensure that students aren’t crushed by it (Participant D). Participant F agrees with Reid (1992) in that the competitive structure isn’t what most impact student enjoyment and motivation, but the rewards that come with it. She feels that the trick is finding the balance between a reward that will encourage students, but not discourage the students that don’t get the reward.

- Teachers disagreed with how much success in the UIL reflects the quality of the program. Participants B, D, and E believe that the UIL One-Act Play contest is not an accurate assessment of their programs. Each of these teachers devote their time to several different productions in addition to the UIL One-Act Play contest. They try to do well in the contest, but it is not the primary focus of their work as a teacher. Participants A and C state that they are primarily focused on winning the UIL One-Act Play contest. Their production calendars are focused on developing students for the contest, and they both equate “success” with winning. To be “successful” as a theatre teacher is to advance in the competition. Participant F doesn’t make this conflation, but she does state that her job as a theatre teacher is to develop actors with the skills to be “competitive.” Her adherence to the concept of competitiveness as the definition of success reflects concerns from Kohn (1992). When the results of the contest dictate the supposed “success” or “failure” of the program as a whole, it becomes a non-synergistic extrinsic...
motivators; students and teachers are no longer motivated to excel for the sake of making good art, they are motivated and controlled completely by the extrinsic motivator (Locke, 2012; Collins and Amabile, 1999). Whether the contest acts as a synergistic or non-synergistic motivator depends on the practice of the teacher, not on the contest itself.
Conclusion

Findings

The critical question addressed by this study was, “what does a focus on the UIL One-Act Play competition reveal about teacher views on competition and the learner-centeredness, social responsibility, and comprehensiveness of Texas theatre curricula?” In order to answer this question, I interviewed six theatre teachers in Texas about their practice, both inside and outside the UIL One-Act Play contest. In order to do this, I sought answers to four subquestions.

In the first subquestion I asked what was currently being taught in Texas theatre schools. In my interviews, I found that each theatre teacher chose content and learning activities for their individual classrooms. While the state of Texas does have a state-wide set of theatre learning objectives, the TEKS, teachers find these TEKS broad enough to implement curriculum they feel best fits their students’ learning needs. Because of this curricular freedom, theatre curricula is incredibly varied from program to program. Some common threads I found, though, include a dedication to teaching acting methods, design and construction skills, and critical analysis of performances and scripts. The theatrical aesthetics investigated in schools are overwhelmingly western-focused, with non-western forms of theatre being regularly ignored. Many theatre teachers use their programs as a means of societal change, and will address critical issues such as
race, class, sexual orientation, and ability through extracurricular performances, in-class activities, and discussions with students.

In the second subquestion, I asked if theatre classes in Texas are learner-centered, socially responsible, and/or theatrically comprehensive (Lazarus, 2012). Like in the first subquestion, I found that teacher experience in these three areas was not consistent. Some teachers valued having a learner-centered classroom and production practice more than others. Answers ranged from a teacher who’s students regularly chose curricular content and directed their own work to teachers who micromanaged every curricular aspect of their classrooms. I did find, however, that teachers’ classrooms tended to be more learner-centered than I anticipated. Many participants reported regularly allowing their students to choose intended curriculum and scripts to produce. Teachers showed a trust for their students in their production work. Teachers regularly sought to make their classrooms seem like safe learning environments for their students where teachers and students cooperated to achieve similar goals and to grow. This socially responsible practice was complemented by many teachers’ pursuit of producing plays that challenged hegemony. Concerning the third part of this subquestion: I was not surprised that in most schools, there is a separation between acting and technical skills. While some encouraged students to widen their experience, teachers regularly segregated students into one of these two camps. The size of the school did not influence teacher’s attitudes toward this divide or how comprehensive students’ theatre education was, but teacher’s attitudes toward a learner-centered environment did correlate with theatre comprehensiveness.
Students who take part in more learner-centered classrooms will more often have authentic experiences in more DBTE disciplines.

I expected teachers to treat the UIL One-Act Play production differently than other productions because of its unique function as both a production and a competition piece. Because all teachers interviewed feel that they are required to participate in this activity that actively ranks them, I expected teachers to treat it similarly to a standardized assessment, which tends to bend curricula to pull undo focus (Ravitch, 2012). I found that I was somewhat wrong in this expectation.

Most teachers do treat the UIL differently than their other productions, but the ways that influence is displayed differs from teacher to teacher. For some teachers, the UIL meant a more restrictive learning environment for students, both in its learner-centeredness and social responsibility. For most the teachers, however, the producing of a UIL One-Act Play was either equally or more student lead and socially responsible than other productions. This result surprised me the most. Teachers felt freer to explore important topics and to let their students take a more active role in the production process for the UIL One-Act Play competition.

On the last question: Only two teachers said that their curricula are oriented to success in the UIL contest. Teachers participate in the UIL One-Act Play competition, and they do their best, but succeeding in the contest does not define their school year the way that succeeding in a standardized test does in testable subjects (Ravitch, 2012). Because of this, the UIL One-Act Play does not have the limiting effect on curriculum that I was expecting to find in any of the three categories of theatre curriculum investigated.
The largest theme that emerged from the data is that the UIL One-ACT Play does not regularly hinder theatrical curricula in Texas. Teachers utilize a wide variety of strategies and objectives in their theatre classrooms, each with its own advantages and disadvantages in their learner-centeredness, social responsibility, and comprehensiveness. I expected the UIL One-ACT Play competition to limit student experiences and encourage a narrow, teacher-centered practice. I found that while it may not actively encourage curricular quality in these three areas, it didn’t hinder it either.

The assertion of the UIL and proponents of the UIL One-ACT Play contest is that because the contest exists, and is required of teachers, schools are encouraged to develop strong theatre programs (Bedichek, 1956). This study cannot determine if this claim is true, but it does indicate that the contest does not interfere with teachers’ ability to produce learner-centered, socially responsible, and comprehensive theatre classrooms.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The UIL One-ACT Play is the largest interscholastic theatre competition in the world (UIL, n.d.b.). However, very little research has been done on its interaction with Texas schools and curricula. More studies need to be conducted in order to investigate the impact of this large program.

All my impressions of the curricula studied came from interviews of the teachers. In order to reinforce this data, and increase their reliability, a more in-depth case study should be conducted (Lichtman, 2013). Student interviews and
classroom observation along with teacher with the teachers would help in getting a
clearer picture of how learner-centered, socially responsible, and comprehensive
Texas theatre curricula are.

Further, quantitative data derived from surveys of Texas theatre teachers
should be used to triangulate knowledge gained from these studies in order to give
a bigger picture of curriculum across the state. Qualitative research, by it’s nature,
is less generalizable than properly executed quantitative research (Marshall &
Rossman, 2011). Triangulating allows us to reap the benefits that both types of
research have to offer.

Reflection

When I started this research process, I sought to learn more about Texas
theatre curricula. What was being taught? How was it being taught? As I
transcribed and analyzed the interviews, I was profoundly struck with how unique
and personalized each teacher’s curriculum was. I was impressed with how
learner-centered, socially responsible, and comprehensive the teachers were, and I
couldn’t help but look back at my own experience as a teacher and at all my
curricular and pedagogical shortcomings. I was convinced that, in order to have a
“functioning classroom” I would have to take much more of an authoritarian
position above my students. My students did not have an adequate say in the
curriculum or in the choice of extra-curricular plays. I had fallen into the trap of
believing that “process” and “product” were antithetical in an educational theatre
environment. This approach was not successful for me. I often struggled with
“maintaining control” over my classroom, and I argued with students much more than I’d like to admit.

However, after reading the theories and transcribing the interviews of the participants, it is now very clear to me that process and product are not opposites, and an educationally worthwhile and holistic process can even improve the product. Seeing this in practice has had a drastic impact on ways I view teaching. This thesis has drastically changed in the way I view curriculum, and my classrooms will be more democratic and anti-hegemonic as a result.
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

PERSONAL BACKGROUND
Tell me about yourself as a theatre educator. What brought you to this work? What keeps you/sustains you in this work?
How long have you been teaching? Participating in UIL?
How long have you taught at your present school?
How many theatre teachers are at your school? Do they teach theatre full time?
What is your educational background? What degrees do you have?
What kind of theatrical experience do you have?
What do you feel is your biggest directorial strength?

SCHOOL BACKGROUND
Can you describe the demographics of your school? Racial makeup of student and teacher populations? Socioeconomic background?
Urban/Suburban/Rural?
What makes your school different from other schools? What does it have in common with other schools?
What is your school's UIL category? (1A, 2A, etc.)
In what ways does your school's community support your theatre program?
What are the ways in which “support” is demonstrated? Funding? Administrators’ enthusiasm? Administrators’ flexibility in scheduling? Small class sizes? Afterschool programming support in additional staffing for rehearsals?
Can you describe your school's student interest in your program? Are they committed to the program?
What are the ways in which “student interest” is demonstrated?

CURRICULUM
General
Can you describe your school year? (semesters? Trimesters? Class makeup?)
Are your classes a semester long? A year long?
How many classes do your students attend a day? How many classes do you teach a day?
Do you operate on a block schedule?
What classes do you teach?
Describe your typical yearly season.
Do you have a regular rehearsal procedure? What is it? Why?
On what is most your classroom time spent? If you had more time, where/how would you spend it?
What do you want students to leave your class having learned? What do you want them to take with them?

CTE
What technical skills do your students learn? Do students at different levels learn different technical skills?
How do you teach acting? Do you discuss different acting methods?
How much technical experience do your acting students receive?
How much acting experience do your technical students receive?
Can you describe the roles of the students in productions? What are their responsibilities? What are your responsibilities?
What are student’s roles and responsibilities in the classroom?
Do students help you design your shows? UIL and non-UIL?
Do your students study playwriting? Dramaturgy?
In your classroom, do you try to create a balance of theatrical competencies (such as acting, directing, playwriting, tech, etc)?

LCP
How much influence do your students have in your curriculum? What kind of influence do they have?
Do students have a hand in assessing their own work?
If yes – describe. If yes, what brought you to that assessment strategy/practice?
What kinds of student decisions affect UIL performances?
Are these different from non UIL performances?
Do students ever help choose a play?
Do they have a hand in choosing material covered in class?
Would you say you have a democratic classroom? Why/why not?
Would you say your classroom is learner-centered?

SRP
What guides your selection of plays? Who and what are the multiple influences on your decision-making process?
Do you consider social issues or politics when selecting plays for your students? Could you give me an example?
Have your students ever performed a play that dealt issues of race, poverty, ability, or sexuality in student productions?
Have you ever performed a play where the main character was not heterosexual?
Are you more likely to perform a play on these topics during UIL? Less likely? Why?
Have you performed any plays from outside the US or Europe?
Do you consider your classroom a “safe space?” What steps do you take to ensure this? How have students indicated that it is a “safe space?”

COMPETITION

UIL
Did you participate in UIL as a high school student?
Do you feel you have a choice in participating in UIL?
What’s the furthest you’ve gotten in the UIL tournament?
Do you enjoy the UIL tournament? Do your students?
What unique challenges are there in directing a UIL show?
What does the UIL competition look for in a play?
What plays have you performed for UIL? Do any stand out? What was your favorite?
Have you ever dealt with issues of race, poverty, or sexuality in your UIL productions?
When choosing a UIL play, what role do the play’s themes have in your choice?
Do students have a role in choosing the plays you perform for UIL?
What effect does UIL have on the rest of your year?
What parts do your students play in the direction of your UIL show?
Design? Acting? Direction?

General Attitudes Toward Competitions
What are your feelings about competition in general?
Are their problems associated with competition? What are they?
Are there benefits of competition? What are they?
Do you include competition in your classroom practice?
Do you think competition can help students learn? What makes you say that?
Is competition a natural part of theatre? Should it be?

WRAP UP
Is there anything else you would like to add?
Do you have any questions for me?

Possible Follow Up Questions (These may be asked after responses to individual questions):
What makes you say that?
Can you say more about that?
Can you name an example?
Appendix B: Sample from Transcript and Interview Analysis

Below you will find a sample from one participant’s transcript and my analysis. Questions are bolded, which are followed by the participants answer. My notation was originally color-coded, but in this appendix will appear as the following: *learner-centered practice, **socially responsible practice, ***comprehensive theatre education, and ****views on competition. After the individual answers were analyzed, a summary for the participants responses in each category was added to the end, which I have also included using the same notation. Areas where portions of the transcript are missing here are notated with (...).

What do you feel is your biggest directorial strength?

Well, as a director I have...I would say it’s kind of hard to critique yourself as a director as far as what your strengths are. It’s easy to tell you a weakness, but I feel as though creating a safe, friendly learning environment is one of my strengths as a director, and to pull the most out of each individual student, and to create a large ensemble. Because, we really consider what we’ve created here to be an ensemble theatre, you know where anyone can step in at any given moment and fill the shoes of the lead, or any alternate can step in and we really don’t miss a beat. Having a great sense of ensemble and family is really my strength as a director.

*By focusing on building a cohesive ensemble, the teacher ensures that all students’ contributions are valued and efforts recognized. This fits within Apple’s requirements of a democratic classroom.
**By building a family this way, the teacher has established an environment where respect and community are essential. This could be considered anti-hegemonic teaching.**

(...)

**What makes your school similar to other schools?**

We’re similar in terms of the state of Texas, there is a huge following for that UIL One Act Play contest. We’ve got lots of neighboring schools, schools around the state of Texas that really feed off of that. It’s like our football season. Once football’s over the kids are going, “it’s time for one act play.” They’re really excited. It’s almost a sport around here. There’s a huge culture and following at my school district, and I would argue that it’s the largest, person per person, the largest in the state. We’ve got at our performance the other day, we probably had 150 people from our school there I was thinking, “our town’s only got a thousand people in it.” A tenth of the town was there, and partly because we don’t have a stage. It’s nice to see our kids on a particular performance space. The following of our One Act Play is similar to other school districts, and it’s becoming even more popular than it was in the 80’s and 90’s and early 2000’s. Administrators are catching on, they’re catching the fever for One Act Play. I think that’s what makes us similar to other schools.

***Excitement for the competition ensures the place for theatre in the school. The teacher’s UIL successes feed into that.***

****Excitement for the theatre program is directly related to the contest according to the teacher. The teacher really likes the contest, and really finds it to boost his program. The contest play is seen by the community as something to cheer for, like a sport.

(...)

**And you mentioned them going to the actual UIL performances, but in what other ways does your community support the program?**

Well a few years ago I started a theatre booster, so that’s helped to expand the theatre department. I’ve had parent and community involvement with the theatre department in terms of fundraising and giving away our first scholarships, which is unheard of in such a small school, the community has backed our script selections, they are constantly donating items, whether it’s clothing or instruments, sheet metal or piles of wood, they even outside of our building, knowing that we’re going to take them we just have that sense of community. They’re always asking if I need anything before they throw it away. You know, teachers, if they’re going to have a garage sale and they’ll e-mail everybody and the theatre department and say “If you
need any of this stuff before I sell it. I'll happily give it to you guys." So we've got that constant community support. They just love seeing their kids on stage, because it's the only source of theatre in this town. It's the only source of entertainment is what our school offers. You can drive though our town and go "what's here?" You'll see there's a 12 time state One Act Play company, a 6 time state champion One Act Play company. That's what's in this town. There's a two time baseball state champion. That's what the school does. It's the center of this community. And so, I can ask a stranger on the street if they have a safety pin to pin one of the kid's costumes and, so long as they knew it would help the kids, they're give their only forgotten safety pin, so to speak, to help out the kids. I mean, that's what we do here, and I would do the same for anyone in this community, even if I don't know their name.

*By reaching out to the community and ensuring that the community is involved in curricular decisions (script choice) the teacher has widened the flow of ideas.

**The teacher uses the booster club to not only benefit his program, but the students as well. Through the making of a scholarship, the teacher is addressing a need of some of the students in his program, an act that makes a visible, tangible change.

****Again, the contest is compared to a sport as a reason for civic pride.

**Can you describe your typical school year? Semesters, Trimesters?**

Yeah, sure. So, it's really challenging to do Theatre Arts productions in a small school. I know a lot of schools our size do one production a year and that is One Act Play. You know, my lead actors were on the varsity football team, so every day after school they are at practice. My lead actresses are at volleyball practice in the fall, so it's very challenging to get those productions in, and each year I try to in my theatre productions class, which I consider my One Act Play group, I will involve the TEKS into a class production. So, from stage management to make up to scenic design and set construction, acting, directing, [script] cutting, anything that's involved with the TEKS, publicity and marketing, the students have to do in our class as well as put on the production. So, I'm able to teach and direct at the same time in the fall, and we usually do two shows at the same time with a group of about 25 kids. So, I'll have them on one side of my gym doing one show and another group on the other side doing another show, and half of them are working on costumes, so I'm able to follow the TEKS, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, in a classroom rehearsal. So they kind of sort of teach themselves. So, my administrators come in and they're kind of floored by this organized chaos, but they see constant learning and engagement, and they see the students teaching themselves. So, there's a bit of scaffolding that happens because I'll have seniors, juniors, freshman, sophomores, all from the same class and kind of passing down the techniques, they're looking on the projector to see the next task, making sure
they’re following the procedures, and making sure they’re in line. Kind of, and they even grade themselves. So, I have a very ensemble way of teaching. I’ve had several teachers, student teachers come by to observe my classroom asking if I could just write a book on this because, literally, they’re teaching themselves. I’m the type of teacher that doesn’t worry if I’m gone, “Oh, no, what are they going to get done?” I was hosting a debate tournament on the other side of the school and I didn’t even need a substitute teacher. So, I had them in the library, I was in the cafeteria, which is next to the library, and I could look if my class wasn’t working. They get excited about that. My other classes do the same thing: They work on a much smaller production, just for classroom purposes: whether it’s Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day or True Story of the Three Little Pigs, they work on some small-scale production, and they work on the TEKS, so it’s another opportunity for the community to see their students on stage, seeing things that they’ve never done. So, That’s my fall works. We will perform two plays, a double feature, on the open week of football week, and we don’t have...we virtually have no after school rehearsals in the fall, but it’s almost as though I’m preparing those students for One-Act Play season. And then we’ll have, after football season ends in December, we’ll host those auditions, and students will come in, and anywhere from 50 to 60 students will come in and audition for the one act play, and come January that list is posted. I get all of the students schedules that I selected to be on the company, and then I work their schedules so that they can be in one class. So, I’m kind of a counselor in that regard. An administrator: So that rehearsals could be easier come spring. So, we work on that in Spring.

*By structuring class this way, by allowing students to “teach themselves” in a project-driven environment, the lessons being taught are very learner-centered. Students are constructing knowledge on their own. While goals (tasks) are assigned by the teacher, the best way to REACH that goal is decided by the students. Students participate as both student and teacher in this scenario, as those who have “been here before” help those who have not. As described, the practice seems to be very democratic, as the efforts of each student are necessary for the completion of the goal (a well performed show.)

**By encouraging students, allowing them to experiment and explore, and by feeding their excitement, the teacher is fighting the dehumanizing nature of schooling (Pinar, 1975). By allowing them to “teach themselves” students are constructing knowledge, instead of it being “given” to them by the teacher in a banking system.

***The teacher strikes a balance between theatrical competancies. He bases his classroom around the state standards, and encourages students to work with all aspects of theatre (technical and acting). There is no segregation of “tech” and “on stage.” It seems that everyone does everything.
The school year is devoted to preparing for the UIL contest. He tries to do more productions than just the one, but it is clear that the UIL performance takes most of his focus, and most of the focus of his students and community.

(...)

And you teach one productions class and, you said, six other just general theatre classes?

Okay, so I have...I have two eighth grade introductory theatre courses. These are kids that are going to be in high school next year so they are prepping, so they have an introductory theatre course. If they master that course, they are allowed to take Theatre 2 when they get to high school. Most students are put back into Theatre 1 when they get to high school...They actually, they are separated a bit so that they aren’t all...I have two eighth grade classes, and then there’s Theatre Productions class, that does include some freshman, some sophomores, juniors and seniors. Some are theatre 2, and so on. Some are theatre 4 kids. I have two Theatre 1 classes, and then I have two Theatre 2+ classes. Those can include 2nd year theatre students, and maybe their schedules don’t allow for them to be in the productions class, or maybe they’re advanced and they just prefer to be in the Theatre 2+ class, and I’ve got students who are Theatre 3 students in that class, which involves more preps, but it’s fairly simple: you know, you get those students to start being the example and start teaching the actual subject to see if they’ve mastered it. So, I do have an advanced theatre class, if you will, that’s kind of below the Theatre Productions class. I’ve got two of those.

No division between tech students and acting students, as I find in larger schools. They are not in separate classes.

When you are rehearsing, do you have a regular procedure that you follow?

Yes, I do. Let’s say a rehearsal is from 6:00-8:00PM: the rehearsal begins at 6:00 with me, the director. Students are required to be here 15 minutes before to warm up as a group, and once they’ve all warmed up at 5:45-6:00PM, then we’ll begin the rehearsal. If they don’t warm up until 5:50, than the rehearsal will go over five minutes to 8:05. So the students’ actions, their prep determines the rehearsal schedule. Once the One Act Play season starts, and we start those rehearsals at 6:00, some of the things we do is at least once a week is we run through of the show in the first hour and to provide notes and feedback. Or vice versa, let’s come up with ideas from last rehearsal for the first hour and then let’s look at some scenes that have some issues. Whatever the biggest issue is, sometimes it’s a matter of getting all the way through the show to make sure the students are off book, or work transitions for an hour or individual scene work or relationships, we set at least an hour in each rehearsal for an issue with the show. I always reserve ten minutes at the end of each rehearsal, kind of like I do in class, a bit of a reflection
period. I know sometimes in rehearsal some people can kind of feel torn apart, you know, at odds about some criticism, but that ten minutes really brings us back together. We’ll sit in a circle sometimes and just, we’ll say something good about the person to our left from that day, words of encouragement, Or we’ll just talk about how the rehearsal went, and how important it is for them to leave any personal feelings outside of this rehearsal, because it’s not about them personally; it’s about their growth as an actor in this particular role. I find that ten minutes of personal reflection period to be very helpful in keeping the program in tact. So, it’s something I do in every rehearsal.

*The “prep” or warm-up time is student driven. The teacher specifies the goal (to be warmed up and ready to rehearse) but the students decide how to best get there based on knowledge acquired through experience and the course. The reflection period at the end of the rehearsal and class ensures that the valuing of students’ perspectives, a necessary component for a democratic practice, perseveres. The students are able to practice this learner-centered way because they have developed a good working relationship through their own efforts.

**The reflection time also encourages students to examine their own work, their own progress, and acknowledge the progress of others. Students can “take care of themselves” during a particularly trying or stressful period. The teacher cares about the students’ wellbeing. The teacher sees this as a crucial part of his practice, as he says it keeps the program “in tact.” Respect for everyone is important to the teacher and the program.

****After school rehearsals are required for the one act play but not other plays. This puts an emphasis on the UIL show.

If you had more time, either in rehearsals or in your classroom, where would you spend it?

If I had more time...I would say for us, we would spend it in an actual theatre since we don’t have that kind of space. You know, to take my kids there and let them be around the equipment, the technical equipment, instead of pressing make believe buttons on paper. I would definitely do that. I would also take my students out to eat more often. I bring food to them, but just building that sense of ensemble and family because, you know, sometimes that’s all they do have. Coming from broken homes or things like that, this is their one refuge. They look forward to it, running around. I’d spend more time building our ensemble and family doing fun activities, which would strengthen the relationships within the cast and company.

**The teacher is aware of the student’s economic situation, and it alters his operational curriculum (bringing food to the students).
***Even though the teacher does not have adequate facilities, the students still practice technical skills (buttons on paper.) The lack of facilities is not an excuse for letting the technical go.

(...)

**What are the student responsibilities in productions?**

Well, it is all student centered. So, it is all very much like One Act Play. One Act Play is not like basketball or football or any other sport because I cannot call a time out and make a substitution and give them words of encouragement when they are doing poorly, if they are doing poorly. It’s all in the students’ hands. So, I think, the best way to prepare them for a competition is to have your entire program like that. That includes having the stage manager or having a student representative introducing the shows, taking the ticket money, creating the publicity, creating the programs, again, the students are running the program, to making sure everything is set backstage, opening the doors, passing out programs, you know, from collecting money, sound, the lights, you know. I basically say, “thank you for coming,” and turn it over to the students. Cutting house lights off, running the...making sure all the emergency exits are locked, or open, making sure the Cyc curtain is down, they do it all. They do it all. And I think that’s...Because they’re engaged they want to be a part of it. When there’s so many alternates, or so many people back stage, or crew members that don’t have a job, so they get out of theatre at other schools. “We don’t do anything but sit here,” is what I hear often, so I give them something to do. If they have nothing to do, there’s always a costume that needs to be repaired, or a prop that needs to be reglued or repurposed. A make up kit that needs to be reorganized. Giving these kids purpose and identity is very important.

*The teacher explicitly mentions that the rehearsal process is student-centered. The teacher feels in order to prepare them for a performance, the students need to be able to handle as much responsibility as possible during the performances. The students are clearly driving the success or failure of the project themselves. The teacher also consciously removes himself from “the spotlight,” making the performance about the students and not him. Even the introduction of the show, a task which directors often take upon themselves, is given to the students. All of this embodies a democratic, learner-centered practice wherein everyone’s efforts are necessary.

**The program belongs to the students, not the teacher. They are who the program belongs to and who the program benefits.

***By placing the responsibility for the production on the students, they show a more complete mastery of a wide variety of theatrical disciplines.
****The UIL is compared to a sport in that he sees the UIL contest play to be more of a student-centered event. He cannot control the play the same way a coach can control a game.

What are their responsibilities in the classroom?

It’s very much the same. For example, in my Theatre Productions class...It’s great because I had a student teacher here and I was at the door greeting students before the tardy bell and once we had five students inside they were already doing vocal warm ups, because that classroom time is very important. During that same time I had students, the stage manager and his crew, were in another room listening to the morning announcements transcribing them. While they’re transcribing those announcements, the other students were still warming up vocals, they then text them to the entire class, so we’re not wasting four minutes of listening to the announcements; they can look on their phones between class to see what the morning announcements were. Just right off the bat of class, that is something we do, one of their responsibilities. When they walk in, the stage manager sweeps the floor to make sure the rehearsal space is clear and neat, ready to go, and they set up the classroom in a way that is conducive to a rehearsal so it's no longer a classroom. They move the chairs and desks and couches. They move a podium there if I want to stand at a podium. They set up any special side lights, actresses put on rehearsal skirts, actors put on dance shoes in that first five minutes of class, and the crew has out spiral and ready to take notes. Often times I ask the alternates to make the notes for the day, so that they can deliver the notes after during that reflection period they can provide feedback. That’s their job on several occasions in class. So, actors have to warm each other up, get each other focused, and make sure that everyone has done their homework. Did they underline...did they write their objective out in each scene, They open each other’s scripts to make sure they have the objective written down, or did they write down the important words in their lines so that they make sense. So, they really are accountable for it.

*Responsibilities are student-driven. The students are taking their own time (the time between classes) and are getting ready for the rehearsal without being told to do so.

**For the actors, the activity of checking each other’s work, as described, seems to be another example of building a cooperative ensemble. However, I wonder if this activity could be doing the opposite. Are students thinking “gotcha” when a fellow actor does not achieve this task? Is that what SHOULD happen? I also wonder about the tasks described for the stage manager and technical crew. Is the transcribing of announcements seen as a worth-while task for the students, or is the crew placed on a lower rung than the actors? Is the crew seen as subservient?
***While I wonder about the theatrical application for morning announcement transcribing, students, as described, learn and practice being critics, actors, and technicians in class in an authentic way.

**Do the students help you design the shows?**

Yes, very much so. In the fall it’s a little more difficult, with students being only present during class. When it comes to One Act Play, our theme is always “catch fire.” So, I’ll ignite it a little bit and get them going, thinking about what direction I’d like to go with a certain show, or certain scene, and then light bulbs go off, and they’ll show up an hour early next time with a new idea for blocking or chorus work or sounds, organic sounds, and things like that. So, I’ve been very fortunate for them to be...be a part of the designing process of a show, and have their foot in it, because, with a sense of ownership the show is just that much better. It’s really the kid’s show. With...I feel like I’m this theatre art...artist director...I’m not sure how to say it, but I let the kids come up with a lot of ideas and then it’s my job to smooth them out and make sure they’re all consistent and fit within the style of the show.

*Under this “catch fire” process, student input is not only valued, but necessary for the completion of the show. This shows that students are not worker bees, but a integral part of the planning process throughout the rehearsal period.

**This methodology is in contradiction to a “banking system,” students are the builders of their production, rather than the tools of the teacher.

***Students practice working as designers and directors.

****The UIL show is seen as an opportunity for more open discussion and a decentralized design process. However, I wonder why this is reserved for the One Act Play.

(...)

**Do your students study playwriting or dramaturgy?**

Yes, and I’ll be the only one to say that today (laughs). No, but, I studied that extensively in graduate school and it really got me excited because I wanted to share that information with students who I thought would be good at it. I think it’s an up and coming profession that’s still not utilized that much in high school one act plays. Most directors are their own dramaturge. So, that’s another task I have bestowed upon the students as a whole. So, our framework and tablework that we traditionally do before a show is really for all the actors. They are the ones who are supposed to bring in new information about the script; the past two years, I guess the past three years, we’ve adapted our own scripts. This year we did an original
script for One Act Play that we devised ourselves. I came up with most the material and it was the students’ job to cut that material down within a certain time frame, and still have a consistent storyline with character development and arc. So, we’ve done that for the past two years in One Act Play.

***Being able to research, evaluate, and talk about a script is an essential part of DBTE. The teacher makes an effort for students to practice dramaturgy, but I’m not sure I would call cutting down a script “dramaturgy.”

Could you talk about...this isn’t one of my questions...but could you talk about your experience of using an original work at the UIL?

Yes, it’s very difficult because you’re so attached to your own work, especially last year with Kholstomer: The Story of a Horse. One student came to me two summers ago and said, “can we do this play?” And I said, “No, that’s a musical.” And he said, “Why don’t you just write it?” “Well...Okay...” So I contacted...found the original story from Leo Tolstoy, got in touch with the people from Russia, got a Russian translation, found a puppet show, and then we just dove in, trying to piece together scenes, so we felt really attached. We went to our first clinic, and it was about ten minutes too long, and we were suggested to cut scenes. It hurt more than it would if it weren’t an original piece. So, we were so attached to the literature because it was our own that we were almost blinded by the things that didn’t really fit in. We just wanted everything to work. So, that process is a little more difficult when it’s your child, if you will, to accept criticism of your piece you’ve created. So, it’s an experience we had never had to experience, and a lot of directors have not, but, we grew tremendously. We were able to detach ourselves from our own performance and our own affinities about our performance that...and see what was true to the story line: was there a through-line that we weren’t pressing. It was a bit of a challenge to go through that.

*The student chose the work that they wanted to perform, and the teacher worked to put the show on. Students are able to see the results of their contribution, which is necessary for a production or classroom to be learner-centered. It is not enough to say that a classroom is student-centered, the students must be able to see it as well. This showcases a de-centering of power. While the play was primarily written by the teacher, it was at the behest of a student, it was not the teacher’s decision which was then imposed on the students.

***Students practiced being authentic playwrights. They not only helped devise a script, they saw it produced and performed for an officially sanctioned event.

****This teacher is taking a difficult path by producing his own work for UIL. Most directors produce already approved scripts, or they send in already published scripts that are not on the list. Writing his own script allowed for a much more
open process, and allowed for students to participate more deeply, which is fantastic.

(...)

**How much influence do your students have in your curriculum?**

Well, you know, that’s a great question because often times I have to...kind of like English...English 1 has to repeat the same curriculum. Unfortunately, Theatre 1, Theatre 2, Theatre 3, those kids have been in the program for several years they have done the same stuff before, and so, if a class...if a group of Theatre 2 or 3 has, you know, participated in something before at an introductory level I will make sure that it is more challenging once they’ve reached that unit a second time. Or third time. And, you know, students have a knack now for technology, so, trying to incorporate more technology based on this generation of learners is really a result of them. So I do more video projects because students are constantly walking around with cell phones, pads, etcetera, so we do more video projects, I’ve created an online profile for videos for our students to see and participate in. I’ve created a video contest within our school, and so has UIL, this year they’ve started a film contest. Catering to those students. They really do drive the curriculum in the direction in which it’s heading. In my productions class they really decide the One Act Play. I give them five and they get to decide which one they would rather do out of those five and I’ll approve, you know if I feel it is a competitive piece, sometimes I do run into students that I realize the material I’m teaching is kind of stale and is kind of hard to get through and students don’t want to learn it. Students don’t want to sit there and learn the ten steps to theatre etiquette. No gum, no...they don’t want to learn that. They don’t want to learn from a piece of paper, and I don’t want to get in their faces. So what I do is, I take them to a performance space and we’ll reenact it. We’ll make a video of the do’s and don’ts of theatre etiquette. And, in turn, it’s more successful and it’s in their memory as opposed to just some list of ten commandments. So, if I see there’s no engagement and there’s no retention of information, I’ll try to come up with a creative way to reteach the unit and try to make it more fun and exciting.

*Not only are the unconscious needs of the student met (in the eyes of the teacher) by shifting the focus of the class to more fit their technological abilities, students are consciously affecting the course. When the play produced is part of the class (when rehearsed in class) than the script chosen becomes intentional curriculum. By letting the students choose their script, they are having a tangible effect over the material they learn. The teacher does have a power of “oversite,” but student decisions are clearly altering the curriculum.

**The teacher is reflective as to the needs of the students. He is asking questions about his practice, the students, and how he can serve them better. He is coming up with practices that allow students to construct knowledge, rather than frame
knowledge as something concrete. Shows that their culture has value (by
acknowledging their technology.)

***Learning to engage in theatre as an audience member is in line with DBTE
practice. The film project allows students to act as actors, technicians, and
directors as well, as long as they are learning the difference between film and
theatre and are not being sent off to film something on their own.

(…)

Do students have a hand in choosing material covered in class?

When it comes to the classroom plays and scenes most definitely. Almost 100%. I
will...when it's time to select scenes I will have more than double the amount of
scenes needed for the class and I will let them pick their own scene. Or their
monologue. I don’t assign a monologue, or do song monologues for students who
will actually use a song they like that has great lyrics and want to turn that into a
monologue. So, they have a huge hand in that actual material as well as when we
do a class play. We read a large group of plays, they decide if they want to do a
comedy or drama, and we start moving in that direction, and I do a little more
research and provide them with the appropriate material.

*I wonder about how much the students have to choose material in the classroom
when not dealing with plays and scenes. Do the students decide what other kinds
of projects they learn? What kinds of discussions happen over these topics? Is the
classroom entirely project-based?

***Students are participating as actors as well as learning how to evaluate scripts in
the described activity.

Would you say you have a democratic classroom?

Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, I had a...I think at one point I had a unit right
after the...at the beginning of the school year: it was improvisation using some
puppets I learned about at the Lincoln Center in New York, and I realized they
weren't working together as well as I liked, so I did some team building exercises
and move more into large group scenes, as opposed to small puppets.
So..uhm...they came up to me and said “[name of teacher], we're just not getting
this. We're not working together and I can’t get this person to do anything...” So, I
realized that it was too soon, you know. So, based of the class dynamic, I had to
kind of shift my lesson plans and move that to the spring semester, which paid off
tremendously. So...
*The teacher seems to understand what I mean by “democratic classroom.” The students’ input is valued, respected, and implemented in the curriculum, and equality and cooperation between students seems to be encouraged.

**The teacher places the treatment of the students above the material covered in class and over the intended curriculum.

***Working with puppets allows students to be actors, designers, and costume technicians all at once.

**What guides your selection of plays?**

Well, there is a Community Standards form at UIL, so my community is a big part of my theatre department. That’s something I take into consideration. I know a lot of schools don’t have that, so I do consider it an advantage because if the community supports me, than the students are going to support us and, you know, it’s just going to be a great experience. So, I try to pick something that will be in my Community Standards. I also try to pick something that will challenge the students as actors and technicians as well as myself as a director. I am known...I love directing comedies and my kids are pretty sharp at it, and those are pretty easy to do for me, as a director, so I challenge myself for One Act Play and I’ve done dramas for the past five years, and it’s challenged me as a director, and it’s challenged our community who, you know, not just show up to be entertained but for it to have an effect on them. Not just be entertained by what they see, so, that’s been a great experience. That’s kind of how I select it, based on the community, the student’s wants and needs, and what will challenge all of us. And what will help us grow together.

****See the summary for more information on the Community Standards form.

*The emphasis on the community is a trait of a democratic classroom. Also, by saying “based on the community, the student’s wants and needs, and what will challenge all of us,” the teacher is essentially endorsing the Tyler Rational when picking his intentional curriculum.

**Do the community standards interfere with choosing an anti-hegemonic script? Does the community prevent the teacher from performing plays about under-represented peoples, or plays about institutional oppression? The teacher is very keenly aware of the wants of the community, however, I wonder if this is a curse or a blessing.

***By striving to “challenge himself,” the teacher is ensuring the students participate in a wide variety of types of literature. However, he never mentions the students participating in a musical, which is a very big part of American theatre.
Do you consider social issues or politics when selecting plays?

Absolutely. It’s a wonderful learning opportunity. As long as you can direct something like that in a tasteful manner, I think the community, the students and myself can learn something from that.

**By framing the plays he chooses as a “learning opportunity” for the community, students, and himself, he displays a few things. 1) that he is willing to reflect on his work to ensure that his plays are sending the messages he wants them to send and 2) he is willing to challenge the community’s preconceived notions on sociopolitical topics.**

Could you give me an example?

I don’t think that anything...we are doing a fairly religious play this year and based on Community Standards it’s a green light there. It’s just praises behind it. They are a very small community, they are very faith based in Christianity, and uh, we’ve had a lot of support there. Whereas, if we were in a larger area, a larger town, a city even, Austin, it may have come off as I am pushing religion on these kids. I should not force these kids to do something like that. Luckily, the students brought this material to me. I also think there is a...a bit of...some racy scripts and stories out there that can push the boundaries, whether it’s corruption of the church, which has happened here before, corruption of the church, or the Catholic Church, doesn’t fare well in our community. And I don’t think that it would be smart...I don’t think that’s an opportunity to educate our community about the corruption of a church. Or any sort of play that has a rape scene, it doesn't really fit in our Community Standards or the expectations of our children because, again, these are children in a small town with a limited cultural experience. So, pressing my ideas and beliefs and on them is not fair to their parents, because that...the parents here, they know that is their job. That is the one thing they can give them, and so I would never want to do that. I want to change lives in a different way. I want for people to feel more comfortable in their own skin, I don’t want to change someone from a Republican to a Democrat or from an atheist to a Christian. I want to educate people. So that they are aware.

**According to Pinar (1981), educating is an “inescapably political as well as intellectual act” (p. 93). Even when done as apolitically as possible, “I don’t know and have no opinion,” one can be reinforcing an oppressive hegemony by not challenging it. The teacher tends to shy away from topics that would challenge the community in this one aspect (that he talks about). He says he wants to make people aware, but aware of what?**

(...)
Are you more likely or less likely to perform a play on one of these sort of heavy topics during UIL than for other performances?

Well, I would say, again it comes down to Community Standards and expectations. I would never want to put my students in a situation that was uncomfortable to them or their families, whether it has to do with sexuality, race, or religion. Anything. So, I select material for this community and...uh...if I were in another community, I would challenge myself to choose something I deemed appropriate for that community. Based on our limited cultural experiences, I would not. I am less likely to do so based on the huge religious following and faith based community. I’m more inclined to do something like The Exodus or Deliverance from the Bible, which is something I would not do in a community where I would do something about a homosexual lead character. So there...those two worlds...It's just based on the community. As far as contest it’s based on the community. I can see myself directing anything based on style of theatre or any lead character struggles, but it’s based off the community.

**Is the “limited cultural experiences” a reason to avoid topics of sexuality or race, or is it a reason to engage on those topics?**

***The teacher is open to a wide variety of scripts.***

****The “community standards” form is being used here as an excuse to not produce work that contains an anti-hegemonic message. In this way, the UIL contest is discouraging reconstructionist curricula. (…)****

What effect does [the UIL One-Act Play contest] have [on your curriculum] before the tournament starts?

Uh...(laughs) there’s a lot of anticipation around the school and within our company as well. We are, with the anticipation and excitement, we also realize there’s a lot of hard work that needs to go in before the big journey starts. But we, we try not to let it affect our lessons in our day-to-day curriculum, but, with our busy Spring term, we can’t afford for it not to. It’s what the school’s looking forward to, it’s what the community is looking forward to is One Act Play season.

***The UIL tournament pulls focus from other possible learning areas. Perhaps the students could do a musical, or perhaps they could get more practice with dramaturgy, or perhaps they could produce student-directed shows if they could “afford not to” devote so much attention to the UIL One Act.****

****A large portion of the curriculum is focused on UIL success. It is the highlight of this program’s production calendar.****
What parts do your students play in directing the UIL show?

Again, I consider it to be an ensemble company, so they will...they'll get various scenes to work on and they'll split up around the gym and they'll get individual scenes. Some of the students who are also actors will also direct a few scenes while I'm working with another group of actors and I'll give them some feed back and they'll work on the scene again. They have a large hand in it because if they don't, they'll be so disconnected from the actual literature.

*Students are outright directing scenes for the UIL One Act Play. The production is a product of their work, their ideas, and their drive. Very learner centered. Though, not too much more democratic from a traditional relationship between director and actor, since there is still a difference in power between the students who are directing the scenes and those who are not.

**The above also applies strongly to anti-hegemonic teaching.

***Students practice directing and see the results of their practice in a final product.

(...)

Summary:

*The practice at this school seems to be very learner centered. Projects are initiated by the adult, but student decisions guide the development of the work. According to the Roger Hart “ladder of participation” (as quoted by Lazarus) this program seems to fall between Levels 5 “Consulted and informed” and 6 “Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth.” (p. 62). The teacher has the final say, but the students are given a wide variety of decisions that have drastic influences over the production of the plays and over the course of the class, including material covered in class, what plays will be performed, and what the plays will look like. Michael Apple’s seven criteria of a democratic practice (including the flow of open ideas, faith in individuals and groups to solve problems, critical reflection, and concern for common good) are all represented in the teacher’s practice as described in the interview.

*Lazarus says “Like learner-centered classroom work, learner-centered production work engages student performers, playwrights, directors, designers, technicians, and dramaturges in dialogue, decision making, and individual collective action. The student’s place at the center of the production process is acknowledged, valued, and nurtured” (p. 71). The learner-centered nature of the program in combination with the program’s UIL success, challenge the “product vs. process” dichotomy.
**As far as anti-hegemonic teaching goes, this teacher is much more conflicted than he is with student-centered learning. He recognizes the power theatre can have in confronting hegemonic, oppressive society, but he shies away from it for fear of imposing his views on others. Pinar and Freire explain that when we teach we inherently impose a view, whether through intentional or operational curriculum. At the same time, I respect his decision to keep the community in mind. He feels that confronting them too harshly would do more harm than good, which I can’t argue with, but I wonder if he can’t push the envelope a bit harder.

**Lazarus provides 5 questions (and several more subquestions) teachers need to ask themselves in a socially-responsible practice: The one that I want to focus on most with this interview is:

- “How am I using the implicit political nature of theatre to engage students and the community?
  - How am I using theatre as a catalyst for civic dialogue? (he consciously sets aside time for dialogue, and has talked about bullying, body positivity, and at least a little on race)
  - How am I inviting multiple-perspective responses to our work? (he allows student input and community input to influence the program, though material covered is primarily from western traditions)
  - In what ways does the program reach beyond the school (the community seems to be a huge part of the program)
  - Does this work lead to awareness, action, or change (in some ways yes (like the scholarships) and in some ways no (like avoiding material on non-heterosexual people and downplaying race in oppression))” (p. 124).

***Because the program is so learner-centered, the students practice many different disciplines of theatre. The students are responsible for more aspects of the production, so naturally they will learn to do more. Students in this program will have a working knowledge of not only acting methods, but of technical and building skills as well. The content portion of the curriculum seems very strong, though I haven’t observed a lesson. The conceptual framework for DBTE includes eight disciplines: researcher, playwright, director, designer, technician, actor, audience, and critic. The teacher has described examples of the students learning each one of these content areas, and times when students practice or demonstration of their learning in these areas is displayed through a product the of the students design. Their learning directly alters the play.

***Eisner (1990) says that curriculum should, “teach skills, ideas, or forms of perception that are educationally important; intellectually challenging to students and stimulate higher order thinking...; presented through various forms of representation...; help make connection with learning in other areas both in and out of the school; provide multiple options for teachers to pursue” (p. 68). The curriculum as described by the teacher fits all of these criteria.
This teacher’s primary focus is the UIL One Act Play. It is the main production he does, and it is the production the town gets together for and supports in for, and it is the production his students are most excited about. The way the production calendar is set up, the UIL One Act Play is the climax of the school year for the theatre program. This is in part because it is an opportunity for the students to participate in theatre in a performance space designed for that purpose, instead of a cafetorium. I wonder if they had access to a better performance space would the focus be so heavily on UIL success?

The UIL Community Standards form mentioned by the teacher is similar to a permission slip. It has one signature line for the principal of the school, and it states in bold letters:

This play has been edited to comply with Section 1033(c)(I)(D). This play has been carefully examined and the script and production are approved for presentation by the students of our school and are acceptable in our community.

It also provides Section 1033(i)(I)(D)

Standards. Directors shall eliminate or reject profane references to a deity and obscene language, actions or scenes from the approved production. The administration of the producing school shall assure that the director complies with these requirements and that the play does not offend the moral standards of the community. When a script and the staged production are examined and approved by the administration of the producing school, the production is eligible for presentation at any contest site. The signed Standards Compliance Form serves to certify that the play and production have been carefully examined and approved for presentation. The League’s Play Appraisal Committee may eliminate language, actions, or scenes as a condition for approval of plays not on the approved lists.

This language, while broadly stated, could be used to actively discourage directors from challenging oppressive social norms.