



Thatz Showbiz's Ongoing Commitment to Anti-Oppression – Our 3 Pillar Method

Anti-Oppression: Thatz Showbiz prides itself on working within an Anti-oppression framework. We believe in theatre as an act of social justice and tool for social change. An Anti-Oppression framework challenges the structure of society, and the use of power, with an understanding that these systems keep some groups in disadvantaged positions. We are committed to improving the quality of theatre education, increasing opportunities and centering equity seeking groups both within our hiring processes and the communities we serve. All staff and volunteers will be expected to learn our Anti-Oppression policies, receive ongoing training and education and commit to utilizing the information and tools provided within our programming.

Our Anti-Oppression Framework addresses **3 pillars** when looking at different community groups and community actions: **Education, Advocacy** and **Action**. It is important to note that while it may read like these are tiered steps, they actually are pillars that support each other and need to operate in conjunction, simultaneously in order to support our efforts. Only having 1 or 2 pillars active at any given time contributes to a weak framework. Additionally, the pillars are not static, and we acknowledge that the work is ongoing to support our Anti-Oppression framework as it evolves and changes:

Anti-Racism

Education

We are committed to the learning and unlearning of the ways in which racism and white supremacy is embedded into structures, systems and institutions. We acknowledge that theatre education has had a long history of excluding, suppressing, appropriating and gatekeeping BIPOC youth. This has contributed to BIPOC youth being unable to access the same theatre education opportunities as white youth and feel as safe, supported and heard. Through research and education, we learn about the barriers that have prevented BIPOC youth from participating, contributing and excelling in theatre education settings. Additionally, we learn about the steps we can take to insure a safer space that prioritizes the needs of BIPOC youth so they can have barrier free access to a theatre education that reflects their potential and prosperity.

Advocacy

We convert education into advocacy by sharing this information with our staff, volunteers and community members. We do this through meetings and training, social media postings, signage that identifies our studio as a safe space on our storefront windows and working with and supporting local community groups (such as Parents for Black Children, Italian Canadians for Black Lives and Vaughan African Canadian Association), listening to the needs of our

community, signing petitions and having conversations with local government officials. Our studio is not serving our community by acting as a vacuum. The youth we work with will only truly feel welcome and safe if they know we are advocating for them within in our walls and outside of them.

Action

Our advocacy supports our concrete actions of:

- 1.) Prioritizing BIPOC youth and validating their important contributions to theatre; their written narratives/staged stories by providing opportunities for them to create their own original work.
- 2.) Pairing them up with BIPOC mentors and theatre educators that can best understand their experiences, support their needs and provide guidance for a career in the arts
- 3.) Securing funding (through grants and donations) to eliminate financial barriers and provide as much free opportunities for BIPOC youth as possible (an example of this is our “3 Plays in 30 Days” playwriting mentorship program)
- 4.) When hiring staff BIPOC applicants are prioritized not only to best support BIPOC youth but also to support BIPOC artists and BIPOC theatre ecology as part of a greater effort to dismantle white supremacy in our theatre communities at large
- 5.) Using a canon of BIPOC playwrights and poets to learn from, study and perform.

Black Lives Matter

Education

We are educated by organization like Black Lives Matter Toronto and the many open educational resources they provide.

Advocacy

We use social media posts, signage at the store front of our studio and conversation with our students to talk about and show our support for Black Lives Matter. We donate and encourage donations to Obsidian Theatre, BLAC (Black Legal Action Centre), The A.M.Y Project, Black Youth Helpline, The Black Mental Health Matters Fund and b current

Action

Our statement and commitment to Action:

I cannot say it better than Philip Akin, Artistic Director of Obsidian Theatre “People keep saying the system is broken. It isn’t. It was designed that way” (Visit Obsidian's page for the full statement and donate while you're there.) Recognizing that we are operating in an intentionally broken system designed to hold Black folks back, we at Thatz Showbiz have an abundance of work to do to actively combat that system. It is not enough to say that we are here, that we are

in solidarity, that we are listening, when lives are at stake. We can listen and mobilize at the same time, and we must. This is urgent. It has been urgent for a long time.

The theatre has let and continues to let Black folks down. Professional theatre companies and theatre schools have been and continue to be violent, isolating and traumatic in the way they treat, use, take from, trigger, exclude and ignore Black folks (Please see Broadway writer Griffin Matthews 's statement on the pervasive racism on Broadway). The theatre is not immune. I would much rather Thatz Showbiz not exist at all then perpetuate this. I would rather Thatz Showbiz not exist at all then be a place of silence, complacency or be wishy-washy and delicate on where we stand. If Thatz Showbiz is not actively fighting the systems of Oppression every single day I will shut it down. If it does not deserve to be here, I will shut it down and that is my commitment to everyone. Black youth deserve better, Black artists deserve better. Black lives matter more to us than our building, our studio and what we create under the name of Thatz Showbiz. Our building, our studio and what we create doesn't matter or contribute anything meaningful to the world of theatre until Black lives matter first.

I want to recognize the many neurodiverse, autistic and performers with intellectual disabilities of color that come through our programs and create theatre with us and how particularly vulnerable they are to violence from police (as well as violence from civilians) who don't consider sensory sensitivities, stims, anxiety and different ways of verbal and non-verbal communication when looking at Black folks with disabilities. We are committed to their safety.

Our commitments:

- Our hiring process for projects will prioritize black artists
- Anti-oppression, decolonial, trauma-informed and anti-racist rhetoric built into all classes
- Anti-oppression, decolonial, trauma-informed and anti-racist training for staff
- Stories and plays by BIPOC artists are centered
- Black youth to the front
- Black youth are paired with theatre mentors who look like them and are given a safe space to create without white gaze, white feedback, white pressure.
- Writing more grants for FREE programs for Black youth and Black folks with disabilities
- Holding our government officials accountable. Writing, calling and being in conversation with them

Decolonizing Theatre Education

Education

We are going through ongoing education and research on the original storytellers and theatre creators of this land (Turtle Island and Tkaronto). We are learning about decolonial theatre education techniques and the origins of theatre history from an Indigenous lens.

Advocacy

We practice advocacy through land acknowledgements at gatherings, meetings, and performances. We donate and encourage donations to organizations such as the Downie Wenjack Foundation, The Woodland Cultural Centre, Native Earth Performing Arts, and Native Women in the Arts.

Action

- 1.) Building a curriculum that highlights the theatre history of the Indigenous original storytellers and theatre creators of this land.
- 2.) Choosing material in our canon to study and perform from Indigenous artists and theatre creators (Such as our “I am Canadian” virtual project featuring the poem by Elder Duke Redbird)
- 3.) Looking at Indigenous creation stories as an important foundation for storytelling and literature
- 4.) Our Free Resource “Virtual Theatre Of Neurodiversity: A Workbook for Educators, Facilitators and Performers with Disabilities” includes sections on Decolonial Theatre Education and resources and exercises that we use that support this framework (<https://thatzshowbiz.com/teacher-guide/>)
- 5.) Prioritizing Indigenous applicants for available job positions
- 6.) Inviting Indigenous artists to lead workshops
- 7.) Creating opportunities for devised theatre and collective theatre creation is an act of decolonizing theatre creating by dissipating power structures and focusing on community creation and valuing everyone’s input.

“Radical Accessibility”

Education

We have done and continue to do extensive research on Disability Theatre and history and the oppressive systems that continuously prohibit performers with disabilities from participating in theatre and theatre education including being discriminated against and not allowed into many theatre education programs and the ongoing casting of able-bodied, neurotypical actors in disabled and neurodiverse roles. We learn about what it takes to create what we call a “Radically Accessible” space, performances, and curriculum. We learn and teach basic ASL to

students and teachers and we share this education with our students, facilitators, and community at large.

Advocacy

We advocate for Artists with Disabilities in casting onstage and on screen. With the extensive research and knowledge, we've acquired we provide consulting and workshops to other theatre organizations on Radical Accessibility and have open resources available. We look to address ableism in our communities and work diligently to get government officials to address the inequalities People with Disabilities face. We are conscious of the language we use. We put much of our efforts toward individuals with intellectual disabilities or who are neurodiverse as we have found through our research that they are most often left out of conversations and attempts to address ableism.

Action

- 1.) Programs specifically for Performers with disabilities (specifically those with intellectual disabilities, neurodiversity and Down Syndrome)
- 2.) Partnerships with The Down Syndrome Association of York Region, Meta Centre and Creating Alternatives
- 3.) Built and continuing to build upon free resource for educators doing theatre with People with Disabilities (<https://thatzshowbiz.com/teacher-guide/>)
- 4.) Providing "Radical Accessibility" workshops to theatre companies so they can learn what language to use, what policies to put into place and how to cast more performers with disabilities
- 5.) Devised theatre creating – allowing artists with disabilities to take back their narratives and tell their own story in their own way
- 6.) Incorporating Disability Theatre History as an important part of theatre history and the study of theatre. Disability Theatre has long been a big part of the foundation of social justice theatre but is rarely acknowledged as such.
- 7.) All abilities and disabilities welcome; all literacy levels, all forms of communication (verbally and non-verbally). No one will be turned away from our programs in regard to disability
- 8.) Not only will students not be turned away but they will be supported and encouraged and their talents will always be honored and utilized. We do not put an emphasis on the written word and our emphasis on collective community creation allows students to communicate and create their story using what is most accessible to them (i.e sound, movement, song).
- 9.) We do not try to fit Disability theatre in to a Western, colonial box, instead we appreciate that Disability Theatre is its own art form that should be respected as such.

LGBTQ2S+

Education

Learning and unlearning the ways in which heteronormativity and the gender binary have infiltrated the theatre for many years and stifled its possibilities. We have learned and continue to learn that these structures have made theatre spaces feel unsafe and unwelcoming to LGBTQ2S+ students and that the casting process can be particularly daunting for LGBTQ2S+ students.

Advocacy

Through social media, signage on our studio store front and conversations with local government officials we advocate for safer and welcoming spaces for LGBTQ2S+ students.

Action

- 1.) LGBTQ2S+ specific programming (Such as our LGBTQ2S+ specific “3 Plays In 30 Days”
- 2.) Pairing up LGBTQ2S+ youth with LGBTQ2S+ mentors and theatre educators
- 3.) Allowing LGBTQ2S+ youth to write and produce their own stories
- 4.) An emphasis on pronouns as a part of introductions in every program
- 5.) Sourcing LGBTQ2S+ material to use in class (i.e musicals, songs, scripts)
- 6.) Eliminating the “importance” of gender or just eliminating gender entirely from many productions and allowing students to decide the gender of the characters
- 7.) Gender swapping roles in shows, allowing students to have the opportunity to play a wider range of characters and gender expressions
- 8.) Eliminating gendered language from the rehearsal room (such as using “friendships”, “folks”, “theatre creators”, instead of “Ladies and gentlemen” and “guys”)