

Regional

Theater education valuable to all students

As students get more involved in scholarly work, many are gaining widespread recognition early on. That is the case for Alex Moore, who graduated in 2011 from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville with a bachelor's degree in theater performance. He has since returned to SIUE's department of theater and dance to complete a teacher education certificate program. A project that he developed was performed at the Missouri State Thespian Conference in St. Louis last January.

"This was my final project for earning my theater education certification," Moore said. "It was a one-act play by Tennessee Williams called, 'Summer at the Lake.' In that project I worked with three high school students directing them through the entire process. The conference was attended by 1,500 high school students from across Missouri." The selection process is competitive, Moore said, adding that this was the first time a student teacher was awarded the honor of presenting work at the conference. Moore said that he has always wanted to be a teacher.

"My counselor freshman year of high school suggested I take a theater acting class, such as improvisation, to help me with communication skills. At the time I didn't want to take it," he said. "I was very shy and it wasn't immediately love at first sight. But it quickly became something I was drawn to and I spent the entire four years working on shows. My senior year was theater education and it quickly came to my mind that it was to be my career path."

After graduating from SIUE, Moore worked in Chicago as an actor, director, and theater company manager before retuning to obtain his teaching certificate. He said that he thinks that learning about theater can help young people regardless of what career they want.

"There is so much to theater that directly applies to internal and external communication," Moore explained. "It's about how you say something, how you do something and how you become aware of what you show others and what you are telling others." He added that because theater is such a collaborative field, students learn how to work well with others. He quickly added that being a theater teacher also requires some special skills.

"You have to risk," he said. "You have to be able to



Alex Moore

try things and look a bit foolish sometimes. You have to have fun and be able to make fun of yourself because you get up there in front of 30 high school students and you do something they have never done before. And they look at you like it's the lamest thing they've ever

seen and they absolutely don't want to do it." He said that a theater teacher spends many hours working with students in rehearsals, drama club meetings and helping them with their studies.

"It's a lot of hours but it can be a lot of fun, and when

Aldemaro Romero College Talk

the students shine it can be a very rewarding experience," Moore said, adding that he oftentimes uses videos of great plays as teaching tools.

"We just finished with my students looking at the play 'Our Town' by Thornton Wilder, and for some of the students that was the first play they had ever seen," he said. "It was a previously recorded production and we went through it to understand what was happening, why is this actor making this choice, how was this different from what a movie would look like. It was just a completely different experience than just watching a blockbuster movie."

Moore said that he teaches students about all aspects of theater, including acting, direction and design. Which area does he most enjoy teaching? "Theater appreciation," he said. "Learning to be an audience member is probably one of my favorites. I absolutely love going to see a play and I love when students go to see a play and come back and talk to me about their experience."

He acknowledged that the Internet poses a big challenge for students who think that it is easier to watch a video on their computers rather than going to see live theater. But for Moore, there is no comparison between the experiences.

"You are there and you realize that you are in the same space with the actors," he said. "You are both breathing the same air, you are both hearing the same thing and you are both reacting. That performance will never be the same twice. As an audience member you essentially become an actor, a participant in the show. You are affecting the outcome. A laugh, a clap, and you have a response that then changes how the performance goes."

Aldemaro Romero is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.

Photo courtesy of Scott Schoonover