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Title of Thesis:

“Further than Form Five”: Investigating the Perspectives on the Pursuit of Theatre and the Performing Arts as a Valid Career Path in Prestige Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

It is widely understood that, in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago, the pursuit of careers in the fields of science and business is held in high esteem. This phenomenon seems to possess a very specific connotation in the quintessential “prestige” secondary school, ergo, such paths of study are viewed with a sense of occupational ultimacy. As such, theatre and the performing arts and the pursuit of careers in the arts are uncommon in prestige secondary institutions, with the collective view of the artform being a largely trivial one. Thus, the research provides an investigation into the collective view of the pursuit of theatre and the performing arts. It is dissected into the perspectives of secondary students, tertiary students, secondary educators and parents or guardians, garnered via the distribution of questionnaires and the conducting of interviews. The findings of the study indicate that the functions and potential of theatre and the performing arts are largely interpreted as merely entertainment and as an auxiliary to more conventional academic fields. Hence, the pursuit of a career in such artforms is hardly an option. This calls for a paradigm shift regarding the structuring of theatre and the performing arts in education, as well as, concerning the hegemonic perspective of the artform in the working world and in society here in Trinidad and Tobago.

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INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE:

This research paper seeks to explore unresearched data regarding the pursuit of Theatre Arts and the performing arts as a valid career path in ‘prestige’ secondary schools, so as to change the hegemonic perspectives on the concept.

THESIS STATEMENT:

The comparative decrease in the pursuit of Theatre Arts and the performing arts as a valid career path past form five in ‘prestige’ secondary schools in Trinidad can be attributed to the varied perspectives surrounding the artform, including those of parents, students and educators.

OBJECTIVES:

- To properly define a ‘prestige’ school.
- To obtain statistical information regarding the composition of CAPE subjects at secondary schools.
- To identify the main factors that influence the subject choices of students at ‘prestige’ schools.
- To gather qualitative information regarding the perspectives of parents on the serious practice of Theatre Arts by their children.
- To gather qualitative information from educators, namely teachers and principals, concerning their views on the role of Theatre Arts and its promulgation as part of the school’s curriculum.

- To analyse how all gathered data work together to inform the collective perspective of Theatre Arts as a valid career path.

METHODOLOGY:

- A critical review of all existing literature was conducted.
- Statistical information regarding the modal CAPE subjects at ‘prestige’ schools was obtained from the Ministry of Education and other relevant and reputable organisations.
- Questionnaires were administered to twenty sixth form students at ‘prestige’ schools.
- Interviews were conducted with educators, teachers and principals, at ‘prestige’ secondary schools.
- Interviews/questionnaires were conducted with 20 tertiary level students (ten theatre majors and ten non-theatre majors) at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.
- From the analysis of the obtained data, a subsequent conclusion was formulated in an attempt to answer the problem outlined in this research paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theatre Arts, Drama and the performing arts and all they entail have always been subject to both discussion and scrutiny. This interest has also followed Theatre Arts into the academic arena, ergo, the place of the artform in the curriculum, as well as its potential in the world of work, has always been debated. According to Madison McAllister, an educator at the University of Tulsa, whilst professional fields such as law and medicine are extremely important, not all students find their niches there; some find it in the art of the theatre. She also posits that, owing to the fact that theatre and the performing arts serve such a significant social function, they consequently help to shape the future. It is widely known and accepted that the youth are the future of society, therefore, it stands to reason that the artform which shapes the future, which is the youth, should constitute a large part of the school curriculum.

Apart from the social function, the integration of theatre and the performing arts into the curriculum is quite necessary as it serves many functions which are vital to the students' overall success and holistic development (Shelley). These functions which are fulfilled by theatre include the cultivation of life skills that enable them to handle constructive criticism, express themselves and interact with various kinds of people. Shelley also notes that the performing arts, when perpetuated in academic institutions, have the potential to facilitate the cognitive development of the students by encouraging them to approach and solve problems from varied angles.

Whilst all the functions served and skills developed through the facilitation of theatre arts benefit the classroom, they do not merely end there. These skills, once furthered through the pursuit of Theatre Arts as a career, help to produce well-rounded individuals who find their strides in the world of work quickly. John Munschauer, in his book 'Jobs for English Majors and Other Smart

People’, states that the employment sector can be divided into two main types: professional work and trait-oriented work. The former is manifested in jobs that call for specialised training, for example, doctors, lawyers and architects, among others. The latter is found in employees that possess special traits, including communication skills, creativity, good reasoning ability, adaptability and sound judgement. Although, the latter job type is synonymous with “theatre people” as all of the aforementioned skills and more are cultivated in the practice of theatre, the fact of the matter is that, training in all aspects of theatre and the performing arts, can be beneficial to both professional work and trait-oriented work (Munschauer). Louis Catron, author and former theatre professor at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, also noted in his research that many business executives prefer theatre students because of their self-discipline and adaptability.

All of these positive sentiments are echoed in the Theatre Arts Syllabus published by the Caribbean Examinations Council annually. According to said syllabus, from which the subject is taught, a link is made between the artform and the Caribbean. It highlights the spiritual, social, aesthetic, personal, national and regional functions that Theatre Arts serves. Another highlighted function that is served is the economic one. This can be attributed to the wide array of career options, outlined in the syllabus, that are yielded by Theatre Arts and the subsequent study of it; ranging from performer, playwright, film producer and designer, to journalist, counsellor and even attorney-at-law. Yet, the interest in the subject at the secondary level in the academic institutions of Trinidad and Tobago seems to be minimal, especially with regards to the quintessential ‘prestige school’.

Raymond S Hackett, a former primary and secondary school teacher and current researcher and lecturer at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, highlights, in his paper “Prestige Schools- Myth or Reality”, the increasing tendency of parents and educators to steer

students towards a 'prestige school'. He noted that many 'prestige' schools are actually denominational institutions. This sentiment is shared by Janelle De Souza, a reporter for the Newsday newspaper, who states that there is an academic difference between denominational schools and what she terms "underperforming schools". This academic difference and all the other perceived differences between the 'prestige' institution and the governmental or 'underperforming' institution can be attributed to the parental and non-parental investments and support, as well as the general type of society that is cultivated in the former, as opposed to the latter (Hackett). Furthermore, there exists the growing regard for the CSEC and CAPE examinations as the indicators of scholastic success. Therefore, Hackett posits that, because particular institutions yield better examination results, these institutions are now viewed as 'prestigious', thus arises the concept of the 'prestige school'.

When talking of CSEC and CAPE and their corresponding examination results, the concept of the "merit list" arises. The merit list is the annual report that is published after the CSEC and CAPE examinations; it highlights the top scoring students in all subjects offered, their respective high schools and islands. The CSEC examinations precede the CAPE examinations, in that, a student sits the CAPE examinations one to two years after sitting the CSEC examinations, therefore, in order to assess the state of the pursuit of the subject Theatre Arts in 'prestige' secondary schools, the merit list becomes a valid indicator. Thus, in looking at the merit lists for the CSEC examinations from 2015 to 2019, it was noted that ninety-four percent of the Trinbagonian students that made the lists hailed from 'prestige' (denominational) schools. However, in looking at the merit lists for the CAPE examinations from 2015 to 2019, it was noted that seventy-four percent of the Trinbagonian students that made the lists hailed from 'prestige' (denominational) schools. This indicated a decrease of twenty percent, meaning that approximately

one-fifth of the top-scoring students pursuing the course in Theatre Arts stopped after form five.

This inspires the cause for investigation.

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER 1: The Catalyst: Building a Conceptual Framework

- Reasons for thesis choice

“So, you’re doing theatre, why? What do you plan to do with that?” Accompanied by raised eyebrows, these are the types of questions that have continued to follow me throughout my theatrical journey, manifesting themselves as condescendingly worried inquiries from family members, past classmates, past teachers and even distant acquaintances. Therefore, it is fitting that these questions make up the initial catalyst that drove me into this particular research direction. Additionally, as an alumna of what is regarded as one of the most foremost academic institutions at the secondary level, St Augustine Girls’ High School, from the year 2010 to 2017, I found that the majority of the focus was put on developing the sciences (chemistry, biology, physics, mathematics, pure mathematics, additional mathematics and environmental science) and business (principles of business and principles of accounts) subjects, as well as elevating the proficiency of the students in said subjects. The fields of literature and foreign languages were given even less attention and finally, the arts were relegated to the place of least prominence. Furthermore, the hegemonic perspective on the arts, though not actively perpetuated, seemed to view it as an aside in the academic world. Unsurprisingly, the experiences of my peers who hailed from other prestige institutions were identical to mine. This lack of interest is also manifested in the gaping hole that characterises the paucity of literature and research based on the varied positions surrounding the pursuit of theatre as a valid career path, especially in prestige secondary schools.

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- The relevance of Theatre Arts as a subject

However, the perpetuation of Theatre Arts as a subject has been proven to yield positive results. In his chapter in “Adult Education in Caribbean Universities”, Montserratian author and historian Howard A. Fergus cited Edna Manley in bolstering his position that the incorporation of the arts at all levels of academia is necessary, specifically in the Caribbean, in order to successfully build nations and expand the cultural heritage of the region (51). He attributes this necessity to the natural ubiquity that the arts possess in the Caribbean metanarrative. He further postulates that the arts serve a pedagogic function, in addition to one of entertainment, in that, in engaging with the varied forms of art (inclusive of theatre), mental, physical, emotional and, to a great extent spiritual, skills are exerted, developing noetic processes (57). This means that the inclusion of the theatre arts as a subject in the curriculum becomes beneficial for all students, not only for those that seek to make it their vocational pursuit. Instead, it promotes holistic development and a serious appreciation for the entire Caribbean and, by extension, national state of existence and its intrinsic link to the arts.

This is supported by the fact that creatives (that is, people who pursue careers in the arts) possess aptitudes for at least six out of the nine intelligences proposed by American developmental psychologist, Howard Gardener. In his book “Intelligences Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century”, Gardener puts forward the theory that there exist the following multiple intelligences: musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, naturalistic, existential, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. It can be understood that, except for the naturalistic, visual-spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences, in the practice of theatre arts, the remaining six intelligence modalities are utilised simultaneously, and it can be further surmised that said practice of the arts cannot be successfully executed without the

engagement of these intelligences. Therefore, it becomes difficult to understand why the general perspective, regarding the practice of the subject of theatre arts and its validity as a possible professional endeavour, in prestige secondary schools is seemingly pigeonholed. As such, this opens a space that can only be filled by research-oriented inquiry. Nonetheless, the research methods employed should be systematic and well-thought out in order to yield results that are as unambiguous as possible.

- Reasoning behind choice of methodology

In constructing the research methodology, the most fundamental consideration that had to be made regarded the scope of the research, ergo, the determination of who would need to be spoken to. Thus, given that the focus is on perspectives on theatre and the performing arts in prestige secondary schools, educators, ergo teachers of subjects both in the performing arts and in more conventional academic fields and principals, would need to be interviewed. Additionally, given that the focus also entails the pursuit of careers in the field of theatre and the performing arts, it became necessary that the views of secondary students on the cusp of beginning preparation for their careers, as well as tertiary students, having already begun such preparations, would be pronounced. Finally, it is widely understood that, especially in prestige secondary schools, the opinions of parents and guardians almost always have great bearing on the subject choices of their children or wards. This meant that investigating their perspectives would add further insight.

The other consideration that had to be made was concerning the method of data collection for each research group. For the parents and secondary students, questionnaires were selected in order to accommodate the sample size. However, most of the questions asked were open-ended since the primary data being sought out regarded participants to state their experiences with and ideas on theatre and the performing arts. Conversely, interviews were selected for the collection of data

from the educators given that interviews facilitate the expression of more in-depth information concerning the experiences with and perspectives on theatre and the performing arts in education. Essentially, via interviews, educators would be able to elaborate further.

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER 2: The Student Perspective: Theatre and the Performing Arts through the Lens of the Student

- The Form Six Perspective (CAPE)

In seeking to garner an all-encompassing response from twenty sixth form students at unnamed prestige secondary institutions, questions were asked in order to gain insight into their current subject choices and subsequent career path, familiarity with theatre and their views on its place in society and, by extension, their lives.

The first question assessed the current subjects being pursued by the students. Overall, all students were pursuing communication studies as part of the requirement in order to sit the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE). However, the sciences, namely biology, chemistry, physics, pure mathematics and environmental science, accounted for 56% of all students, while 28% of all students pursued business subjects such as tourism, entrepreneurship, management of business, accounting and economics. The remaining 16% pursued subjects in the field of humanities, specifically, literature, history and foreign languages. Of the entire sample of students surveyed, there was not a single one that pursued any subjects in the creative and performing arts at sixth form.

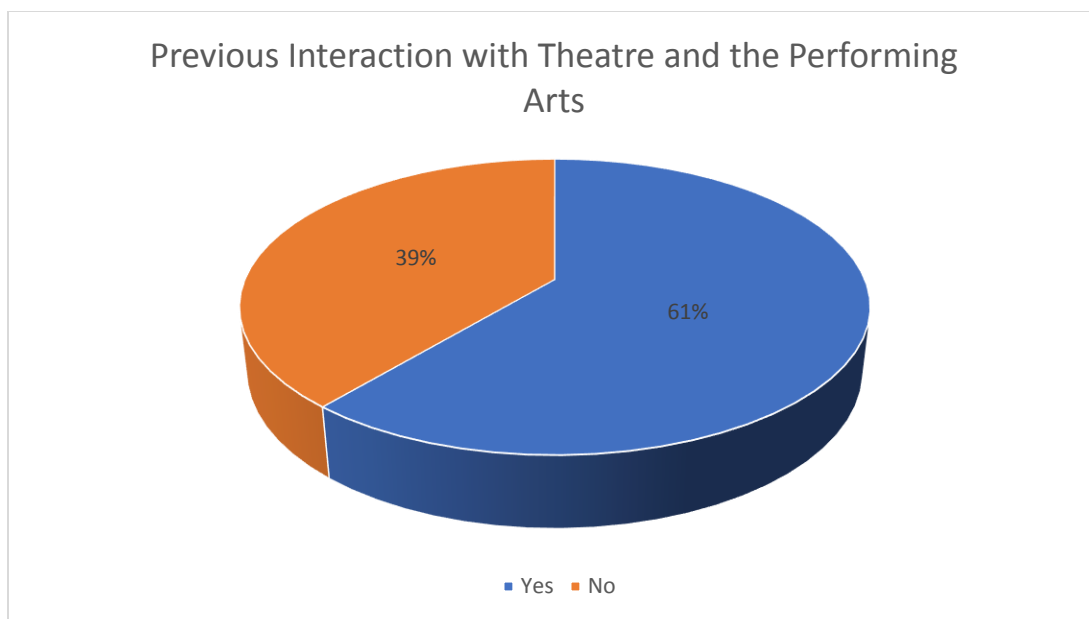


Figure 1: Chart showing the Previous Interactions with Theatre and the Performing Arts of Sixth Form Students at Prestige Secondary Schools

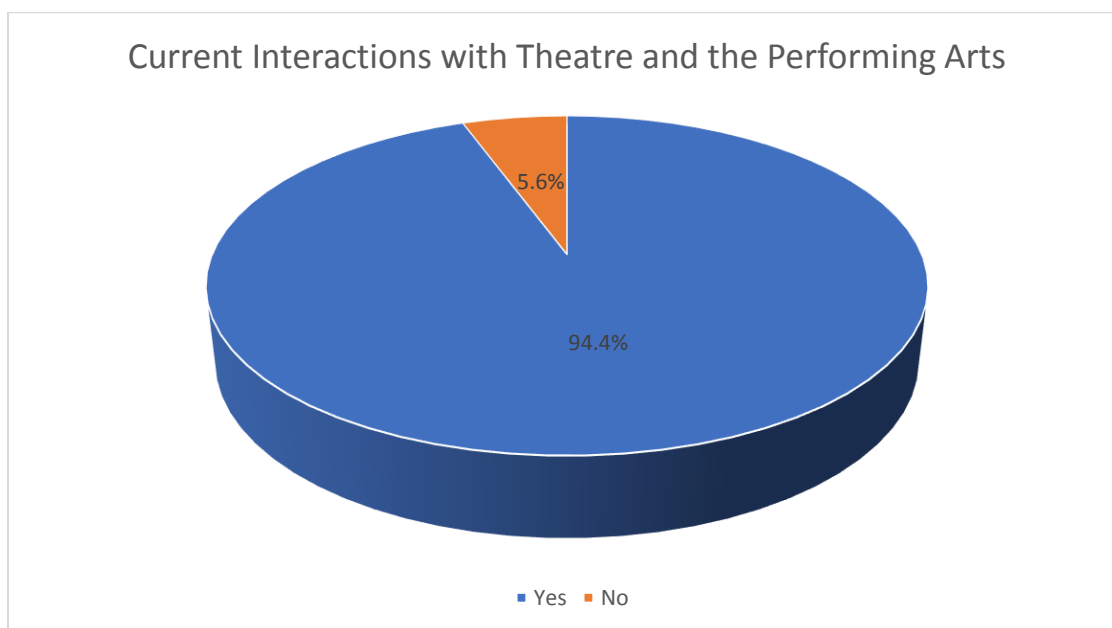


Figure 2: Chart showing the Current Interactions with Theatre and the Performing Arts of Sixth Form Students at Prestige Secondary Schools

Figure 1 shows the previous interactions of the surveyed sixth form students with theatre and the performing arts. From the chart, it can be seen that almost two-thirds of the survey sample had previously interacted with Theatre and the Performing Arts and, subsequently, about one-third had not. Upon further investigation, it was revealed that, of those that had previous experience, most of the students interacted with the artform in an extra-curricular setting, ergo, in a drama club, school play or in dramatizations for special celebrations such as Divali or Carnival. Other interactions with theatre were manifested in school projects and personal acting lessons. However, as seen in Figure 2, only a small fraction of students extended that previous interaction into their current study of the artform. They all cited their passion for the subject as the fuel that propelled it into their current educational pursuit.

On the other hand, both the students who never interacted with theatre and the performing arts, as well as those who opted not to further their previous encounters cited varied reasons. Many referenced their lack of interest in the subject whilst others stated that the artform did not inform their choice of career path. Interestingly enough, this view was shared by those who sought to pursue science-based careers. Additionally, a few students highlighted the unfavourable views of their parents or guardians concerning the arts as adequate disincentive. Another notable point that emerged from research was that of the entirety of the survey sample, one quarter of students reported that the subject was not offered at their institution at the sixth form level.

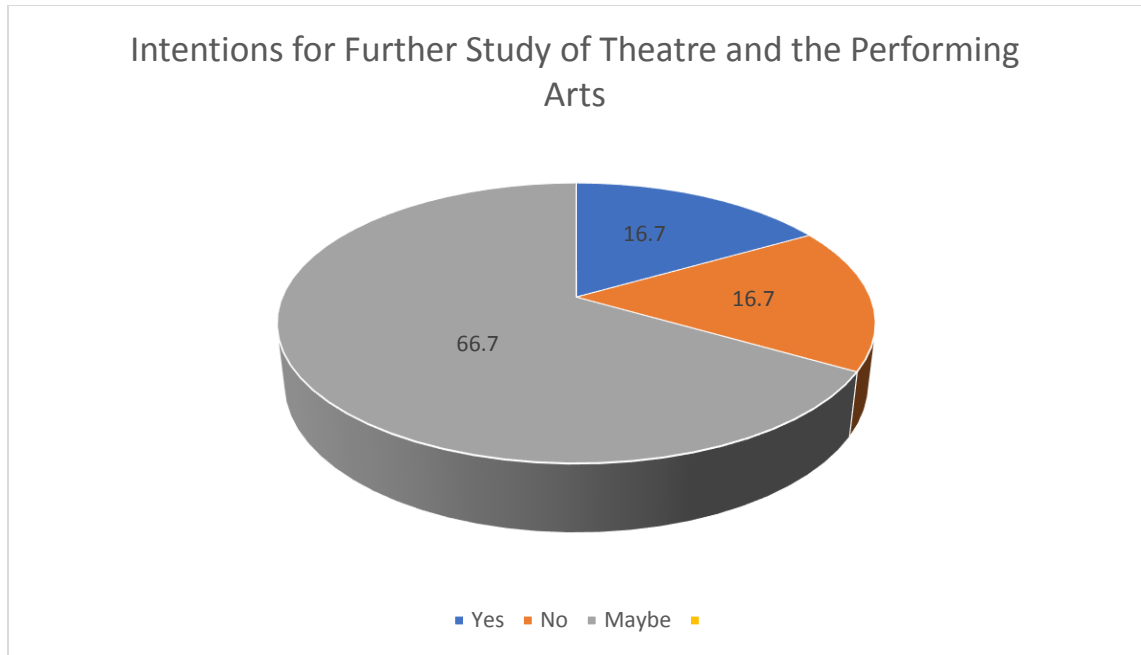


Figure 3: Pie Chart showing the Intentions for Further Study of Theatre and the Performing Arts of Sixth Form Students at Prestige Secondary Schools

In terms of the pursuit of theatre and the performing arts at an even higher level, ergo the tertiary pursuit, of the minute portion (see Figure 3), less than one-fifth affirmed their intentions to do so, citing their passions for the artform, specifically in the sphere of acting. A similar fraction exhibited a sense of irresolution, selecting the option for “maybe”, while the vast majority, approximately two-thirds, expressed an unwillingness to continue the pursuit of theatre and the performing arts at the tertiary level.

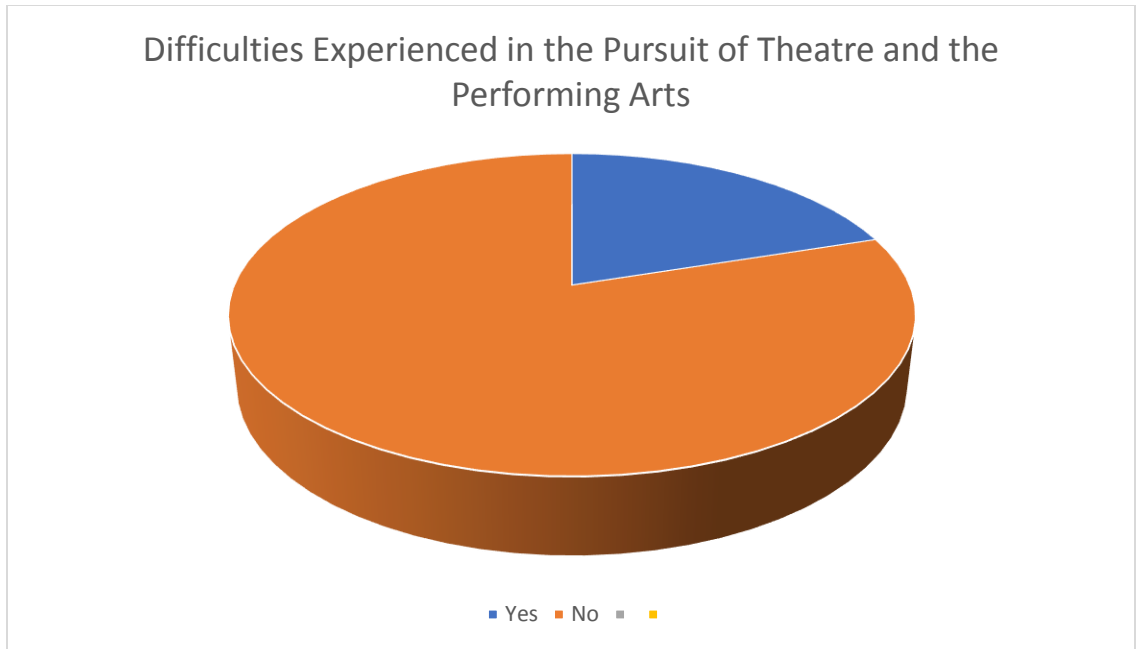


Figure 4: Pie Chart showing the Perceived Difficulties Experienced in the Pursuit of Theatre and the Performing Arts of Sixth Form Students at Prestige Secondary Schools

Participants who had previously interacted with theatre and the performing arts in any way were asked about any perceived difficulties that were experienced (see Figure 4). Overall, the majority stated that they did not and of the smaller fraction of participants that affirmed these experiences, they cited the drawbacks of a lack of mental acuity in praxis and a general sense of inaccessibility of the artform, ergo a lack of ubiquity of the form at their respective educational institutions and society. In an attempt to remedy these issues, students stated that they maintained the practice and conducted research in an attempt to locate theatre and arts facilities in the country.

Finally, the views of the sixth form participants regarding theatre arts and its subsequent usefulness and importance were examined. Many cited the importance of the artform in the perpetuation of the fields of entertainment and creativity, while others highlighted its place in the

cultural development of society, the facilitation of self-expression and human development. Conversely, some participants stated that the artform held no merit in their opinion.

- The Tertiary Perspective

In assessing the tertiary view on the pursuit of theatre and the performing arts, the opinions of both non-theatre majors and theatre majors were examined. Of the non-theatre majors, students who are currently pursuing degrees in the Medical Sciences, Biology, Biochemistry, Law and English Literature were interviewed. The influences behind their respective choices of degrees were varied. Influences included the input of family, prior interest in their chosen career path, the presence of financial possibilities present in the fields belonging to the sciences and law and, in a particular instance, the wrongful perception that they would be content in their chosen field. Interestingly, for one of the participants who is currently pursuing a degree in the Medical Sciences, she was first introduced to the possibility of such a career path through the television drama *Scrubs*.

All of the interviewees had previously interacted with theatre and the performing arts in various ways. The primary realisation of theatre and the performing arts came, for all non-theatre majors, in the presence of drama classes which constituted a mandatory part of their early secondary education. They have also had interactions via the viewing of plays, participation in small scenarios in school, being part of Indian Classical dance troupes and being a part of a performance group. The law student, in particular, was previously a theatre major but switched to law after one year in the theatre program at the University of The West Indies, St. Augustine.

Of the participants, the English Literature and the Law majors were the only ones who had previously considered pursuing Theatre and the Performing Arts as valid career options. In the interviews, they each expressed a sustained desire to pursue such a career path. However, they

shifted their career paths due to familial pressure realised as a negative opinion on theatre and the performing arts, as well as a lack of financial and emotional support. Contrarily, none of the science majors interviewed, considered the pursuit of the arts as a valid career path. For most of them, a career in the arts was simply not an option. Some even expressed a lack of self-confidence, ergo, they believed that, even if they wanted to pursue an artistic career, they did not possess the necessary talents or abilities. It is important to note that, in their perceived lack of talent for theatre and the performing arts, the science majors referred to solely the performance aspect, that is, acting, singing and dancing.

Despite the non-artistic natures of their career paths, all interviewees expressed a heightened awareness and positive personal view of theatre and the performing arts and its importance, usefulness and relevance. They viewed theatre and the performing arts as necessary to societal and political development, emotional and mental growth, the facilitation of critical thinking and application and awareness of self and the surroundings. In very personal instances, the Law and English Literature majors cited their experiences in the artform as highly influential in defining their own identities., labelling that artform as a safe place, emotionally, that is.

For the theatre majors, influences included passion for theatre, the financial possibilities, the encouragement of family, innate talent, as well as the potential to impact society in their careers. Similar to the non-theatre majors, all of the theatre majors interviewed had previously interacted with theatre and the performing arts, with most of them attending drama classes in secondary school. However, the added interactions included taking part in church productions, spoken word and their involvement in musicals and concerts outside of school where they worked both backstage and onstage. One interviewee participated in the Best Village Folk Theatre and belonged to a well-known local theatre company while another mentioned her involvement in

Carnival. The difference in interactions with the artform between the non-theatre majors and the theatre majors, as well as with the proactivity in practicing the artform of the latter offers further insight into the difference between “theatre people” and “non-theatre people”. This affirms the Munschauer ideology that there are the professional workers (the non-theatre majors) and the trait-oriented workers (theatre majors).

Additionally, all of the theatre majors affirmed that they experienced, and still experience difficulties in their pursuit of theatre. These included difficulties understanding and working with theoretical aspects, the lack of economic stability in the local industry (leading to underpaid cast and crew members), the hardship of procuring finances to practice theatre, family opposition, discrimination, fear and the fact that theatre was not offered in one interviewee’s secondary school. In attempts to address these obstacles, many theatre majors stated that they interacted more with the form, from focusing more on theory to auditioning continuously to making serious personal decisions regarding family members and friends who disdainfully viewed the artform. One participant shared that he still faces the obstacle of fear.

Despite their having to face the aforementioned issues, all of the participants expressed a desire to further their educations and careers in theatre and the performing arts. Although a small fraction admitted that they were unsure of how they were to do so, most indicated that they would pursue postgraduate studies in theory or performance. One person stated that she intended to pair the artform with psychology and develop an art therapy facility.

Intriguingly, much like the non-theatre majors, the theatre majors viewed theatre as having positive and necessary implications as a tool in society and education, as well as in collective and personal human development. However, the perspectives took on a general sense of nuanced relevance to said theatre majors. They all stated that their practice of theatre and the performing

arts was necessary for them to live and cope with life. One individual simply called it “everything” whilst others deemed the artform as an innate and irreplaceable part of life, citing its ability to inform, educate, entertain and change. Others stated that the artform facilitated self-expression and boosted self-esteem, encouraging creativity, the growth of skills and crediting the form with allowing them to meet new people.

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER 3: The “Realistic” Perspective: Theatre Arts and the Performing Arts through the Lens of Educators and Parents

- The Educators’ Perspective (Teachers and Principals)

In examining the perspectives on theatre and the performing arts and the subsequent pursuit of careers in such a field, educators in various subjects from prestige institutions (both in and out of the performing arts fields) were interviewed. Non-art subject teachers ranged from history to literature to biology.

In interviewing these individuals, it became clear that none of them believed that Theatre and the Performing Arts were given the necessary attention by the government and in education, especially in comparison to the more traditional subjects, ergo, the sciences and business subjects. In a particular instance, a history teacher who has been an educator for over a decade, stated that, having taught at multiple institutions, both prestige and governmental institutions, he recognised a gap in the emphasis that is placed on the arts. This can be attributed to lack of prioritisation of the sciences and business subjects at governmental institutions as evidenced in the reversal of such prioritisation in the prestige institutions made apparent in the merit listed subjects, which are primarily in sciences or in business. He further stated that many governmental educational institutions have multiple performing arts teachers at one time, whilst in the prestige institutions, there is often little to no artistic activity and development. He cited the facts that the current prestige secondary institution at which he teaches is without a theatre department, having only introduced a visual arts department for three years. This is in agreement with a performing arts educator who stated that there is a lack of structuring, specifically in terms of support, subsidies, incentives and available training, as it relates to education and producing educators in theatre and

the performing arts as opposed to other subjects. Furthermore, a biology educator and former dancer goes on to talk about the lack of spaces dedicated to the cultivation of the skills of students in the theatre and performing arts.

Another educator, a literature teacher, highlighted the governmental focus on the STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine) in terms of the availability of scholarships. She stated that scholarships that are focused on the aforementioned subject areas have overshadowed scholarships in theatre and the performing arts, especially having been instituted for a vastly longer period of time. Additionally, in interviewing the vice-principal of Presentation College, Chaguanas, she expressed a desire to have a theatre teacher and develop a theatre program at her institution. However, she stated that such a move would be based on the financial availability as well as whether or not the government would send a theatre teacher. Having been an educator for thirty-three years, she lamented that many of the students who are talented in theatre and the performing arts are unable to hone and build on their skills and, as such, they are lost in the system. McAllister highlights this when she discusses the fact that many students are more suited to careers in theatre and the performing arts than to traditional academia.

The perspective of educators regarding the parental perspective was also investigated. Many stated that the parents of their students do not believe that theatre and the performing arts could be useful or beneficial to their children, with one educator highlighting the disinterest of the students themselves as part of the issue. Instead, many parents think of theatre and the performing arts as belonging on the side-lines. Another educator highlighted the unfortunate fact that, at their respective prestige secondary school, unless the annual Carnival program is pointedly advertised as educational, as much as half of the school's students would not attend.

Regarding the perceived future of theatre and the performing arts at prestige secondary schools, all of the teachers of non-arts subjects expressed that they expect stagnancy in the perpetuation of theatre and the performing arts, both immediately and in the long run. While this sentiment was also expressed by the theatre and performing arts teachers to a lesser degree, they put forward the more positive notion that there is hope for structural and practical progress once students express their artistic interests and provided that individuals continue to pursue theatre and the performing arts at the tertiary level. However, some arts teachers expressed a sense of trepidation that hope would not be enough.

- The Parental Perspective

Examining the perspectives of parents and guardians of students who attend prestige secondary institutions provided insight into, not only their own ideas surrounding the pursuit of theatre and the performing arts as a valid career path, but also regarding how such opinions inform the students.

The initial step was to inquire concerning what parents or guardians understood by the term “Theatre Arts”. The majority of the responses yielded notions of solely acting. Definitions such as “live performances by actors and actresses” and “information or story lines being presented in an artistic way with performers before a gathering” constituted most of the answers. Approximately only one-tenth of the responses mentioned other aspects, specifically directors and stage crew. When asked if they had previously interacted with theatre and the performing arts, nineteen out of the twenty participants stated that they had not. The remaining lone individual stated that their interaction with the artform stemmed from them viewing a few plays at Queen’s Hall and the National Academy for Performing Arts (NAPA).

Despite their unfamiliarity with theatre and the performing arts, two-thirds of the participants stated that they would indeed approve of and encourage their child or ward if he or she expressed a desire to pursue a career in theatre and the performing arts, accounting for their statements by expressing their beliefs in individual uniqueness as well as their beliefs that, provided that their child is gifted, their subsequent careers would be fruitful. Despite this positive outlook, numerous participants admitted that they would also encourage their children to pursue an alternative career path as a form of job security. On the other hand, many participants affirmed their disapproval of their child or ward’s pursuit of a career in theatre and the performing arts, justifying their stance in multiple ways. All disapproving parents and

guardians cited the perceived idea that it would be difficult for their children or wards to earn a living. This idea was the overarching justification. Others cited religious objections while one participant stated their belief that the arts contribute nothing worthwhile to the development of society and that they “did not want to see their daughter parade around on a stage like a monkey”.

Despite the polarised viewpoints of the participants, most asserted that the usefulness, relevance and importance of theatre and the performing arts lay in its facilitation of creativity and creative expression. Several parents and guardians highlighted the functions of communication and emotional relaxant that are served by the artform.

CONCLUSION

Although parents, guardians and secondary school students of prestige institutions and tertiary students, who do not interact with theatre and the performing arts as part of their careers and future careers, viewed it as necessary to the development of society, they largely highlighted the entertainment aspect.

Furthermore, whilst educators at prestige educational institutions agreed that the integration of theatre and the performing arts into the curriculum is needed, they assigned the lack of such to the disregard by the government, lack of finances, disinterest by the students and the lack of parental interest and support. This explains the large decrease that was noted in the sixth form students who maintained their interaction with theatre and the performing arts at prestige secondary schools. This, however, raises the question, if the government possesses a positive view of the multi-career potential of theatre and the performing arts, as outlined in the syllabus, why have educators made it a point to highlight the dismissal of the artform by the powers that be?

Overall, my research yielded the discovery that, when theatre and the performing arts is given any limited dialogue, it is only spoken about from the perspective of acting and performance. Thus, it is viewed as an auxiliary to other career paths, namely to enhance speech, presentation and interpersonal skills. While this is merited, only with the theatre majors and arts educators did the conversation concerning theatre and the performing arts expand into discourse on the varied occupational avenues, important functions served and the need for shifts in the anatomy of the artform.

Essentially, present in the data collected was a through line characterised as a lack of interest compounded by a sense of perceived gratuity that has been continually cast on the

collective view of the pursuit of theatre and the performing arts in prestige secondary schools by students, educators and parents. However, also present in the data collected was the general notion that the functions served by theatre and the performing arts are indeed valuable and necessary. Thus, a final question emerges, how can the legislative powers that be, current and future educators and parents and students work, both individually and collectively to shift the hegemonic perspectives on the pursuit of theatre and the performing arts as a valid career path in, specifically, prestige secondary schools?

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this research project, limitations manifested themselves in two primary ways. The initial limitation was found in the lack of published information concerning, not only the arts in Trinidad and Tobago, but the place of such in the education sector and the curriculum. Additionally, the lack of valid literary sources of information regarding the concept of “prestige schools” in Trinidad and Tobago as well as the negative views on the pursuit of theatre arts as a valid career path.

The second limitation manifested itself in the difficulty of accessing primary data, ergo, it was challenging to maintain correspondence with a number of educators at certain prestige secondary institutions. This was further compounded by the emergence of the Novel Corona Virus, which halted my communication with the relevant officials at the Ministry of Education.

In terms of recommendations for future research, it would be beneficial to collect data from more prestige secondary schools, thus widening the sample size. Furthermore, it would be useful to conduct similar research at governmental or non-prestige secondary school and compare and contrast all data collected. This would yield a comprehensive assessment of the place of theatre and the performing arts in secondary education, thus adding to an exceedingly restricted body of information.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire questions for sixth form students at prestige secondary institutions:

- What subjects do you currently undertake?
- Have you previously interacted with Theatre and the performing arts? YES/NO
- If yes, what was the extent of your interaction?
- Do you pursue Performing Arts (Drama) currently? YES/NO
- What influenced your choice?
- If you answered yes to Question 4, do you intend to further your study of the artform?
YES/NO
- Give a reason for your previous answer.
- If you answered yes to Question 6, how do you intend to further your study of the artform?
- Have you ever experienced difficulty in your pursuit of theatre? If so, in what ways?
- If you answered yes to the previous question, how did you deal with such difficulty?
- How do you view Theatre Arts, ergo, its importance, usefulness and relevance to your life and the lives of those around you?

Questionnaire questions for parents and guardians of students at prestige secondary institutions:

- What do you understand by the term “Theatre Arts”?
- Have you previously interacted with Theatre and the performing arts? YES/NO
- If yes, what was the extent of your interaction?
- Would/Do you approve of your child/ward pursuing the subject Theatre Arts? YES/NO
- Why/Why not?
- Would/Do you approve of your child/ward pursuing a career in theatre? YES/NO
- Why/Why not?
- How do you view Theatre Arts, ergo, its importance, usefulness and relevance to your life and the life of your child/ward?

Interview questions for educators at prestige secondary institutions:

- Have you previously interacted with Theatre and the performing arts? YES/NO
- If yes, what was the extent of your interaction?
- How do the performing arts match up to the other more conventional subjects, in your opinion?
- What place/role does theatre (its teaching and practice) occupy in your institution, currently?
- Do you believe that Theatre Arts are placed on equal footing with other more conventional subjects, by the government and the other powers that be?
- Given the current state of Theatre Arts in your institution, what do you foresee for the future?

Interview questions for tertiary students with non-theatre majors:

- What is your current major?
- What has influenced your choice of career path? (For example: family, financial possibilities, passion etc.)
- Have you previously interacted with Theatre and the performing arts? YES/NO
- If yes, what was the extent of your interaction?
- If no, why not?
- If you answered yes to question 3, have you ever considered pursuing theatre and the performing arts as a valid career option for you? YES/NO
- Why/why not?
- How do you view Theatre and the performing arts, ergo, its importance, usefulness and relevance to your life and the lives of those around you?