



Student Accountability in Theatre Arts

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VIRTUAL SRS SYMPOSIUM 2021 | SMART PROGRAM



Our goals:

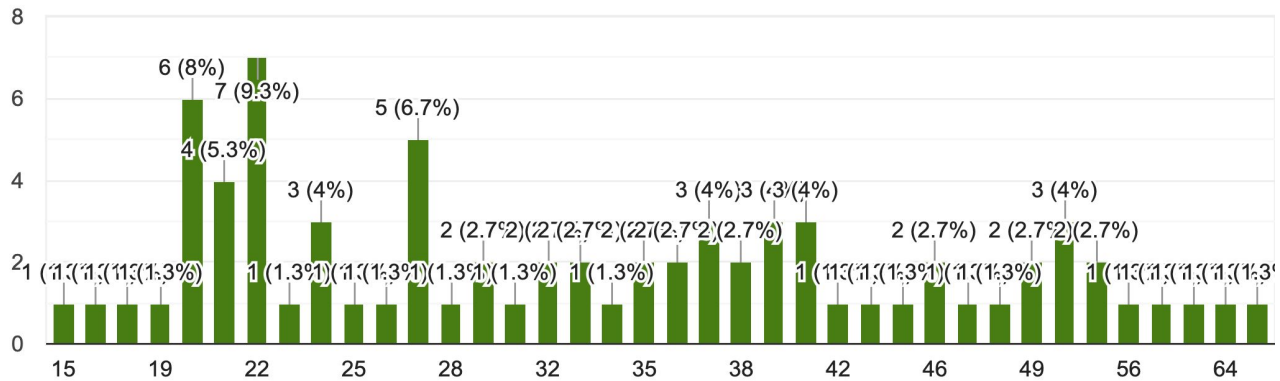
- To define accountability for ensemble based work in the performing arts classroom (specifically theatre organizations).
- How does consent based practice help set “doable” actions for accountability in the classroom/work place?
- To bring together different current or former groups, ages, and races of the theatre community to help us define accountability in their own words.

We surveyed people in the following Theatre organizations.

- UPSTATE Theatre Green Room
- KCACTF Members (Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival)
- The National Alliance of Acting Teachers
- Local Spartanburg Theatre Artists
- The Charleston Theatre Community
- Teaching Theatre Online Social Media Group
- TheatreFest Friends (Texas Theatre Group)
- The American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR)
- The Margolis Method Community (Theatre Practice Community)
- The Parent Artist Advocacy Lead
- Intimacy Choreographers/Coordinators/Educators Resource Group
- Artists Against Racism Network
- SCTC Southwestern Conference Women in Theatre Community
- The Greenville/Upstate SC Theatre Lovers Group
- The Black Acting Method Studio
- Asheville Actors

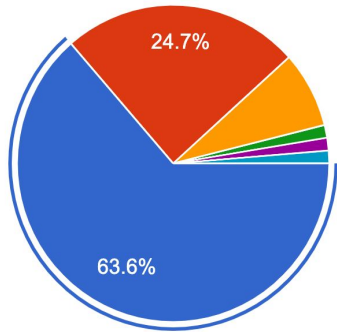
Survey

We were fortunate enough to gain input from sources between the ages of 15 and 64.

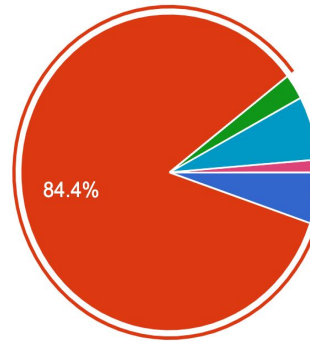


Survey

The majority of responses were from white people who identify as women.



- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to answer
- Gender fluid/ gender expansive
- Transmasculine



- Black
- White
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian
- Pacific Islander
- Biracial (two or more races, ie. black & white)
- Prefer not to answer

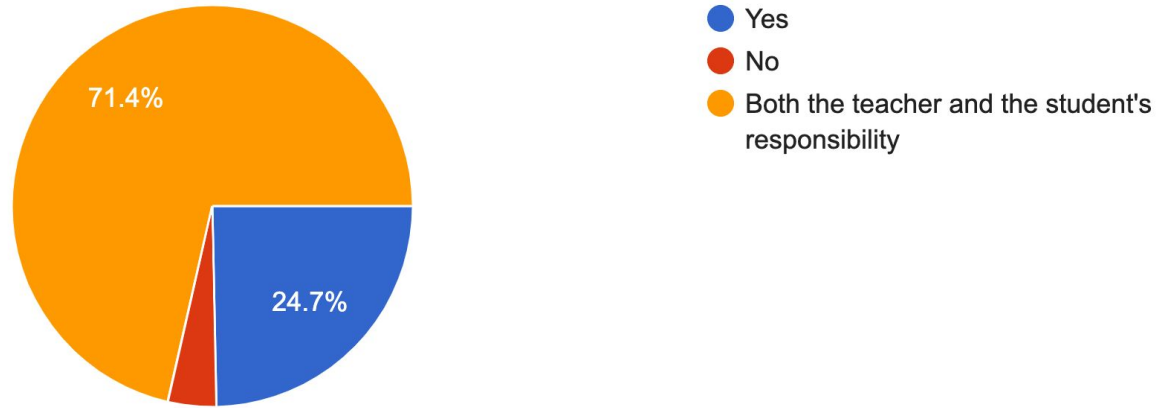
Survey

We then asked for people to define accountability in Theatre Arts in their own words:

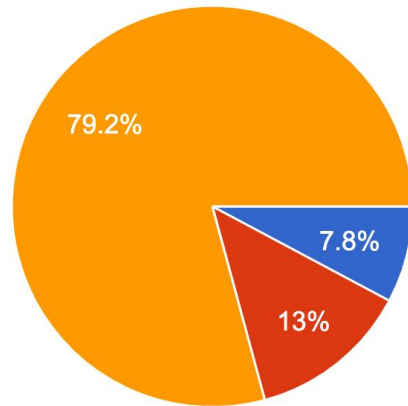
Courage | Helpfulness | Pride | Acceptance | Honesty | Change | Honor | Reliability | Awareness | Responsibility | Strength | Liability | Reciprocity | Ownership | Willingness | Communication | Equity | Trust | Empathy | Integrity | Policies | Obligation | Buy-In | Collaboration | Acknowledgement | Apology | Correction | Meaningful | Respect | Inclusivity | Expectation | Loyalty | Openness | Flexibility | Growth | Recognition | Commitment | Teamwork | Humility | Selflessness | Prepared | Timely | Listening | Action | Learning | Proof | Receipt | Cooperation | Dedication | Transparency | Goals | Dignity | Understanding | Consistency | Engagement | Self-discipline | Ensemble | Consequences | Response | Maturity | Duty | Organization | Determination | Punctuality | Reflection | Truth | Focus | Completion | Changed behavior | Community | Introspection | Leadership | Drive | Presence | Consent | Safety | Obligation | Admission | Showing up | Compassion | Answerability

The three words that were used the most were **responsibility, respectfulness, and honesty.**

Do you feel that it is the teacher's responsibility to set guidelines for group accountability?



Do you feel that it is the students' responsibility to set guidelines for group accountability?



- Yes
- No
- Both the teacher and the students' responsibility

How should the teacher handle group accountability when assigning group work in an theatre class? (scene work, design presentations, group performances)

“Set up ways of communication during the time of the scene and or group work, not wait until the end to check in. Have part of their grade be a part of doing the work has been what’s been used in the past. Mixed on if that should still happen. Definitely communicate that everyone is responsible for what the outcome in and if they’re not willing or able to, then they need to not be in the class at that time.”

“By first creating a safe/accessible space for students to feel comfortable in coming forward to acknowledge someone is acting outside of boundaries/guidelines. Implementing specific/accessible ways in which a student can report misbehaviour. Giving students permission to stop when boundaries are crossed and emphasizing the importance of listening and respect within the process.”

“Create a culture of trust, respect, and reliability. Make it safe for students to fail so that there's no fear for them of doing it "wrong" and facing judgements. Foster open communication and feedback in a safe space. Allow anonymous feedback outside class hours so students can inform the teacher of issues that the teacher may be unaware of.”

With ensemble based learning, when do you get the teacher involved when someone is lacking accountability in preparing group projects?

“As soon as it is recognized. Even if immediate action is not needed, it can help the process and keep instructors informed on practices and history.”

“I’d involve the teacher when their lack of involvement is keeping the group from progressing or succeeding. Call in the classmate about their limited participation/accountability first, then move for assistance from the teacher if things don’t improve.”

“After you have already discussed the issue as a group and with the person involved. It is difficult when someone is less committed than others in a theatre space, but the motivation to work more with the group rarely comes from teacher admonishments.”

How/when should a student communicate with the teacher when their partner is lacking accountability?

“They should talk to the teacher in private before or after class.”

“When a partner is not pulling their weight, not explaining why, and unresponsive to the point of impeding the project for others. At this time, I think it is worth communicating difficulties with partners and ask the teacher for a substitution, assistance reaching out to the partner if there is something you don’t know, or alternative projects/ways of completing learning objectives.”

“I’d encourage students to connect with each other first, the lack of accountability may be a lack of awareness or understanding. If it doesn’t improve connect with the teacher.”

“Be honest. I think it’s also good for students to try to communicate peer-to-peer about accountability, but the environment for communication needs to be cultivated by peers and teachers.”

How should a student communicate with their group partner if they are lacking accountability?

“Honestly, calmly and professionally. Everyone is human and has off days. Life also throws tough situations at people. They might be experiencing something fresh/raw which might be distracting them from their current work and themselves. Start the conversation on a break out of the rehearsal room. Open it without judgement, mention your concern for them and talk about the work with them.”

“Ask them if they need help. Instead of placing blame and accusing them of not caring, they should check in and try to see if they want to open up about why they've been struggling to hold themselves accountable. If the student does not feel comfortable doing so, it should be the responsibility of the teacher.”

“By asking questions around the harmful actions, by challenging the ideas and not the people, by naming how their actions affect them, by making their needs clear”

What is an appropriate amount of time to notify the teacher after a scene has been assigned about potential boundary conflicts?

“As soon as possible.” (7 responses)

“Immediately.” (5 responses)

“Ideally as soon as possible, or as soon as it’s been discovered, but it can be difficult if the boundary is discovered by the actor mid-process. Open and honest lines of communication can help this process.”

“As soon as possible, but sometimes it takes time to know that something may push a boundary. Whenever the student feels comfortable coming to the teacher is always the answer.”

“If someone has an issue with boundaries, it should be brought up ASAP (when the assignment is given); however, if new boundary conflicts arise during rehearsal, the teacher should respect the students and assess the situation.”

What are some of the best/most appropriate ways a teacher can help a student who is struggling with contributing to the group's work outside of class? (ie. not memorizing lines, not showing up, being late, missing rehearsals, etc.)

“Engage with the student and try to determine the disconnect. See if there is an acceptable alternative to the assignment or if there is a barrier stopping the student from achieving the goals.”

“Talking to them one on one to see if there are any external conflicts causing the slacking.”

“I think talking to them is appropriate to an extent. Understanding why there is a conflict will help the group involved be more flexible as needed. But, we have gotten away from accountability and have become too accepting of excuses rather than reasons for someone’s choices and behaviors. There’s a difference between not being able to do something and not wanting to do something and we’ve blurred that line so much it’s almost gone.”

How should students be held accountable for not doing their part in preparing for a group presentation? (ie. not memorizing lines, not showing up, being late, missing rehearsals, etc.)

“They have to be addressed on their lack of work. It shouldn’t be allowed to slip away unnoticed. And if there are tough circumstances outside, it’s down to the individual to find the bravery to talk about it to a teacher and perhaps arrange a group extension. I will say this... you cannot help or ‘fix’ people - you’re not responsible for them all of the time, they’re responsible for themselves. Please don’t allow your energy to be wasted by focusing on someone’s lack of commitment and work. Once you’ve handed the concern over to the teacher, let it go and FOCUS ON YOUR JOURNEY - on YOUR work.”

“Penalized however seen fit.”

How do you feel about a "common values" conversation where the group (students & teacher) decides together how to hold each other accountable rather than the traditional approach of the teacher stating rules that dictates expectations of accountability?

"This sounds ideal so long as it's presented and kept to its values, and not the instructor overruling and shoehorning the process. This can be a great way for the entire class to be engaged, feel heard, and shape their own space for learning."

"This creates a sense of trust amongst the students and teacher by distributing power without losing control of the class."


"I think a conversation about common values is necessary and wonderful. However, it should not be the students responsibility to hold their peers accountable, ever. That puts students in a difficult position that will end up holding them back, potentially more than another person's lack of preparation, etc."

In terms of performance based presentations (scene work, movement project, ensemble dance) where the students' work is dependent on the partner being present and prepared what do you feel are the most important aspects of accountability to succeed in learning from those projects?

Shared dedication, it's a difficult thing when one partner cares more for a project than the other, but this is also realistic to the profession. Accountability wise, it can be helpful to evaluate both individual and group performance, so that a group or partner is tanked because one person dropping the ball.


When we "buy into" the equal opportunity and accountability idea, we can invest in seeing it through. Speak openly, ask for help, and seek to collectively create solutions. The process of working through difficulty is often an incredible experience and exercise is working with a team. The work may be more valuable than the scene.

Preparation, active engagement, mutual support. Awareness of and proactivity in acknowledging and fulfilling one's role in the structure of the project.



Most people define accountability in aspirational terms. However many of the answers to the questions showed that people were looking for “doable” actions.

A lot of people think about this topic in lofty and inspirational terms - when we suggested doable actions in the survey (such as holding an open conversation about common values at the start of a class or workshop) the people we surveyed were overwhelmingly on board with these actions to support accountability.





Defining Accountability - how does consent-based practice support this?

Consent requires people to be fully informed.



Works Cited

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