



Current Programming Trends in Cultural Arts Settings for Persons with Sensory, Social, & Cognitive Disorders

Roger I. Ideishi, JD, OT/L, FAOTA
Associate Professor , Occupational Therapy
Temple University

*What are sensory / autism / relaxed
cultural arts experiences?*

**Cultural arts experiences
adapted to foster the patron role
for individuals with sensory, social,
& cognitive disabilities.**

Who has sensory, social, & cognitive challenges?

- Autism
- Intellectual disabilities
- Brain injury
- Attention disorders
- Psychiatric disabilities
- Others

Range of challenges

- Receiving, integrating & interpreting information
 - Sensory sensitivities
- Behavioral & social difficulties
 - Communication differences

Theater, Museums, Zoo, & Aquarium Environments



Predictable, familiar

Unpredictable, unfamiliar

Lights & **NOISES**

Smells & Textures

Crowds & *SPACES*

Visual stimulation

Intensity of information

Who is creating sensory/autism/relaxed friendly cultural arts experiences?

Education or Accessibility Departments

- Museum venues
 - Children's museums
 - Art museums
 - Science museums
 - Zoos & aquariums
- Performing Arts venues
 - Theater companies
 - Ballet companies
 - Orchestra companies

Is it Sensory-friendly / Autism-friendly / Relaxed?

- Diversity to meet the needs of the group being served
- Great variation in design, implementation, marketing, & evaluation

(Reiter, 2014)

Why are cultural arts education programs developing sensory/autism/relaxed experiences?

- Growing disability population
 - Estimated ~ 18% of U.S. population has a disability impacting function (Lazar & Jaeger, 2011)
 - 1 in 68 children being diagnosed with autism (CDC, 2014)
- Increasing inquiries about options for persons with sensory, social & cognitive disorders
 - Ambiguous guidelines
 - Limited model programming or clinical evidence

Why are cultural arts education programs developing sensory/autism/relaxed experiences?

- Philosophy and attitude towards persons with disabilities
 - Opportunity & choice
- Range of opportunities & choice as a cultural arts patron
 - Diverse needs, situations, modifications, and experiences

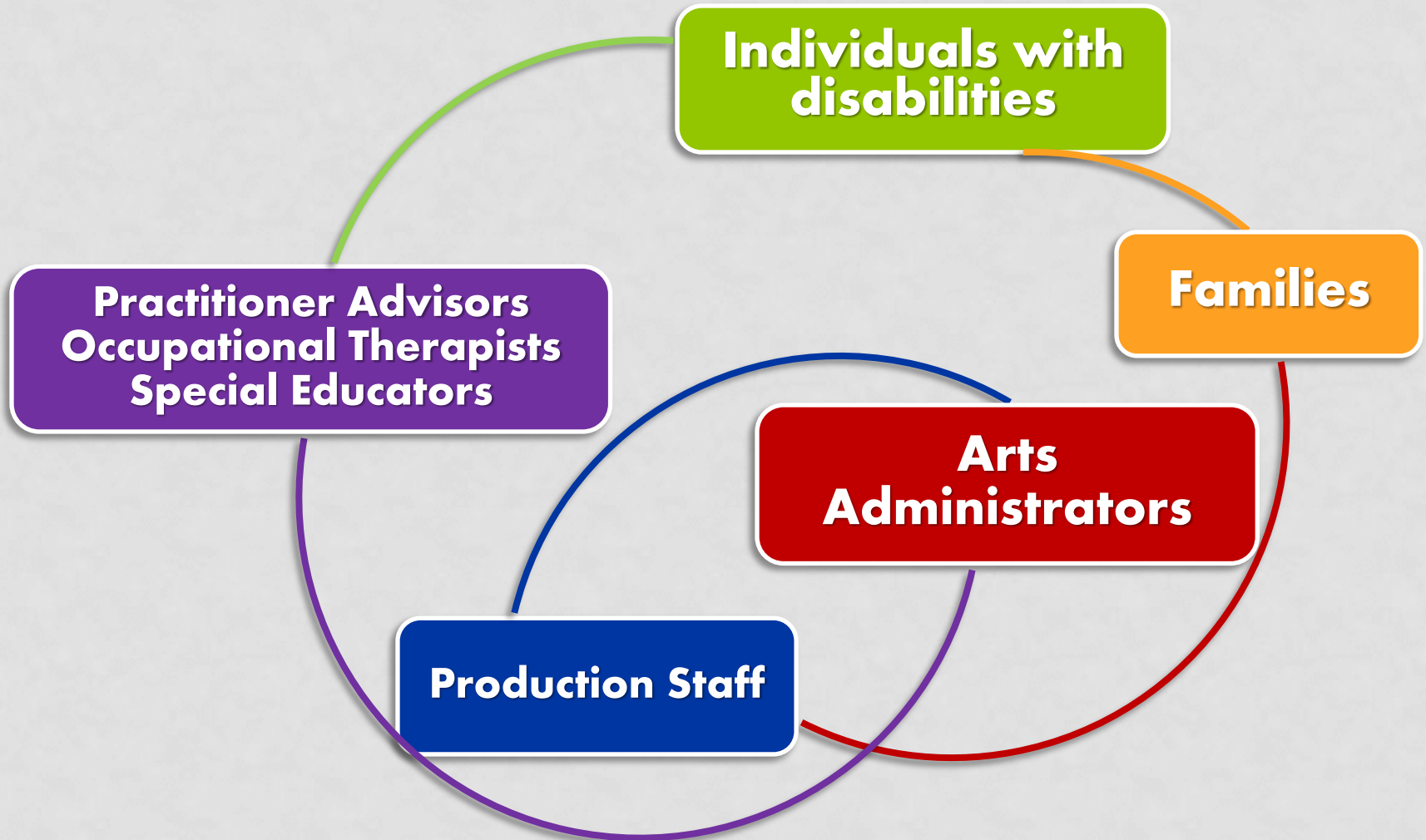
Why are cultural arts education programs developing sensory/autism/relaxed experiences?

- Sedentary behaviors, isolation, limited activity range (Bedell, Coster, Law et al, 2013; Ideishi & Mendonca, 2012; Palisano, Kang, Chiarello, et al., 2009)
- Begin preparations earlier to build routines, habits, and community patterns in childhood and youth (Hoogsten & Woodgate, 2010)
 - Friendships
 - Empowerment
 - Self-determination
 - Activity patterns
- Preparing for transition to adulthood

What are cultural arts education programs trying to address?

- **Family needs and concerns** (Ideishi & Mendonca, 2012 & 2013)
 - Is it for the entire family?
 - Is it a good day for my child?
 - Just getting there
 - What is the “escape” plan?
 - Who will help me?
 - Is it a safe space?
 - How much will it cost when it's a risk?

Who is on the team to address these concerns?



How do I start?

Individuals with disabilities

Occupational Therapists
Special Educators

Families

Production Staff

**Arts
Administrators**

Prep...

- Gather advisory team

- Select show & dates

- Public or special performance?

- Ticketing (*pricing & policy*)

- Public communication & marketing strategies

What do cultural arts venues do to create sensory/autism/relaxed friendly experiences?

Environment

- Modifications

Predictability

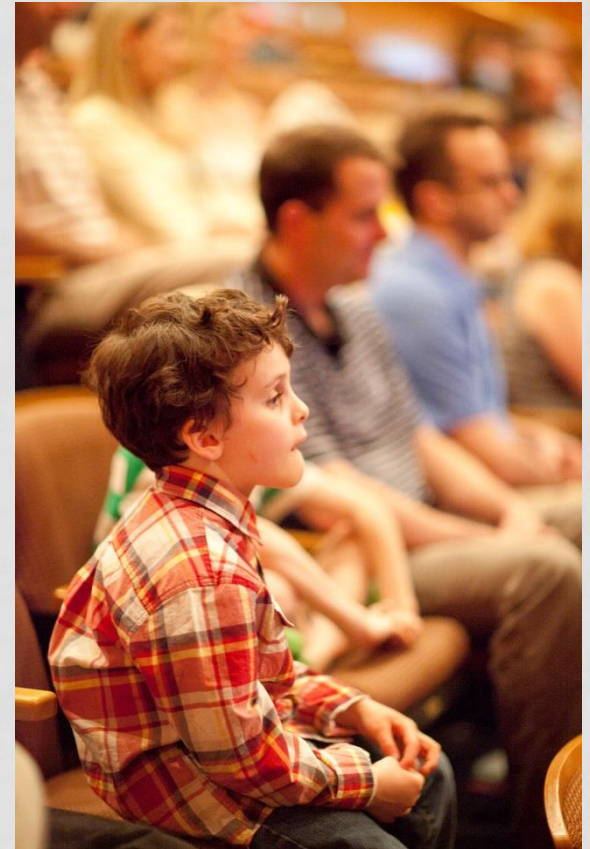
- Preparatory pre-visit materials

Supports

- Organizational policy
- Staff training

Outcomes

- Program evaluation



ENVIRONMENT

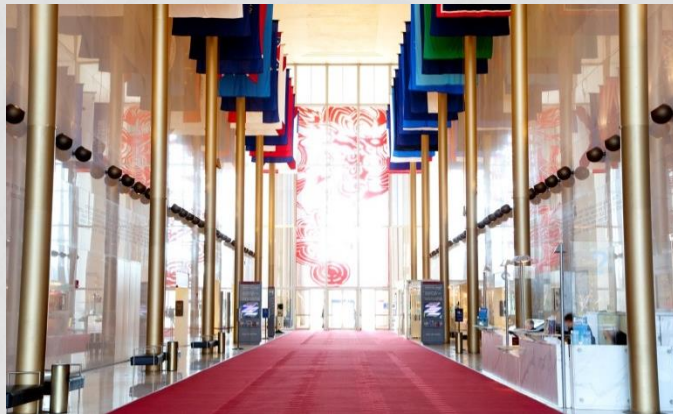
• Modifications

◉ Preview environment

- Mapping the environment
- Facilitating or constraining environmental features

◉ Environmental

- Physical space – distance, height, width
- Sensory – lighting, sounds, crowds, movement, smell
- Social – norms, routines, expectations



ENVIRONMENT

• Modifications

◉ Environmental logistics

- Parking – distance, garage/flat lot
- Entry – opening times, waiting
- Bathrooms – automatic or manual
- Lobby – seating, quiet/loud spaces
- Theater – seating row length, stairs/railings (number & grade), opulence



ENVIRONMENT

• Modifications

- ◉ Family Tip Sheets
- ◉ “*Meet your Seat*” or visitation events
- ◉ Modified opening times
- ◉ Quiet & break spaces
- ◉ Tape over automatic devices (manual flush/paper towels)
- ◉ Seating preferences
- ◉ House lighting*
- ◉ Audience sound*

Advisory team can assist

*(Ideishi & Mendonca, 2012, 2013)



Photo courtesy of Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre



Photo by Scott Suchman
Photo courtesy of the Kennedy Center

ENVIRONMENT

• Modifications

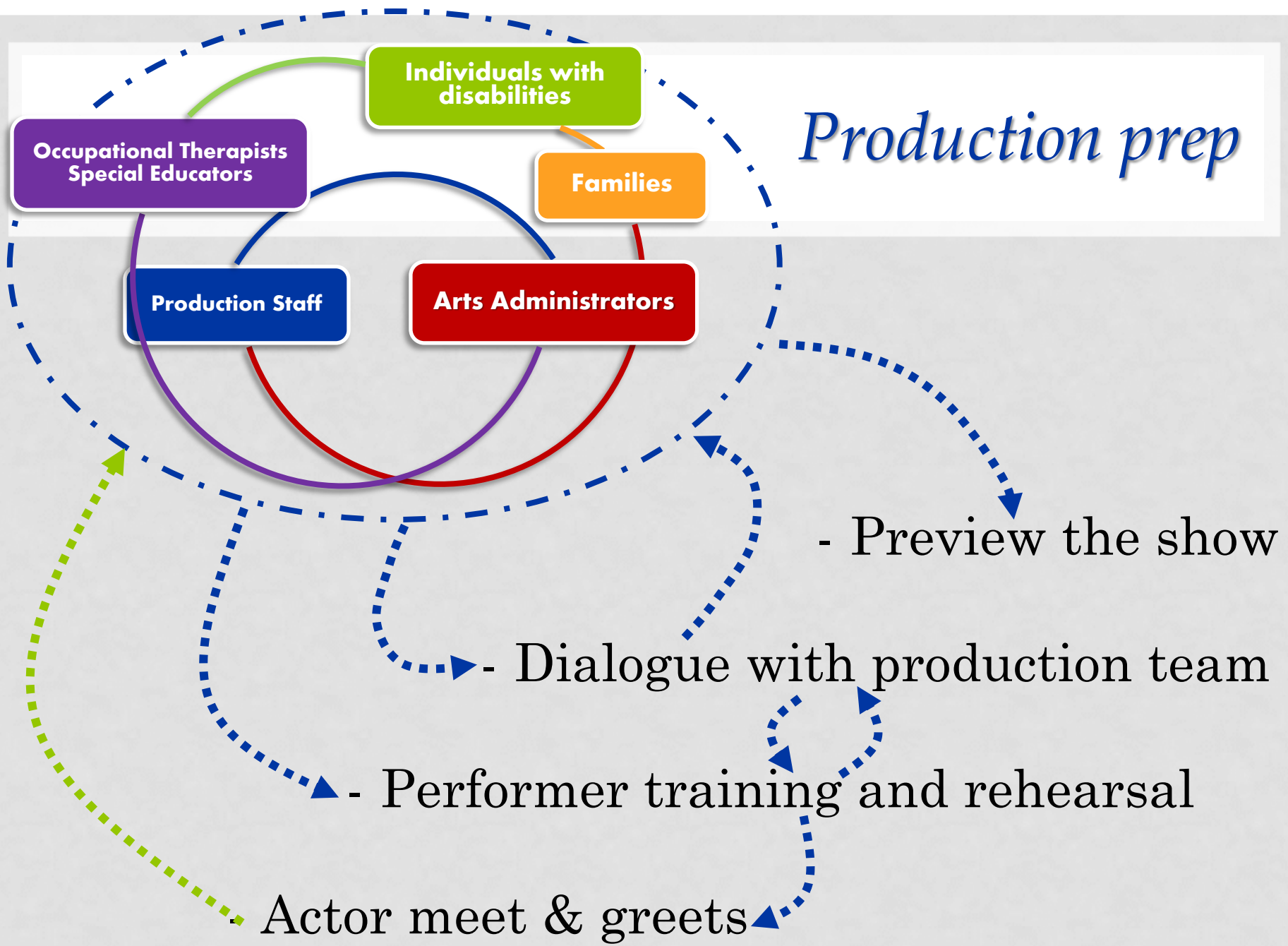
- ◉ Preview performance
 - Mapping the performance
 - Potential facilitating or constraining features



Photo by Margo Shulman

Photo courtesy of Imagination Stage, Bethesda, MD

2014 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Production, Theater for Young Audiences



Occupational Therapists
Special Educators

Individuals with
disabilities

Families

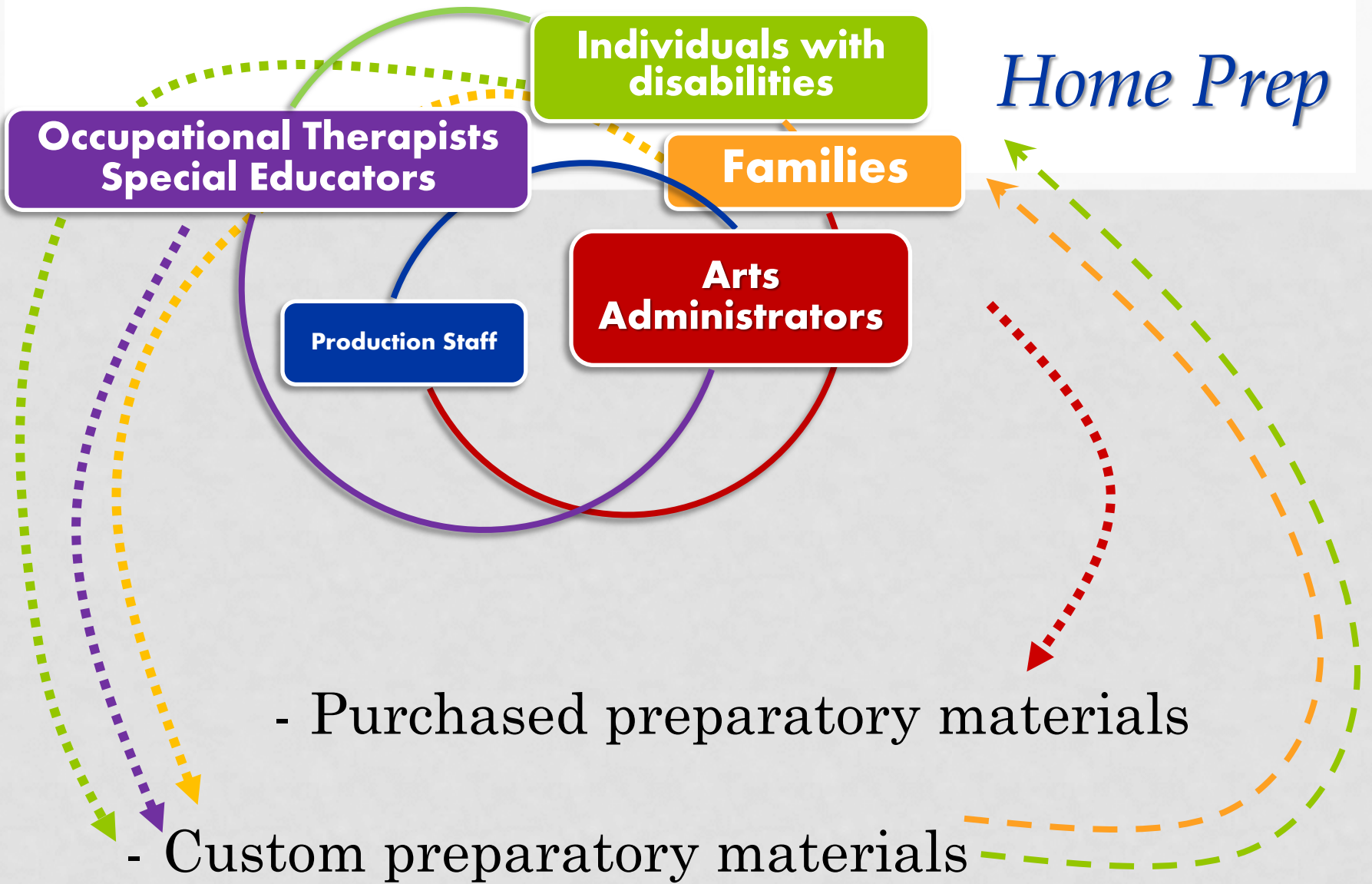
Production Staff

Arts Administrators

ENVIRONMENT

• Modifications

- ⊙ Usually, modifications only from the stage edge towards the audience (*house lights, sound speakers in audience not stage, seating, movement, etc.*)
- ⊙ Some theaters will make “minor” adjustments to the on-stage performance
 - Interactive moments in the show; performers in the audience (*invite interaction, don't invade space*)
 - Flashing or strobe lighting
 - Sudden or startling moments (*visual cues*)
 - Loud moments (*the “swoop”*)
- ⊙ Artistic director participation is critical



PREDICTABILITY

- Preparatory pre-visit materials

◉ Priming

- Family tip sheets (environmental logistics)
- Visual schedules
- Pre-visit stories

◉ Adaptive tools

- Ipads, headphones, fidgets, web resources

(Ali & Frederickson, 2006; Crozier & Tincani, 2007; Kokina & Kern, 2010; Lequia et al., 2012; Quirnbach et al., 2009; Sansosti et al., 2004)

PREDICTABILITY

- Preparatory pre-visit materials

Visual Schedule

THE
ACADEMY
OF NATURAL
SCIENCES
of DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Picture Schedule

Museum



Front desk



Button



PREDICTABILITY

- Preparatory pre-visit materials



lobby

The theater **lobby** at the Kennedy Center is big.

When I look up, I will see a lot of flags.

I will walk in the **lobby** to get to the theater where I will see the show.

Pre-Visit Stories

Explain a situation

- ✓ Descriptive
- ✓ Directive

PREDICTABILITY

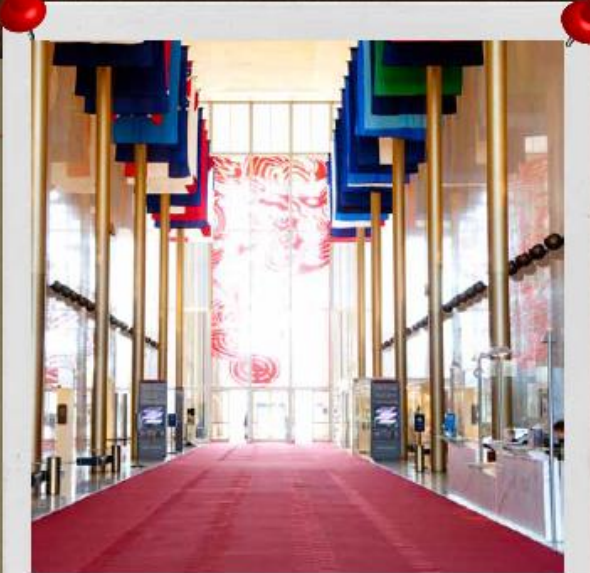
- Preparatory pre-visit materials

The theater I am going to is located near the **Hall of States**.

The **Hall of States** displays flags from the 50 states, the 5 territories, and the District of Columbia.

The show will be in the Family Theater.

I can look around the **Hall of States** before I go into the Family Theater.



HALL OF STATES

Pre-visit stories can have multiple complexity

PREDICTABILITY

- Preparatory pre-visit materials



magic

During the ballet, a person may perform a magic trick by making something fly around.

This piece of cloth isn't really flying.

The cloth is being moved around on wires.

PREDICTABILITY

- Preparatory pre-visit materials

Pre-Visit Movie



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Q9MxfJ_OQc&feature=youtu.be

SUPPORTS

- Organizational policy

- ⇒ Advisory board
- ⇒ Admission price
- ⇒ Alternative hours
- ⇒ Communication & marketing
- ⇒ Resources
 - Human
 - Space
 - Financial

SUPPORTS

- Staff training

- ✓ *What is autism?*
- ✓ *Increase awareness of family/child needs*
- ✓ *What is autism programming?*
- ✓ *What are the sensory modifications?*

- Parking attendants
- Security guards
- Educators
- Ushers
- Concessions
- Volunteers
- Anyone the person may be in contact with

SUPPORTS

• Performer training

- ✓ What is autism?
- ✓ Increase awareness of family/child needs
- ✓ What is autism programming?
- ✓ What are the sensory modifications?
- ✓ Develop strategies

- *“Preparation beforehand helped”*
- *“We’ve had more unruly non-autistic audiences before” (school performance)*
- *“It was hard to keep up the pace but be intense, emotionally speaking”*

*“Peter Pan & Wendy”
Imagination Stage, Bethesda, MD
Photography by Margo Shulman*



Performer Qualitative Data Analysis

ACTING WITH INTENTION

- it's a good challenge for actors as well. It stops you from being complacent, you have to sort of think about things again.
- ...maybe it was just me, there was this one scene where the lights go full black out and we have to sneak out on stage... But my thought was don't go out until the lights go out but then I thought "oh wait, the lights aren't going to go out" so I stood there a bit until I realized it.
- I think we were really listening to each other better on stage just because it was so different... At least for me, it improved my connection to the characters and listening to them and get where they are coming from.

FUN

- I think some of that stuff is fun. So you find, you are accomplishing things in a different way.
- It can be a lot of fun and a good challenge in a long run.
- We changed the character a bit which I mean at point in the run, this kind of stuff is fun, we've done it about 40 times now. So by the time we hit this point in the run, an excuse to change something up is kind of fun.

OUTCOMES

- Program evaluation

WALNUT STREET THEATRE
AMERICA'S OLDEST · FOUNDED 1809 · PHILADELPHIA, PA

(Ideishi, Ideishi, Pontiggia, & Mendonca, 2010)

Objectives

- Change in social skills during participation in a theater arts program

Methods

- Social Skills Inventory Scale (Gresham & Elliott, 2008)

	Typically Developing	Special Needs
Cooperation	↓	↑
Responsibility	↓	↑
Problem Behaviors	↑	↓
Hyperactivity Behaviors	↑	↓

OUTCOMES

- Program evaluation

Objectives

- Child behaviors
- Parent expectations & parent experiences
- Performer experiences

Methods

- Survey
- Interview, focus groups
- Behavioral observations

OUTCOMES

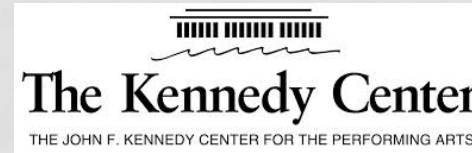
- Program evaluation



- Families needs (Smithsonian Institution, 2012)
 - Judgment free zone
 - Preparation materials useful
- Diverse learning opportunities (The Walters Art Museum, 2013)
 - Interactive galleries and studio activities effective
 - Sensory modifications to environment & setting effective
 - Increasing attendance at sensory friendly events
- Family knowledge (NJAAS & Kennedy Center, 2010 & 2012)
 - Predicted & actual behavior can be surprising

OUTCOMES

- Program evaluation



- *A sense of family*
 - *Judgment free zone*
 - *Sensitive & welcoming staff*

The Walter Arts Museum - Hosler, 2013

Smithsonian Accessibility Morning at the Museum - Fernandez, 2013

New Jersey Academy of Aquatic Sciences- Ideishi, Willock, & Thach, 2010

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts - Ideishi & Mendonca, 2013

OUTCOMES

- Program evaluation



PITTSBURGH BALLET THEATRE



Objectives

- Parent expectations prior to community experience
- Parent experience after the community experience
- Performer experience

Methods

- Survey
- Interview & focus groups

OUTCOMES

- Program evaluation

Light*

Sound*

M o v e m e n t

Usher*

*Statistically significant positive change

Data relatively consistent between Kennedy Center, Imagination Stage,
Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre

OUTCOMES

- *Meaningful impact*

**Welcoming and
accepting environment**

**Letting their kids be
who they are**

Being a family



Kennedy Center, Photo by Scott Suchman



Roger I. Ideishi, JD, OT/L, FAOTA
Program Director & Associate Professor
Program in Occupational Therapy

Temple University
Philadelphia, PA

roger.ideishi@temple.edu