



New York State
nystea
Theatre Education Association

Perform. Transform.

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BELONGING... a sense of belonging.

It is a human need, and it is something that I have found within the NYSTEA family. Just about twenty years ago, my co-teacher and I learned of the NYSTEA organization. I can't remember exactly how we came to know about NYSTEA, but as the only theatre education organization in the state, we thought we would join.

Our first experience with NYSTEA was to travel from Central New York to the Hudson Valley to attend the Annual Student Conference. We brought three eager students with us and none of us knew what to expect. This is where the BELONGING began. The community we found was so very welcoming and positive; we were hooked and so were the students. Following the weekend, upon our return to school, they shared their experiences with their classmates and others involved in our theatre activities, and the next year the number of participants doubled to 6 ... then the following year to a dozen ... and every year since, we have taken nearly two dozen. Many have shared that the conference is the highlight of each high school year, and because of their involvement we all have seen tremendous growth in their skills, confidence and character.

That's what happens when you have a place in which you BELONG... when you find an environment that allows for personal expression, and one which celebrates individual talents and diversity. I was so happy to find like-minded individuals who believe that true growth can happen in a supportive and cooperative environment free of judgment and competition – an environment in which perfection is not expected or encouraged – an environment that acknowledges that there will be struggles along the way as you explore new interests and push yourself beyond your comfort zone. Not only is this philosophy a tenet of NYSTEA, the activities and workshops they offer put these beliefs into practice. When this happens, anxiety levels decrease and smiles and laughter increase! I have never seen students and adults support and celebrate each other more than at these conferences.

And now I will turn to how we as teachers, teaching artists and other-defined “theatre folk” grow from our involvement in NYSTEA. I cannot express strongly enough how I grew as a theatre teacher through my involvement with this organization. A prime directive of NYSTEA is to support New York's theatre teachers. We are there for all of YOU! You belong to us and we belong to you. The educators' professional development days offer hands-on activities and methods to directly influence your teaching, but the time spent with educators during the PD workshop days establish those connections and build the relationships that will continue to blossom and become your “state-wide-theatre department”. We give and we get. We are actor

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and audience in one. There is a planned professional development day happening soon (September) in the Syracuse Area. Check the website, watch for emails, and register!

My role in theatre education has recently changed. I retired two years ago after teaching for 32 years. I am still finding ways to keep theatre in my life and that growth is ever-changing. Thanks to NYSTEA, I can use my time to continue to be connected to theatre education through my extremely rewarding involvement on the Board of Trustees and the Student Conference Planning Committee. It is so refreshing to be part of such a diverse group of people involved in supporting the theatre students and theatre teachers of New York State.

I had the pleasure of sitting down just this morning with a theatre educator in my region who wanted to know more about NYSTEA. I was required to deeply reflect and try to articulate all of what has been so vital to me and my students over the last twenty years. It wasn't easy to get it all out, and as I drove away from our coffee get-together I thought of so much more I needed to communicate. It's okay, though. Her excitement about what we talked about was enough to assure me that she is ready to join the NYSTEA family. She already felt she BELONGED. She knows that you give and you get.

So, enjoy this halfway mark of summer break and continue to replenish and refocus. In your plans for a new and wonderful year, consider making NYSTEA part of that focus. I hope to see many of you in the Syracuse area this September and again in Callicoon in January. Come give and come get. And maybe bring a friend – there is always room at the table.

Chris Spring