

Jessica Harris - Fourth Year Arts Award Outcome Report
**Developing Artistic Networks, Educational Models, and Creative Best Practices:
Connections in New York City**

For my Fourth Year Award, I received funding to attend the Educational Theater Association National Conference in New York City in September 2019, and to become a member of various educational theater networks and associations. At the conference, I attended workshops, heard from keynote speakers, and got a chance to network with fellow arts educators. Additionally, the memberships have tremendously impacted my work with my educational theater nonprofit and beyond.

As a theater educator, I often feel that I need to recharge my creative faculties to continue providing the highest quality instruction and creativity to my students. Thankfully, the EdTA Conference provided just that. I left the weekend feeling rejuvenated and inspired to continue making art that matters to me, and helping my students do the same.



The welcome sign at the conference hotel!

While at the conference, I took workshops on the Stanislavski Method; incorporating human rights education and social change into my theatre work; and more in-depth classes on empowering students and using theater to make a difference. The speakers that we heard from were not only phenomenal artists, but were incredible at sharing their story in an impactful way. I left each session feeling either affirmed that I am ‘on the right track’ as an educator, or with new tools to enhance my work.

Perhaps the most meaningful class was one called “Reinvigorating Your Spark: Reflective Practices to Avoid Burnout.” One of the things I appreciated most was getting to hear from other teaching artists and educators who are in various realms of arts education or who teach for a variety of different reasons. Not only did I get the chance to hear from others about similar

struggles or frustrations that they face, but I also felt affirmed in that the challenges I face are often universal. We were able to brainstorm and problem-solve together, and I found peace in the community in that moment.

Some of the speakers that we heard from included former chair of the National Endowment for the Arts Jane Chu; composer of *Wicked* and a composer for countless other shows and movies, Stephen Schwartz, and Kristen Anderson-Lopez who co-composed *Frozen*— along with other notable performers. All of the speakers and presenters were phenomenal and gave me much to think about in terms of supporting students, facilitating my own artwork, and creating positive environments in which I can create and teach. I felt inspired by their humility and presence, and grateful to have heard them speak of their tremendous experiences.



A performance by actor & performer Marc Kudisch at the conference

In addition to the conference, I was able to secure memberships to the Educational Theater Association and the Drama Teacher Resource Group. Both of these memberships have been incredibly helpful in providing me with resources to activities, forums, and lesson plans that I have implemented in my programs this past year. They have been invaluable in helping me grow and evolve as a teacher, and provided my students with access to things I never thought possible.

I am so thankful for the Miller Arts Scholars program in granting me this incredible opportunity! Special thanks to the J. Sanford Miller Family, the Miller Arts Scholar program, director Michael Rasbury, and my faculty sponsor David Dalton for making this possible and for their continued support. These experiences not only gave me so many new connections and experiences, new information to share with my students, and the ability to create a toolkit for my creative and educational worlds – but it reminded me of the importance of the arts, and of sharing what I learn with others. I am so excited to continue this work, and beyond grateful for all of the experiences the Miller Arts Scholars program has given me.