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Abstract

The increased pressure in higher education to demonstrate evidence of student learning is prompting all sectors to develop clear assessment methods. This national conversation has also sparked the greater recognition and use of assessment as a process for the improvement of teaching and learning. Given the scant literature on assessment in the fine and performing arts, understanding the status of one sub-field provides insight into the status of assessment in musical theatre and how assessment is conducted in an arguably nebulous area of study. This exploratory mixed methods survey study of 20 BA/BFA programs was designed to examine how musical theatre programs assess student learning within and across their programs. The qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed using Gale and Bond's framework for the assessment of learning in the fine arts.

Assessing the Work: An Exploration of Assessment in the Musical Theatre Arts

In 1990, Ernest Boyer re-conceptualized scholarship to include inquiry into teaching and learning. In the landmark piece *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer asserts that the assessment of teaching effectiveness and student learning is a responsibility of the professoriate and postsecondary institutions more broadly. What began over twenty years ago as a reappraisal of scholarship, has since developed into a paradigm for teaching and learning in higher education (Maki, 2010). Driven by the call to transition from a focus on the teacher to students' learning and the products of their learning, instructors and program faculty are encouraged to assess how students learn, what promotes student learning, and how to create an environment that fosters desired learning and its outcomes. Litterst and Tompkins (2000) argue that integral to the scholarship of teaching is the assessment of teaching and learning. The process of systematically reflecting on teaching practices and student learning outcomes is critical for improvement. In other words, assessment facilitates the reflective aspect of teaching that contributes to its improvement. Programs are challenged to demonstrate student progress and learning cumulatively to their institutions, stakeholders, and accreditors (Bresciani, 2006). Therefore, necessary for the continued improvement of programmatic efficacy, institutions must assess student learning and development, collect their data across the curriculum and program, and improve student learning throughout the program, engaging in the scholarship of teaching and learning through program assessment.

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Assessment of learning at the institutional and program levels has become widespread throughout higher education (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014; Maki, 2010). For this study, assessment for program review is defined as "a systematic process in which program faculty and/or professionals articulate the intended results of the cumulative contribution of their program...The faculty and/or professionals then purposefully plan the program so that the intended results (i.e., outcomes) can be achieved; implement methods to systematically—over time—identify whether the end results *have* been achieved; and, finally, use the results to plan improvements or make recommendations for policy consideration, recruitment,

retention, resource reallocation, or new resource requests” (Bresciani, 2006, p. 14). Promotion of assessment as a tool for good teaching and learning is now commonplace among institutions and programs (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Kuh et al., 2014; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Maki, 2010). Kuh and Ikenberry (2009) found through their national survey of institutional assessment practices that most institutions have a set of common learning outcomes, use a combination of institutional-level and program-level assessment approaches, and are primarily driven by accreditation. In addition, more recently, Kuh et al. (2014) found in a national study that 84% of the sample institutions reported that they had common learning goals for all their students.

Assessment has also gained recognition as a condition of educational accountability, demonstrating quality learning experiences and education to state and federal agencies, accreditors, and other stakeholders (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Bresciani, 2006; Kuh et al., 2014). Therefore, institutions and programs face increased scrutiny of quality in higher education with a push to demonstrate how data on student learning are collected, to provide evidence of individual student learning and development, and show how such data are used to inform decisions at all levels. While often motivated by external forces, assessment at the course- and program-levels across disciplines provide an opportunity for faculty to examine their teaching and programmatic practices, with the ultimate goal of improving student learning and success.

Assessment in the Arts

While assessment is generally expected across all disciplines, there are unique aspects to determining appropriate learning outcomes and corresponding measures that require assessment to also be situated within a disciplinary context. Creative and performance activities are often considered difficult to assess because of the challenge in identifying assessment criteria and indicators in traditionally affective and subjective domains (Belluigi, 2009; Gale & Bond, 2007; Mello, 2007; Orr, 2011; Parkes, 2010). Gale and Bond (2007) state that assessment of performance and creative arts is often conflated with public critique and commercial acclaim. Rather, the goals for assessment in each scenario are distinct and therefore draw upon differing criteria for judgment. They assert that in higher education we are concerned with how well students and faculty understand the processes for assessment of student work versus public, professional critique (Gale & Bond, 2007). Yet, the lack of clear delineation between the two reflects a tendency to slip into matters of personal preference rather than exercising aesthetic judgment based on matters of craft and creative ability. Assessment is not only about assigning grades or imposing conformity, but is intended to help students develop a critical perspective within their disciplinary craft.

The presence of literature attending to assessment of the performing arts in higher education is sporadic and sparse, a majority of which focuses on assessment of learning at the course-level. For example, Prendergast (2003) examined the use of soliloquy in reflective practice and qualitative assessment of a performance course; Orr (2011) examined the role of values and identity in the assessment practices of arts educators; and Parkes (2007, 2010b) tested and found that the use of criteria-specific rubrics in musical performance curriculum assisted in more learner-centered student learning. Belluigi’s (2009) case study of a South African fine arts school’s formative assessment and encouragement of creativity and critical thinking was the only empirical institutional study found. And only Mello’s (2007) study of assessment in a theatre course is specific to the disciplinary focus of this reported study. Utilizing a conceptual approach, Parkes (2010a) conducted a literature review on performance assessment in music. In addition, Belluigi (2013) proposed a schema for the conditions of creativity in fine arts studio practice in which she presents concerns and evidence that assessment may adversely affect creativity, while still advocating for the necessity of assessment for student learning. Finally, of primary interest to this study is Gale and Bond’s (2007) framework for the assessment of fine arts at the course-level and is discussed as part of the conceptual framework. Much of the literature reviewed grapples with the arts-based inquiry and the interplay and tension that may exist between assessment and creativity. Roberts’ (1995) and Dorn and Orr’s (2008) contributions are the lone items to attempt to examine and consider how assessment of theatre arts occurs at the program- or department-level. Roberts reports on the painful and productive aspects of departmental self-assessment, while Dorn and Orr’s book advocates for measurable goals in arts education across all levels. Yet, both publications are conceptual, resulting in a lack of empirical literature on this topic specific to the program-level.

The process of systematically reflecting on teaching practices and student learning outcomes is critical for improvement. In other words, assessment facilitates the reflective aspect of teaching that contributes to its improvement.

Given the affective and subjective nature of assessing student learning in the creative and performing arts, in addition to the range of disciplinary areas that encompass this type of work, understanding the literature and assessment processes of a particular discipline may provide some insight. Understanding how a disciplinary area whose forms of learning are extensively entrenched within and demonstrated through methods and means that are subjective, expressive, and affective can impart awareness and examples for other fields of study and the broader study of assessment. The study reported in this paper focuses on musical theatre programs.

Assessment in Musical Theatre

Specific to the disciplinary area of musical theatre under investigation in this study, there is little to no scholarly literature about the current assessment practices or frameworks in use to assess learning in higher education. Yet, given the increased focus on assessment in higher education and the presence of an accrediting organization for theatre arts programs, the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST), one can assume that assessment does exist to assess a student's standing and progress within the degree program and overall learning of the content and skills associated with the degree. Through NAST there are basic guiding principles that are common denominators in the field to guide student progress within a program. These basic principles are outlined in NAST's (2009) guide entitled *The Assessment of Undergraduate Programs of Theatre*.

While often motivated by external forces, assessment at the course- and program-levels across disciplines provide an opportunity for faculty to examine their teaching and programmatic practices, with the ultimate goal of improving student learning and success.

This guide is for any undergraduate degree in theatre and the core of the guide is applicable to the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), a primary degree category for theatre and musical theatre majors. The guide presents four categories of assessment for consideration. These four categories primarily ask departments or programs to question what is important when planning assessment, how feasible those goals are in relation to program's resources, how those goals connect with the larger institution, and then how to implement those goals with students. The guide helps programs prioritize and asks questions that would typically be considered subjective in a way that allows for faculty to objectively assess students' progress and specific intended outcomes. The overarching principle of the assessment guide is that a program and department need to have stated goals for the department and program that are agreed upon by the faculty and connect to the institution's goals. Then those goals need to be communicated with the students and aligned with curriculum. Though the guidelines proposed align with the broader assessment literature, it addressed assessment challenges specific to theatre and performance programs and uses language that is common in the field. However, there is less guidance for how to actually assess learning in the more muddy affective and performance areas common to performance arts. Nor does it provide empirical evidence for if and how theatre programs are currently assessing for learning across their curriculum and programs.

Developing a general picture of assessment methods for learning that are currently employed and understanding them within the context of an applicable and useful framework can provide guidance for faculty and program administrators in the arts and in other disciplines on this increasingly important matter. Yet, the current literature suggests limited potential frameworks for assessment of performance and creative arts and only provides some description for how individual instructors or courses assess these areas. The conceptual framework proposed by Gale and Bond (2007) suggests potential categories that may be useful to understand how assessment, particularly for affective and performance domains, in theatre arts may be conducted.

Conceptual Framework

Gale and Bond (2007) offered a four-part speculative framework for the assessment of learning in the creative arts. The framework consists of (a) *knowledge building*, (b) *creative production*, (c) *integrative contextualization*, and (d) *critical communication*. First, knowledge building refers to the fundamental knowledge necessary for a particular field of study and would be evident through the students' ability to aggregate and apply information from these fields of study. For example, a singer or student of voice would need to have knowledge about how to read music, chord progression and aural skills in order to be successful. Gale and Bond suggest that this first level of the framework should determine

the extent to which students gain, understand, and use knowledge to create knowledge. Second, creative production is the assessment of creative work and is often considered to be the most difficult of the four given the personal nature of creative work and the view of creative production as a development of the person, not only the product. Gale and Bond emphasize the importance of clearly defined abilities that are not entangled with identity issues. Important for the assessment of creative production is the goal of assessing the extent to which a student executes the identified elements of the craft and the degree of alignment between exhibited abilities and the goals of the assignment and course. Third, integrative contextualization reflects the student's ability to understand creative production within its social and historical context and the broader intellectual discussion. This contextualization requires that students utilize knowledge building, in addition to developing the ability to frame creative production within historic, political, cultural, and artistic contexts. Finally, students must develop and demonstrate their ability to articulate the nature of a work within a context and framework through critical communication. Critical communication may take the form of speaking, publication and writing, or even film, as a sample of communication mediums. Gale and Bond's framework is the only proposed tool for student assessment specific to the art of craft. That said, it has yet to be applied or, if we must, tested for its relevance and applicability to the practice of assessment of student learning in these fields.

Creative and performance activities are often considered difficult to assess because of the challenge in identifying assessment criteria and indicators in traditionally affective and subjective domains.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore current methods being employed and to develop a current picture of assessment of student learning used in musical theatre Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) programs throughout the United States. Furthermore, given the sparse nature of guiding frameworks for fine arts specific fields, we chose to explore the utility and relevance of Gale and Bond's (2007) framework for the assessment of individual student learning and programmatic assessment in one sub-field, musical theatre. We approached the study with the following research questions: What areas of student learning are identified as most common and important in musical theatre programs? What forms of programmatic assessment do musical theatre programs use to assess their students' learning? And, does Gale and Bond's framework for the assessment of student learning in the arts reflect the current practice?

Methods and Data Source

Method

This study was an exploratory, concurrent, mixed methods survey sent to musical theatre program faculty. A 31-item survey, the *Assessment in Theatre Arts Survey* (see Appendix A), was developed to gather information about the extent to which assessment plans and methods are currently in place for musical theatre programs and to explore how programs assess the learning of musical theatre majors throughout the program curriculum. Gale and Bond's (2007) framework was not used to structure the survey instrument. The survey instrument was divided into six sections: Program Logistics (7 questions), Student Learning (7 questions), Performance Requirements (4 questions), Student Expectations (5 questions), Review Process (4 questions), and Senior Project (4 questions). Survey questions ranged from asking participants to provide general program information to outlining current assessment practices. The survey also asked participants to evaluate their program's assessment policies. Some questions required single answers; others permitted multiple responses, and six questions allowed for open-ended responses.

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Data Collection

There are 48 institutions of higher education that offer the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and/or the Bachelor of Arts (BA) credential in musical theatre (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). We invited program directors and coordinators at all institutions to complete the survey. They were digitally sent a link to the survey and then prompted by instructions to guide them in providing information about their academic program and their approach to assessment. Prior to completing the survey they viewed a screen describing the study, including the risks and benefits. They were informed that the information collected will remain anonymous and

unidentifiable. Furthermore, the survey introduction stated that individuals can stop or ask to be removed from the study at any time. Finally, subjects were informed that proceeding with the survey indicates informed consent. Twenty faculty members representing 20 different programs completed the survey, resulting in a 41.7% response rate. No academic program was represented more than once in this study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analyses were conducted to address the first research question concerning how musical theatre programs assess individual students' learning. For single- and multiple-response survey items (including program logistics), response percentages and frequency distributions were determined. In addition, means and standard deviations were recorded for surveys items related to student learning.

Exploration of the second research question (i.e., Does Gale and Bond's framework for the assessment of student learning in the arts reflect the current practice?) involved reading and reviewing the qualitative survey results for patterns and codes in line with constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis and theme building were guided by current research on assessment of learning, assessment and performing arts literature, and Gale and Bond's (2007) framework. One researcher served as the primary coder who used the four categories from Gale and Bond's framework to code the qualitative survey responses. The leading researcher then led a discussion with two additional research team members to review the coding patterns and develop themes. One team member is a musical theatre faculty member who provided expert review that established credibility and trustworthiness to the coding process. Researchers were in agreement that the following themes emerged:

- Knowledge Building: Report of the extent to which specific areas of learning are important for musical theatre students;
- Creative Production: Description of the review process of musical theatre students;
- Integrative Contextualization: Report of the extent to which musical theatre students must demonstrate mastery in performance areas; comparison of student expectations and department expectations concerning performance requirements;
- Critical Communication: Description of the senior project for musical theatre students.

The resulting themes aligned with Gale and Bond's categories and reflected an additional thematic category of career preparation and professionalism.

Findings

Respondents represented institutions from multiple regions of the United States, including the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, and the Pacific Coast. Almost half (48.3%) of the institutions offer only the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree in musical theatre, approximately 13.8% offer only the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in musical theatre, and two institutions offer the BA and the BFA in musical theatre. Almost half (48.3%) of all programs, regardless of degree type, are accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST).

Nearly all respondents (90.5%) felt that assessment is very important (66.7%) or somewhat important (23.8%) to their musical theatre programs. The majority (85.7%) indicated that they have a formal assessment plan fully (61.9%) or partially (23.8%) in place for their programs. Those with plans indicated that their plans follow program-specific guidelines (55.2%), NAST accreditation guidelines (48.3%), or institution-specific guidelines (20.7%). A chi-square test was performed to examine the relation between the type of degree offered (BA or BFA) and how important assessment is for musical theatre programs. The relation between these variables was significant, $\chi^2(4, N=20) = 15.91, p < 0.05$. Programs offering the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degree were more likely to express that assessment was very important to their musical theatre program than those offering the Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree. A chi-square test was also performed to examine the relation between NAST accreditation status

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and how important assessment is for musical theatre programs. The relation between these variables was not significant, $\chi^2(4, N=21) = 2.74, p < 0.05$. As previously mentioned, Gale and Bond's (2007) framework was not used to structure the survey instrument. However, the four categories of the framework were used to guide analysis of the results.

Knowledge Building

Survey participants were asked to indicate the extent to which eight areas of learning were important for students in their musical theatre programs, using a scale of 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*). In general, respondents indicated that all eight areas of learning were at least very important for students in musical theatre programs, but there was some variation in the mean values of importance (see Table 1). While not ranked as most important, outcomes and skills assessed for knowledge building were solidly present. For example, understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette ($M = 4.50, SD = 0.89$); mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application ($M = 4.45, SD = 0.69$); and understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the canon ($M = 4.60, SD = 0.50$) were all identified as very important.

Table 1
Areas of Student Learning: Level of Importance to Degree Program

Area of Student Learning	Mean	SD
Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance	4.75	0.72
Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance	4.70	0.92
Ability to apply coursework to production work	4.70	0.57
Understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the canon	4.60	0.50
Understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette	4.50	0.89
Mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application	4.45	0.69
Ability to work independently in production	4.40	0.82
Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory	4.05	0.92

Survey participants also responded to two open-ended questions, asking them to (a) list other areas of learning that were important for students in their musical theatre programs, and (b) specify the learning outcomes for their musical theatre programs. Qualitative responses indicated that understanding of technical aspects of theatre, musical theory and sight-reading, and knowledge of theatre history and repertoire were areas of programmatic focus. Across institutions, program faculty reported that students in their programs will “demonstrate their knowledge of musical theatre literature including scores. They will also demonstrate their knowledge of the development and history of musical theatre.” An aspect of knowledge building regularly mentioned by participants, but not explicitly included in this category by Gale and Bond (2007), was the importance of knowing about and understanding the profession. This would include the mastery of audition/interview skills, understanding the business and marketing aspects of the field, understanding the limited opportunities available in the field, and understanding current trends and styles within the field. The importance of preparing students to take their craft into the professional world became evident through such comments and is more fully addressed in additional categories.

Methods used to assess students' knowledge were not reported in great detail, though the senior project was widely discussed as a capstone form of assessment that included foundational knowledge and skills from coursework. Application of skills and knowledge from coursework within production participation was also rated highly (Table 2). Therefore, assessment of learning in this area in both experiences would be logical. That said, given that the survey focused on programmatic forms of assessment, it is not surprising that detail about methods is missing. One can assume that most foundational knowledge and skills are introduced and assessed at the course-level, which was not the focus of this study.

Responses indicated that program faculty recognize a sense of responsibility not only to prepare students to be knowledgeable and critical performers and participants in their craft, but also to hone students' professional and career enhancing skills.

Creative Production

This suggests that despite the lack of literature on assessment within the creative and performing arts, faculty and instructors in musical theatre are actively engaging in the assessment of their students, individually and throughout their bachelor's programs.

As suggested by Gale and Bond (2007), each part of the framework is closely related and integrated with one another. This is certainly evident in the relationship between knowledge building and creative production. Creative production outcomes were generally considered to be the most important and were very common (85.7%) in programs represented. Production-oriented items in Table 1 (“Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance,” “Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance,” and “Ability to apply coursework to production work”) were consistently rated among the most important. Participants’ open-ended responses support this finding with comments about the importance of “demonstrated ability to create characters convincingly and perform vocally in various musical theatre styles... (and) demonstrated ability in various musical theatre dance techniques,” in addition to “us[e] (ing) the technical skills of a specialty of theatre (and)...exploit all appropriate tools in creating integrated production elements.”

Most programs (91.7%) required students to audition for all on-campus productions. Survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which auditioning for roles and/or serving in crew positions were considered when evaluating musical theatre students, using a scale of 1 (*not at all considered*) to 5 (*always considered*). Results indicated that most programs expect students to serve on at least one crew position in an on-campus theatre arts production ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.09$) and to audition for on-campus theatre art productions ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.41$). The expectation for students to audition for or to serve in crew positions in off-campus productions was less pervasive (see Table 2).

Table 2
Student Expectations: Level of Consideration When Evaluating Musical Theatre Students

Student Expectations	Mean	SD
Complete the curriculum outlined for the musical theatre degree program	5.00	0.00
Complete the essential studies or core requirements for the institution in which the student is enrolled	4.86	0.53
Serve on at least one crew position in an on-campus theatre arts production	4.43	1.09
Prepare and pass all yearly performance reviews	4.29	1.49
Audition for on-campus theatre art productions	4.00	1.41
Complete a senior capstone experience	3.93	1.69
Audition for professional/summer stock theatre arts productions	2.43	1.60
Serve on at least one crew position in an off-campus arts production	1.29	0.61

The assessment techniques most often mentioned in this study were closely aligned with the category of creative production. For example, most programs considered two student expectations, “Prepare and pass all yearly performance reviews” ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.49$) and “Complete a senior capstone experience” ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.69$) to be important elements of assessing students. When asked to describe the yearly review process, respondents indicated the use of faculty panels or reviews to assess student performance and growth on a regular basis. As one respondent wrote, “Musical theatre students must undergo an acting and a vocal jury [review] each semester, and a dance jury once a year. The juries [reviews] consist of monologues and scenes, vocal selections both from classical and musical theatre literature, and requisite dance combinations within abbreviated routines.” The emphasis on and importance of creative production as an outcome and an assessment area suggests that this aspect of the framework is among the most critical. Although the study did not ask specifically if the reviews used rubrics, the opportunity for evaluation is apparent. It is unclear how students receive feedback after these reviews and if the feedback is built upon a previous review. This is the most specific area for feedback and the greatest potential for specific assessment.

Integrative Contextualization

Integrative contextualization was present, but not pervasive among respondents. In fact, “Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory” was among those outcomes ranked lowest in importance ($M = 4.05, SD = 0.83$) relative to other goals that respondents had for students in musical theatre programs. Qualitative survey responses related to student goals such as “Growth and developing in all aspects of theatre production and study,” “Growth and development in the concepts and application of musicianship,” and “Integrating musical theatre studies with other academic studies” highlight programmatic efforts to place knowledge building and creative production within a broader intellectual context for their students. Not surprisingly, all respondents indicated that completing the curriculum outlined for the musical theatre degree program was always considered when evaluating students ($M = 5.0, SD = 0.0$). Completing essential studies or core requirements were also strongly considered ($M = 4.86, SD = 0.53$; see Table 2).

As mentioned in discussion of creative production, the senior project was a somewhat common assessment tool that, outside of specific coursework, was most likely used to assess integrative contextualization. Approximately 64.0% of institutions require musical theatre students to complete a senior project. These projects serve to demonstrate student growth in acting (89.0%), vocal performance (89.0%), and dance (78.0%). Additional purposes of the senior project included demonstration of research analytical skills; demonstration of an overall command of production, direction, and choreography; and demonstration of the ability to share self through cabaret. Often required items were more likely to focus on integrative characterization included character biographies, scene-by-scene analysis, and project reviews with scholarly components. In light of the sparse representation of this category among participants, a question is raised about the relevance of this skill to an undergraduate degree in musical theatre; rather, perhaps it is more evident in related graduate degrees.

Critical Communication

Critical communication could be considered the culmination of the integration of the other three elements to the framework (i.e., knowledge building, creative production, and integrative contextualization). As reflected in the creative production area, students are required to “Communicate verbally and physically a dramatic idea, situation, scene or character” and “Communicate verbally with collaborators using the vocabulary common in theatre.”

In addition, research, analytical, and scholarly writing skills are often assessed programmatically through senior projects, providing the critical element to this communication category. Previously mentioned, approximately 64.0% of institutions require musical theatre students to complete senior projects. For these projects, the student submits a variety of materials. Slightly more than half of participating institutions reported that they require students to submit written self-evaluations (56.0%). Fewer institutions require resumes (22.0%) or headshots (11.0%). These items are in addition to other institution-specific senior project components, such as character biographies, scene-by-scene analyses, and project reviews. Students must demonstrate and communicate mastery of their acting, vocal performance, and dance skills to reviewers, who are most often musical theatre faculty members (78.0%). Few institutions reported using reviewers from other academic departments (22.0%) and no institution indicated that community members serve on review panels for senior projects.

Although the communication or performance element is strong, the critical aspect of critical communication is less evident in participant responses. While students were asked to communicate by their programs, as was reflected in the discussion on integrative contextualization, critical analysis was less present and not clearly linked to communication beyond writing.

Professionalism and Career Preparation

A final theme that emerged from the qualitative survey responses to questions about the identification of learning outcomes and student expectations represents an additional category not included in Gale and Bond’s (2007) original framework. This category reflects the skills and abilities that students require in preparation for a career in theatre. Responses indicated that program faculty recognize a sense of responsibility not only to prepare students

While limited to one area of the creative arts, this study is a step toward developing an empirical assessment of student learning in the creative and performing arts in higher education.

The described criteria, including professionalism and career development, demonstrate assessment of learning and program outcomes in theatre arts that align with the broad goals of higher education, often reflected in general education requirements.

to be knowledgeable and critical performers and participants in their craft, but also to hone students' professional and career enhancing skills. This category was evident through two sub-themes: (a) professionalism and skills specific to working as a performer (e.g., auditioning, interviewing, marketing, etc.), and (b) the development of soft skills necessary in professional job and career opportunities. For the purposes of this paper, soft skills is defined as the interpersonal and personal attributes and skills desirable for employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge such as common sense, problem solving, working well with others and flexibility.

The crystalization of assessment criteria of learning within creative arts programs also reflects the proximity of the learning in these disciplines to the core learning outcomes of higher education.

In regard to the first subtheme, program faculty were aware that their students needed to be knowledgeable about and prepared to exit higher education and enter a career in theatre arts. A significant part of this preparation includes knowing how to conduct oneself in a professional manner specific to this career field and understanding the expectations of searching for and working in this field. One faculty member described the need to assess for professionalism, "We assess 'professional disposition' as a component of the evaluation process. Musical theatre students are expected to comport themselves at all times in a professional manner consistent with the demands and expectations of the professional field." Other programs describe understanding the audition package and interview, auditioning for roles, business and marketing aspects of the field, limited opportunities available in the field, and current trends and styles within the field as important to student growth and development in their programs.

Second, the development of soft skills necessary for professionalism and career success were also consistently described. One area of emphasis within this sub-theme included the importance of working well with others. Faculty stated that teamwork, working with professionals, "Functioning as a responsible member of the creative team," and "Going out into the work world to be excellent artistic collaborators" were critical elements to student learning.

While program faculty consistently described this area as an important area of learning, they did not explicitly report how or if it is assessed across a program. That said, students are introduced to the professional norms and expectations in theatre through the program's production process and activities (i.e., auditions, rehearsals, and performances). Assessment would, at the least, informally occur through auditions and feedback embedded in the production process, but there is no indication that assessment of professionalism and career preparation is formalized. While these elements could be included in the knowledge building or even creative production categories, the focus on the preparation of professional skills versus skills and abilities required for creative production in theatre arts results in a poor fit. The professionalism and career preparation category reflect separate skills and abilities necessary for college theatre arts majors intending to pursue this work as a career.

Discussion

To claim that assessment is becoming more common and increasingly required is an understatement; rather, it has become widespread and an embedded expectation throughout higher education and accreditation (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Kuh et al., 2014; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Maki, 2010). The descriptive data in this study supports this assertion. A majority of the program coordinators of bachelor's programs surveyed in this study both believed in the importance of assessment of student learning for their programs and also had some form of assessment plan in place. This suggests that despite the lack of literature on assessment within the creative and performing arts, faculty and instructors in musical theatre are actively engaging in the assessment of their students, individually and throughout their bachelor's programs.

Gale and Bond's (2007) four-part framework for assessing student learning for the creative arts is indicative of the broader status of literature on assessment in the arts as the majority of research and literature is focused on course-level assessment (Belluigi, 2009, 2013; Fryer, 2010; Mello, 2007; Orr, 2011; Parkes, 2010a, 2010b; Prendergast, 2003), with only two scholarly publications that discuss program or department-level assessment in theatre (Dorn & Orr, 2008; Mello, 2010). While limited to one area of the creative arts, this study is a step toward developing an empirical assessment of student learning in the creative and performing arts in higher education.

Although Gale and Bond's (2007) framework, by the creators' admission, was designed to be used as criteria for course-level assessment, as the sole conceptual frame for understanding how assessment in the creative arts could be conceptualized we sought to examine its applicability and utility in program-level assessment for theatre arts bachelor's degrees. Demonstrated in the findings, all four of Gale and Bond's categories were useful in making sense of the program responses, though why the latter two outcomes and areas of assessment, integrative contextualization and critical communication, were less common is unclear, though one might conjecture that such skills and areas of learning assessment may be more common within advanced degrees. Analysis of the qualitative responses also yielded a fifth category—professionalism and career preparation—extending Gale and Bond's framework. This fifth area concentrates on the ability of students to secure employment and develop a career in theatre arts—an arena to enact “the art of craft” (Gale & Bond, 2007, p. 26). While the fifth category is different from the previous four in that it is not an ability or competency in the art of craft, it was consistently described across the data as an important area of assessment and for competency development. Furthermore, within the context of the postsecondary educational outcomes expected by student and stakeholder alike, the ability to graduate college well-prepared for one's chosen career field with secure employment is paramount (Altbach, Gumport, & Berdahl, 2011). Therefore, this fifth criterion reflects an active area of learning outcomes and assessment that requires representation.

Gale and Bond (2007) state that “assessment of the creative, fine, and performing arts, especially at the undergraduate level, should determine to what extent students have been able to acquire the ‘art of craft,’ namely, those abilities and capacities required for artistic understanding, production, interpretation, analysis, and, above all, literate engagement...” claiming this goal to be “...as vital to liberal education as more traditional areas of evaluation and it is just as deserving of attention” (p. 126). The described criteria, including professionalism and career development, demonstrate assessment of learning and program outcomes in theatre arts that align with the broad goals of higher education, often reflected in general education requirements. As broad skills that college graduates should emerge with, skills and abilities such as logical and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, effective communication, understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives, and knowledge building across a range of disciplines are identified as essential to becoming a knowledgeable, literate human (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Though the arts are often pigeon-holed into representing the creative aspect of knowing, the application and extension of Gale and Bond's framework demonstrates the learning in the creative arts as critical to the overall development of the college student. The crystalization of assessment criteria of learning within creative arts programs also reflects the proximity of the learning in these disciplines to the core learning outcomes of higher education.

Implications for Practice & Research

Given the high stakes of assessment of student learning and program effectiveness for all academic programs in the current educational climate, there is a lack of literature discussing disciplinary-specific examples and models for assessment of learning in the creative and performing arts despite the practices and prevalent assessment activity evident in this study. While information and best practices for course and program level assessment are widely available and discussed generally, if and how they apply to assessment of learning in the theatre arts, and the broad disciplinary area of the arts, is understudied. The dearth of disciplinary-specific resources on this topic for the arts is problematic if such programs are to meet institutional assessment expectations, but as a field remain new to the assessment discussion. Furthermore, the lack of public information and discussion of assessment in the arts is a detriment to the study of assessment in general. These findings indicate that the assessment of subjective, affective, and expressive learning outcomes is active and well developed. In this case, musical theatre arts provides an opportunity for other disciplines to learn from their example. The creative and performing arts has an opportunity to contribute to the broader field and literature on assessment. This study aimed to develop a broad understanding of how learning is assessed in musical theatre and what the implications are for identifying areas for improvement and demonstrating program effectiveness. Most compelling is the opportunity to explore and develop best practices for assessment of student learning at the course and

While information and best practices for course and program level assessment are widely available and discussed generally, if and how they apply to assessment of learning in the theatre arts, and the broad disciplinary area of the arts, is understudied.

program levels among musical theatre programs and the potential to inform assessment of learning for other sub-disciplines within the arts as well.

The evidence from this study shows the useful application of Gale and Bond's (2007) framework within musical theatre programs. Although no institution cited their framework specifically, most programs' assessment practices included the four categories outlined: knowledge building, creative production, integrative contextualization, critical communication, and the added career and professionalism preparation category. Suggesting a potential frame for the development of best practices created for the discipline or adapted by more performance based programs.

It appears that knowledge building and creative production are present in a program's curricula and production season. Integrative contextualization and critical communication although less pervasive in the survey results could perhaps connect to understanding of the profession and performance standards. Understanding of the profession appeared to be a value in most programs. Integrating classroom learning and professional standards contextualize a production at the university or professional level. Critical communication often connects to written or oral communication. For performance programs, communication also includes nonverbal communication. This form of critical communication perhaps needs specificity when applied to specific disciplines for the most beneficial results. Because Gale and Bond's (2007) framework is valued, although mostly unknown, by performance programs one could argue that a program could place value on the categories within the framework and those categories can be given hierarchical order.

Most compelling is the opportunity to explore and develop best practices for assessment of student learning at the course and program levels among musical theatre programs and the potential to inform assessment of learning for other sub-disciplines within the arts as well.

History proves that most performance degree programs do not look toward traditional assessment methods, or perhaps are not labeled as such. In fact, most performance degree programs look toward industry standards, which can lead to subjective assessment. One could also argue that some performance programs are not based on industry standards, but the desires of the current faculty. Although Gale and Bond's (2007) framework was used as a tool to guide the survey the methods within the framework were not ranked or prioritized in any way in the survey. Gale and Bond's framework might not be the most clearly defined guide for assessment in performance programs, however it appears to be the best aligned with programmatic values as surveyed and provides a workable framework.

The majority of musical theatre programs required a review of students' progress either on a semester or yearly basis. The review appeared to be the most documented form of assessment of Gale and Bond's four areas as well as the fifth area of professionalism mentioned earlier in this article. Perhaps a more direct application of these five areas during the review would provide an entree into the creation of a measurable assessment tool for faculty and students. The study did not ask for specifics regarding a program's review process and what rubrics if any were used, however upon further research, using the five areas discussed in this paper as a common rubric for musical theatre program reviews might create less subjectivity and clarity of assessment or might be used to structure and organize assessment approaches used throughout programs. Additionally the accreditation agency could also supply examples for professional programs to use in a review process. The standardization of evaluation has never been attempted in the arts. Industry standard has been the norm for performing arts programs. This can lead to variance in outcomes; however consistency is not always beneficial in the arts. Whatever method was developed must include room for a student's unique talents and approach to the work.

A second way that this framework could be useful for programs, particularly in accountability efforts, would be for programs to track or conduct a curriculum mapping of the assessments conducted at the course- and program-levels using the framework's dimensions as an organizing agent. The benefit of this approach would be the (a) ability to use a uniform and consistent way to organize and interpret the data and (b) use of an assessment tool that is aligned with the values and language of the performing arts.

This study, drawing on descriptive quantitative and qualitative data, was exploratory in nature and purpose. Given the scant empirical and scholarly literature on assessment of learning in the creative and performing arts, this study began to fill this gap and build its knowledge base. Further research would benefit from a deeper and more specific exploration of assessment practices in both the classroom and program levels. Creating a fuller picture of

current practices would contribute to the development of applicable and practical descriptions, case studies, and tools that might be used to further develop and support clear assessment plans and practices in the creative arts. Finally, a limitation of this study was its narrow focus on one area, musical theatre, within the creative arts. Continued research would expand knowledge and understanding of assessment practices to other disciplinary areas (e.g., music, dance, visual arts, etc.), extending the utility of such literature and practical tools.

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Appendix A

Assessment in Theatre Arts Survey

Section 1: Program Logistics

1. What is the name of your institution?
2. What is the name of your academic program?
3. What type of degree in Musical Theatre do you offer?
 - a. Bachelor of Arts (BA)
 - b. Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)
 - c. Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)
4. Is your program NAST accredited?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I am not sure
5. Does your program have a formal assessment plan in place?
 - a. Yes, a formal assessment plan is fully in place.
 - b. A formal assessment plan is partially in place.
 - c. No, there is no formal assessment plan in place.
 - d. I am not sure
6. What guidelines do you use for your assessment plan, if any?
 - a. NAST
 - b. Institution-specific
 - c. Program-specific
 - d. Other, please specify:
7. How important is assessment to your Musical Theatre program?
 - a. Very important
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Not at all important

Section 2: Student Learning

8. Indicate the extent to which the following areas of learning are important for students in your program:

Item Number	Areas of Student Learning	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
a.	Understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b.	Mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c.	Understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the cannon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d.	Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e.	Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f.	Ability to apply course work to production work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g.	Ability to work independently in production	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h.	Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. List here other areas of learning that are important for students in your program.

10. Do you have specific, stated learning outcomes for your program?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. not sure

11. If you answered “yes” to #10, what are the learning outcomes for your program?

12. Do you plan to change the learning outcomes for your program?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. not sure

13. If you answered “yes” to #12, what changes do you plan to make?

14. If you answered “no” or “not sure” to #10, do you plan to write specific learning outcomes within the next 12 months?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. not sure

Section 3: Performance Requirements

15. Do you have performance requirements for students in your Musical Theatre program?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. not sure

16. If you answered “yes” to #15, for how many on-campus productions must Musical Theatre students audition?
- a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. All
17. If you answered “yes” to #15, for how many professional/summer stock productions must Musical Theatre students audition?
- a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3
 - e. All
18. What, if any, consequences do Musical Theatre students face if they do not audition for on-campus or professional/summer stock productions? Mark all that apply.
- a. There are no consequences
 - b. Negative yearly performance review
 - c. Non-renewal of scholarship(s)
 - d. Other, please specify:

Section 4: Student Expectations

19. Indicate the extent to which each of the following performance areas are important for students to demonstrate mastery as Musical Theatre students:

Item Number	Performance Area	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
a.	Acting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b.	Vocal Performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c.	Dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. Indicate the extent to which the following student expectations are considered when evaluating Musical Theatre students:

Item Number	Areas of Student Learning	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very Important	Extremely Important
a.	Understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b.	Mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c.	Understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the cannon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d.	Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e.	Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f.	Ability to apply course work to production work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g.	Ability to work independently in production	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h.	Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. What grade point average (GPA) do you require students to maintain in all major-related courses?

- a. No GPA requirement
- b. 2.0-2.5 on a 4.0 scale
- c. 2.6-3.0 on a 4.0 scale
- d. 3.1-3.5 on a 4.0 scale
- e. 3.6 or above on a 4.0 scale

22. What grade point average (GPA) do you require students to maintain overall?

- a. No GPA requirement
- b. 2.0-2.5 on a 4.0 scale
- c. 2.6-3.0 on a 4.0 scale
- d. 3.1-3.5 on a 4.0 scale
- e. 3.6 or above on a 4.0 scale

23. List other student expectations that are considered when evaluating students in your Musical Theatre program.

Section 5: Review Process

24. How often do you review the progress of students in your Musical Theatre Program?
- Never
 - Once a semester
 - Once a year
 - Once every two years
 - Upon completion of the program
 - Department or program chair review
 - Community member review
 - Other, please specify:
25. How are Musical Theatre students reviewed at your institution? Mark all that apply.
- Self-evaluation
 - Faculty review
26. Please describe the review process.
27. How is student success determined in your review process of Musical Theatre students?

Section 6: Senior Project

28. Does your program require Musical Theatre students to complete a senior project?
- Yes
 - No
 - I am not sure
29. If you answered “yes” to #28, what is the purpose of the senior project? Select all that apply.
- Demonstrate student growth in acting
 - Demonstrate student growth in vocal performance
 - Demonstrate student growth in dance
 - Other, please specify: _____
30. What materials must a student submit for the senior project? Select all that apply.
- Self-evaluation
 - Resume
 - Headshot
 - List of repertory completed while in program
 - Other, please specify: _____
31. Who evaluates the senior project? Select all that apply.
- Musical Theatre faculty members
 - Faculty members from other departments
 - Community partners
 - Other, please specify: _____