MAKING CONNECTIONS: ENGAGING LEARNERS THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

Sharon Luann Glover
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MAKING CONNECTIONS: ENGAGING LEARNERS THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

A Project

by

Sharon Luann Glover

Approved by:

__________________________, Committee Chair
Karen D. Benson, Ph.D.

_________________________
Date
Student: Sharon Luann Glover

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______________________________, Associate Chair
Rita M. Johnson, Ed.D. Date

Department of Teacher Education
Abstract

of

MAKING CONNECTIONS: ENGAGING LEARNERS THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

by

Sharon Luann Glover

This project was an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education: Curriculum and Instruction with an Elective Emphasis on Arts in Education. It followed Pathway III: Developing a curriculum, program, or performance related to arts education or arts in education. Over a period of 16 years the author used performing arts to engage students in learning. She found performing arts to be an effective means of engaging and connecting students to content areas. Furthermore, students were found to grow socially and emotionally. This led her to conduct an additional study, specifically integrating performing arts and social studies to further explore these results. Using the methodology of narrative inquiry, the project investigated how learning through the arts, instead of through the traditional way of lecture and report writing, helps students interact with social studies content standards in a meaningful and engaging manner. The project involved placing students into research groups, based on interest and grade level. Students researched the contribution of a critical event or key individual to the development of the United States of America and then recorded facts and discussed their work together. Finally, each group developed a culminating project, using performing arts, to demonstrate their understanding of the history and social studies they had
researched. The culminating projects were performed for two different audiences.

Student, parent, and teacher reflections showed that students were thoroughly engaged in learning about history. Moreover, the students felt more confident in their ability to perform in front of an audience.

____________________________, Committee Chair
Karen D. Benson, Ph.D.

____________________________
Date
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Cultivating a disposition for learning in students can ensure the development of life-long learners who are productive and contributing citizens. In order for this important goal to be met, the process of learning must be engaging and meaningful. Engagement occurs when a student’s curiosity is stimulated through meaningful experiences. Information acquired during these experiences is stored in the brain until it is connected to other information (previous knowledge) through other meaningful experiences that include both thinking and emotion. Thus, this process of learning is important in promoting lasting knowledge. Learning through art experiences involves creativity, problem solving, higher order thinking, curiosity, imagination, and the generation of new ideas. For example, when a student studies a content area such as history, by becoming engaged in an art experience, the student is able to make meaningful connections and generate lasting knowledge. Furthermore, experiencing history through the arts takes into account a full range of learning styles and allows access to the curriculum for every student, including English Language Learners (ELL), students with learning disabilities, and gifted students. Providing choice in how students learn empowers students, giving them ownership over their own learning and building confident, independent learners. This culminating project demonstrated the students’ understanding in a personal and meaningful way. In addition, performing for their families and community provided an
opportunity for parents to become involved in their child’s learning, encouraging a more positive connection between home and school.

This project investigated how learning through the arts helps students interact with social studies content standards in a meaningful and engaging manner that extends their interest, knowledge, and skills in both social studies and the arts, as well as supports the development of a disposition for learning that will last a lifetime (Dewey, 1934). If children love learning, they want to continue to attend school, and, most certainly, graduate, thus reducing the growing dropout rate for high school students around the nation. As students become engaged in learning, they begin to take learning risks that allow for social and emotional growth as well as academic development.

With this goal in mind, students were placed in learning groups based on interest and grade level. The learning groups researched a critical event or key individual that contributed to the development of the United States of America. They organized their information using a graphic organizer and then gave brief oral presentations to their classmates. Next, each student learning group developed a culminating project, using performing arts, to demonstrate their understanding of the assigned critical event or famous person. The students developed many creative projects such as vignettes, dramatic readings, pantomimes, puppetry, and PowerPoint presentations with original art. They learned songs and dances from their historical period and created narration to tie their individual projects into one performance. Their culminating projects were presented two times. The performances were presented to the students’ families and friends, the
local community members, the elementary school’s student body and staff, and guests from the district office. Throughout this project, the author researched scholarly literature on three topics: The Theory and Practice of Arts in Education, Integrating Performing Arts with Content Standards Based Curriculum, and The Effect of Performing Arts and Social/Emotional Development.

The methodology of research was narrative inquiry, which included observations of students’ learning and interactions among the students as they collaborated. Anecdotal notes taken during observations and discussions, results from parent and student surveys given throughout the project, and learning reflected in student journals as they completed their projects were collected as data for this research. The understanding of content knowledge demonstrated in each student’s final project was recorded and analyzed. Pictures, samples of student work, and video taping with parent/student written permission were used as evidence for student learning from the beginning of the project until its completion. Oral interviews were documented in narrative form as further evidence that students are more engaged in learning through performing arts than by traditional methods. During the interviews, students commented on their social/emotional growth throughout the project and their subsequent gain in self-confidence.

The current cycle of education seems to discourage teachers to integrate the arts into their program by ending funding of arts programs, increasing pacing and assessments in math and language arts, and viewing the arts as unnecessary fluff. This makes it difficult for teachers to feel validated in their own beliefs about the power of the arts and
its effectiveness in the process of learning. This study demonstrated that the arts are engaging, motivating, and a powerful tool that supports student learning of social studies content standards. The study confirmed the belief that the arts deserve a place in every classroom, giving teachers the evidence and support needed to continue integrating the arts into core curriculum.

Definition of Terms

The Glossary, located in the Appendix, contains theatrical terms as well as definitions.

Multiple Intelligences – A theory identified by Howard Gardner in 1983 that includes eight different forms of intelligences. They are linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, bodily/kinesthetic, and natural intelligences. He further declared that intelligence, as defined previously, does not sufficiently encompass the wide variety of abilities humans display.

Limitations

A few limitations negatively affected this project. The first limitation was financing. No funds were available to support this project due to the state budget crisis. All materials and labor for costumes, props, and backdrops had to be donated.

Secondly, time was a consideration. Time allotted to teach social studies during the day was limited, due to the pressure by the school district administration to teach only reading, writing, and mathematics. Teachers had to stick to a schedule so they could teach all the skills needed for students to plan and create backdrops, puppets, dances,
write scripts, and learn to act. Students volunteered to stay after school in order to complete their projects.

The students at the elementary school in this project have had very little exposure to the arts. It was necessary to teach the students basic skills of drawing, painting, puppetry, drama, dance, and singing in a very short time since the project was scheduled for completion in December 2009.

Parent volunteerism was the last major concern. Parent involvement was minimal at this school site. Getting parents to commit time and effort, fulfill their commitments, and attend when scheduled was difficult.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter is a review of the relevant academic literature, focusing on three topics: The Theory and Practice of Arts in Education, Integrating Performing Arts with Content Standards Based Curriculum, The Effect of Performing Arts and Social/Emotional Development.

The Theory and Practice of Arts in Education

Philosopher and educator John Dewey’s ideas and theories on educating children in the arts, as well as other areas of curriculum, are still prevalent in exemplary classrooms and schools nationwide. His philosophy of education continues to influence educational leaders’ thinking and practices today as it did in the past century. In order to understand Dewey’s philosophical ideas and their influence on educational theory and practice across time, it is important to begin with the shift in educational philosophy between the 19th and the 20th centuries.

In “Education at the Turn of the Century: A Crucible for Curriculum Change,” Herbert M. Kliebard (1982) explained that the shift in educational philosophy between the 19th and 20th centuries was due to the ever-changing society. Kliebard wrote that teachers in the 19th century were in charge of disciplining children as well as developing the moral character through established, traditional family values. As traditional family life disappeared towards the end of the 19th century, the role of school shifted from the teacher and a focus on mental discipline to a standardized curriculum. Standard units of
study were developed and schools were divided into grade levels. In 1930, over 51% of the teenagers were attending secondary schools. Special interest groups began to want to control the curriculum. Four of these special interest groups emerged as leaders in education.

Charles Eliot, a mental disciplinarian, was the leader for the Humanist group. He believed that the systematic development of reasoning power should be the main function of the secondary schools, and students should develop skills for expressing their own thoughts clearly. G. Stanley Hall led the Developmentalists group. He felt that curriculum should be structured around the developmental readiness of the child. He did not think all students should be taught in the same way, that subjects carried equal weight, and that “fitting for college was the same as fitting for life” (Kliebard, 1982, p. 5). William Torrey Harris, a Social Efficiency educator, was very sensitive to social changes. He wanted only grammar, literature, art, mathematics, geography, and history to be taught. He thought society was changing with the rise and influence of technology. Therefore, the specialization of skills was needed, which could be accomplished through an increase in differentiation. He was followed by Lester Ward, a Social Meliorist. He believed that schools were the major force for social change and social justice. The curriculum should teach students how to deal with the problems of today’s world. Schools had the power to create a new social order.

With the 20th century came John Dewey, a philosopher and psychologist. He integrated and reconstructed the ideas of the four interest groups before him (Kliebard,
1982). This reform arrived under the umbrella of progressive education. American curriculum of today reflects some of each of the special interest groups’ beliefs.

In 1934, John Dewey wrote *Art as Experience*, a book that explored the formal structure and characteristic effects of all the arts: architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and literature. In his book, Dewey defined an art experience as when an object or occurrence moved through phases until it reached its conclusion or end. An experience was a sequence of seemingly individualized steps that were integrated, emotionally infused, and led to a culminating point. Each step flowed to the next without interruption (Dewey, 1934). For example, a painter could have an experience while creating a work of art. As his creative piece developed, he would make changes as he interacted with the medium itself and the idea that he was trying to portray. He would continue working with the piece until his thought or vision came to life and he felt or perceived his work to be finished. He would have to be satisfied with his work before he would feel it was completed. The process was meaningful and, thus, enabled the painter to learn.

Donald Arnstine connected with Dewey’s philosophy in 1967 when he wrote the book *Philosophy of Education: Learning and Schooling*. Arnstine defined curriculum as “the sum of the educational experiences that children have in school” (p. 339). He believed children should be taught how to learn. Knowledge and skills without connection and meaning to the student were of little value. If a child had curiosity or interest in a specific area, then the skills and knowledge associated with that area would be very meaningful and connected. Learning would occur. Arnstine (1967) stated that a
“student who is learning to learn, is among other things, developing his own aims and purposes” (p. 345). Helping the student to become a productive and contributing citizen, through thoughtful planning and curriculum selection was the responsibility of the teacher.

Arnstine (1967) further stated,

A competent teacher has a tendency to see content in its role as an aesthetic cue, as a prod to curiosity, or as a cue to awareness of a problem, and to see it as supplying the material for the pursuit of these initiating situations. (p. 370)

Jun’ichiro Tanizaki (1999) in his essay, *In Praise of Shadows*, described this same experience in relation to an art experience using all of his senses,

With lacquer ware there is a beauty in that moment between removing the lid and lifting the bowl to the mouth when one gazes at the still, silent liquid in the dark depths of the bowl, its color hardly differing from that of the bowl itself. What lies within the darkness one cannot distinguish, but the palm senses the gentle movements of the liquid, vapor rises from within forming droplets on the rim, and the fragrance carried upon the vapor brings a delicate anticipation. What a world of difference there is between this moment and the moment when soup is served western style, in a pale, shallow bowl. A moment of mystery, it might almost be called, a moment of trance. (p. 15)

Rudolf Steiner (2003) believed it was a fatal mistake to think that an individual’s strength developed through a merely intellectual education or simply by itself. He felt
that teachers could not assess individuality using grades or IQs. True education addressed the whole child, exciting and creating a natural sense of curiosity and wonder within them. It is an education of the whole human being. This is the reason why Waldorf schools, developed by Steiner, pay great attention to the development of feeling and will that allows a healthy and living intelligence to unfold and lead to the awakening and maturing of the individual. Steiner (2003) wrote,

In training the mind and training feeling, we must give particular attention to the individual characteristics of the child. As teachers, we must be capable of forming the instruction so that the child does not simply receive something intellectual in the instruction, but enjoys the instruction in an aesthetic way. We cannot achieve this if the ideas appeal only to the intellect. We can do this if we, as teachers, relate to the children’s feelings in such varied ways that we actually elicit the children’s expectations of the subject, which we then fulfill. We can do this if we arouse hopes that, both large and small, we fulfill - if we develop every positive attribute of the children that can play a role in an aesthetic understanding of their surroundings. You can meet the child’s aesthetic need if you bring yourself into a correct relationship to the child’s feelings. (p. 28)

Arnstine (1967) suggested,

It is the way a competent teacher lives: the way he plans his semester’s work and his daily lesson plans, and the way he makes judgments about how and where to
direct the discussion and the activities of his class. His responsibility is to provide
the conditions under which children can learn. (p. 370)

His goal was to make each student so independent, confident, and socially conscious that
the teacher will not be needed. Students will make good decisions/choices by themselves.

Howard Gardner (2006) placed the responsibility for developing competent,
contributing citizens on educators. He introduced the theory that there are five kinds of
minds that educators must help develop to provide the necessary leaders for the future. In
his book *Five Minds for the Future*, Gardner discussed the following five mental
dispositions:

- Individuals without one or more disciplines will not be able to succeed at any
demanding workplace and will be restricted to menial tasks.
- Individuals without synthesizing capabilities will be overwhelmed by information
and unable to make judicious decisions about personal or professional matters.
- Individuals without creative capacities will be replaced by computers and
will drive away those who do have the creative spark.
- Individuals without respect will not be worthy of respect by others and will
poison the workplace and the commons.
- Individuals without ethics will yield a world devoid of decent workers and
responsible citizens: none of us will want to live on that desolate planet. (pp. 18-19)
Additionally, Dewey (1934) suggested that art could not truly be understood or valued unless the beholder really understood the background of the piece itself. For instance, a painting of a baker’s crest-fallen face as his client rejects his wedding cake could not be really appreciated unless you understood the hours of intense work and painstaking artistry the baker had put into its creation. Dewey (1934) wrote,

The point, however, is that no amount of ecstatic eulogy of finished works can of itself assist the understanding or the generation of such works. Flowers can be enjoyed without knowing about the interactions of soil, air, moisture, and seeds of which they are the result. But they cannot be understood without taking just these interactions into account – and theory is a matter of understanding. Theory is concerned with discovering the nature of the production of works of art and of their enjoyment in perception. (p. 11)

John Berger, author of *Ways of Seeing*, (1972) agreed with Dewey’s suggestion. Berger felt art, an authentic connection to the past, had meaning when it was left in its original setting and was viewed as a whole work. Art and its meaning were distorted when it was photographed in pieces, reproduced, and shipped to another location. It was seen out of context and, therefore, its meaning or relationship to the past could not be truly discerned. Man could no longer understand his/her relationship with historical past. Berger (1972) wrote,

The art of the past no longer exists as it once did. Its authority is lost. In its place there is a language of images. What matters now is who uses that language for
what purpose…One of the aims of this essay has been to show that what is…at
stake is much larger. A people or a class which is cut off from its own past is far
less free to choose and to act as a people or class than one that has been able to
situate itself in history. This is why-and this is the only reason why-the entire art
of the past has now become a political issue. (p. 33)

Elliot Eisner (1998), in his book The Kinds of Schools We Need: Personal Essays,
suggested it was the teacher’s task to see the academic world through the eyes of both the
arts and the sciences. He defined literacy as the ability to decode or encode meaning in
any of the social forms through which meaning is conveyed. He also felt that a person
who was literate in one form would not necessarily be literate in another form. For
instance, a person might understand the language found in literature, but be baffled by
scientific terminology in biology. He wanted students to have the opportunity to
understand the meaning of visual forms such as art, architecture, film, and video as well.
He felt that language was only one way to demonstrate understanding. Eisner (1998)
stated,

We would like our children to be well informed, that is, to understand ideas that
are important, useful, beautiful, and powerful. And we also want them to have the
appetite and ability to think analytically and critically, to be able to speculate and
imagine, to see connections among ideas, and to be able to use what they know to
enhance their own lives and the desire to contribute to the culture. Neither of
these two goals are likely to be achieved if schools are inattentive to the variety of
ways humans have represented what they have thought, felt, and imagined nor
will these goals be achieved if we fail to appreciate culture’s role in making these
processes of representation possible. (p. 44)

Eisner believed that the arts were an integral part of the curriculum in a balanced
and equitable education. He learned through his own experience that knowledge cannot
be reduced to what can be said. Knowledge also can be conveyed in what is created. The
process of creating an image, a solution, or a means to transfer knowledge is important in
its own right. Visual learning is one example of this. Visual learning simplifies complex
information and, thus, makes meaning easily transferable. A demonstration of the steps of
a new dance is much easier to learn from than detailed verbal instructions without
pictures. Eisner (1998) identified the common, core contributions of the arts and their
potential role in furthering the aims of education as “1) not all problems have single,
correct answers, 2) the form of a thing is part of its content, 3) having fixed objectives
and pursuing clear-cut methods for achieving them are not always the most rational ways
of dealing with the world, and 4) the arts make discovery possible, and they provide the
forms through which insight and feeling can emerge in the public world” (pp. 82-85).

Dewey (1934) also pointed out that human beings often do not get to have an
experience when completing day-to-day tasks because everything moves so rapidly in our
society. There was simply not time to appreciate or enjoy the process of completing tasks.
Nothing was ever brought to its full conclusion. Dewey (1934) wrote, “The final
comment is that when excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of
attitudes and meaning from prior experience” (p. 68). In teaching, Dewey was a proponent for depth as well as breadth. The process of connecting all the information stored in the human brain would be considered crucial and of utmost importance. All learning is purposeful.

Similarly, Arnstine (1967) stated that to approach the teaching of the curriculum in an organized, systematic way without regard for each student’s needs or interests would result in little meaning and/or learning. Dewey, Eisner, and Arnstine would agree that it is the journey or process that fosters learning, not the end product. This philosophy is clearly evident in the newly adopted California state curriculum materials. The new materials in science and mathematics are designed to teach the whole child and present a balanced program. The bulk of instructional time is dedicated to hands-on, interactive experiences. These experiences are concrete, progressing to representational drawings, and concluding with the abstract, required work. Discussing, processing, and experiencing the concepts presented in each text are clearly emphasized. Critical thinking, problem solving, and meaningful real-world applications help children to deepen their understanding of each concept. The process is emphasized not the product. The anticipatory set in each lesson is designed to evoke curiosity and engagement. Both programs are highly differentiated, taking under consideration learning styles, language development levels, skill levels, and developmental levels. The arts are interwoven throughout both curriculums and are used as tools to help students acquire a connection.
or deeper understanding of each objective. Dewey’s philosophical influence is present in the core curriculum taught to students in our schools today.

**Integrating Performing Arts with Content Standards Based Curriculum**

Social studies teachers and researchers have also been greatly influenced by Dewey’s thoughts on purposeful learning. In “Drama and Authentic Assessment in a Social Studies Classroom,” Ronald V. Morris (2001) explained the importance of dramatic experiences in connecting students with the past. Morris believed that social studies teachers try to prepare their students to actively participate in a democratic society. These teachers use drama to build students’ confidence, demonstrate content knowledge through authentic assessments, and build strong connections to the people they are portraying from the past. In 1993, Goaien and Hendy (as cited in Morris, 2001) completed a study about how historical thinking was developed through drama. The experiment involved fifth grade students who were studying to take the National Curriculum test. The students were taught the curriculum using lessons that involved drama. Goaien and Hendy’s study showed that drama students with a range of abilities achieved a higher level of conceptual understanding than did those in classes taught with traditional strategies. Goaien and Hendy’s research demonstrated that drama activities allow students to access information easily resulting in high levels of understanding (Morris, 2001). Other studies had been done in past years, but they failed to prove the effects drama had when used as a standard method of year-long studies. These studies
only looked at short-term activities and their effective use of drama as a teaching strategy.

Morris (2001) spent two years studying a seventh grade social studies class that used drama as its main method for instruction. He was particularly interested in the meanings/connections students constructed when learning social studies in this manner. These students spent three weeks, deeply investigating an ancient civilization. They studied topics such as social justice, social history, the role of minorities, and the serious issues of each civilization. They role-played different historical events, studied the roles of each class of citizens, made predictions on how characters would react to situations in history based on their knowledge of each class, and participated in deep discussions. They actively assessed their own learning and reflected upon their findings. They compiled portfolios for their teachers to evaluate. This process allowed students to show the thinking, knowledge, and creativity used in completing their products. Peers and students reflected on their own work and the work of others in the classroom. They set their own goals and objectives, encouraging community building and teamwork. Students involved in drama developed critical thinking skills and the promotion of democratic values, by pausing to discuss and reflect throughout their performance. Morris continued studying seventh graders’ learning, based on dramatic role-play and experiences. He found similar results. Authentic assessment and dramatic methods of learning were highly effective. Students seemed to work harder and set higher academic goals for themselves than students learning in traditional settings.
However, Morris did not mention that part of the successful learning in these classrooms could be due to the students’ involvement in a variety of techniques that were brain-based and catered to multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). Most of the assessment options were based on Bloom’s taxonomy. These classrooms appeared to be student-centered where teachers acted as facilitators of learning. Teachers had a deep knowledge and understanding of standards and content curriculum. They seemed to have years of teaching experience behind them. A less experienced teacher might fail to see the complex organizational structure of this type of classroom and find this method of instruction overwhelming. Time to set expectations, cultivate critical thinking, and engage students in problem solving would be key. Students would have to be used to working productively in groups and have a great deal of self-discipline. However, Morris’s findings demonstrated that an effective way for students to learn and self-evaluate is through realistic, authentic, and meaningful assessments.

In “Multimodal Literacy and Theater Education,” Amy Petersen Jensen (2008), like Morris, suggested that theater education teaches students to make meaning. However, Jensen’s focus was not on helping students to understand the past. Jensen’s research focused on teachers who used new technology in conjunction with drama activities to aid students in understanding current world issues through role-playing and simulated real-world experiences. Her research showed how students can make meaning out of the technology-driven world they live in today. Jensen wrote,
It is vital to consider how to prepare students for this technology-driven world and what students should look like and sound like as they encounter the challenges and beauties of that world. I am interested in students becoming active participants in local and global conversations. These students are prepared producers and active transformers or creators of the knowledge that surrounds them. To accomplish this, teachers must embrace theater’s essential quality - meaning making. Theater skills are a significant mode of production and reception through which students can articulate who they are in the world. Theater teachers must actively encourage students and other interested parties to see the ways that theater interactions prepare us to inquire about and understand how the contemporary world is shaped. Understanding how theater interacts with new literacies is a requirement for this survival. (Jensen, 2008, pp. 24-25)

Students use the same skills acquired in theater education to comprehend literature, as well. Elementary educators have used drama activities to enhance reading instruction for some time. Professional organizations such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Committee of English Studies and English Education, and the International Reading Association agree that drama activities are an effective means of teaching the development of schema, metacognition, strategic reading, and oral language. Bidwell and Garuthier (1992), reading teachers, supported this belief in their article, “Ideas for Using Drama to Enhance Reading Instruction.” Bidwell and Garuthier stated,
A student’s knowledge framework for a typical situation (called a schema) is activated by drama. Students rely on this background knowledge to explain the actions of the characters. Metacognitive abilities become part of the instruction when students analyze their performance by asking such questions as “How am I doing?” or “How can this part be improved?” Feedback between students and teachers stimulates interaction and discussion about performance options. As students and teachers explain their reasoning, everyone’s input is valued. (p. 653)

Bidwell and Garuthier (1992) believed that before students could role-play a specific character, they must develop an understanding of who that character really is. For example, a student who is portraying a famous historical figure in a play, must gather information about their character from multiple sources, which involves employing reading strategies, such as skimming texts, and using headings and subheadings to locate information.

Bell’s (1991) studies went beyond character role-play and its connections to reading. Bell suggested that a critical component of reading comprehension is the ability to create a “gestalt,” which “is created by the visualization of the whole…it is the ability to create an imaged whole” (p. 247). Students who comprehend well, create images of whole scenes as they read. In their article “Imagery-Based Learning: Improving Elementary Students’ Reading Comprehension With Drama Techniques,” Rose, Parks, Androes, and McMahon’s (2001) wrote,
According to Bell, strong readers can visualize the details of a story assembled as a whole rather than try to hold onto the many parts separately. Bell’s work, which is grounded in cognitive and developmental psychology, suggests that imagery is a powerful tool for learning and an important component of memory…Drama requires actors to visualize (or create an image of) a scene and all of its elements so that it creates a meaningful story. That is, before re-creating a scene dramatically, one must have a clear image of its contents, sequence, and timing. (p. 56)

Imagery or the ability to visualize is certainly a key component in comprehension. However, drama activities help develop other crucial reading skills as well. For instance, students build fluency as they practice reading the text numerous times. They often consult with fellow student actors to see if they are portraying the characters feelings and actions accurately. Drama provides the students with a real audience. Bidwell and Garuthier (1992) noted, “Speaking (to improvise), writing (to extend a speech or smooth a transition), and listening (to get cues) join reading as essentials in a drama activity. Thus drama effectively integrates language arts” (p. 653). Students enjoy learning reading strategies through drama because it is engaging and fun.

Alber and Foil (2003) agreed with Bidwell’s thinking that drama is an effective approach to enhancing reading development. They wrote, “Students with limited vocabulary development tend to have difficulty mastering important language arts skills such as reading comprehension and written expression. Using drama activities to teach
target vocabulary words can be an effective and motivating instructional practice for all
students, especially those with learning problems” (p. 22). During drama activities,
students actively practice vocabulary definitions through physical movement. Alber and
Foil stated, “Teachers can enhance the introduction of new vocabulary by creating a
memorable event. Memorable events are likely to improve the retention of concepts and
can serve as fun and effective attention-getters when opening a vocabulary lesson” (p.
24). Understanding how vocabulary words connect to other concepts and ideas improves
overall achievement in reading for all students. Alber and Foil’s (2003) studies support
current research that shows students with more advanced vocabularies will become better
readers. They will also be more effective listeners, speakers, and writers when they are
actively engaged in learning through the use of drama games.

Laura Miccoli (2003), English and Linguistic professor at Federal University of
Minas Gerais, Brazil, discovered drama to be engaging and motivating for university
students who were learning English. In her article “English Through Drama for Oral
Skills Development,” she discussed the complexity of her student population and the
results of her case study. Miccoli was concerned about meeting all of her students needs
because of the diversity of skill levels in her classroom. Her conversation class consisted
of students whose language proficiency levels ranged from basic to advanced. After
careful consideration, Miccoli (2003) chose to teach her students through drama
activities. Miccoli had students keep portfolios of their work and daily reflections.
Students were encouraged to critically reflect on their experiences by tapping into
feelings, re-evaluating their experiences, sharing observations and attitudes, and then comparing them to those of their classmates resulting in new meanings of experience.

Miccoli (2003) wrote,

Learning a language cannot be divorced from culture learning…culture includes aspects such as ‘how (native speakers) hold their bodies, how far they stand apart, where they look when they talk, how men shake their hands with each other, how children talk to their parents, and so on…culture involves issues such as how anxiety or excitement are expressed, or how culturally accepted intonation is use to deliver humor or anger…Drama is a way of bringing the issues above naturally into the language classroom. (p. 123)

Expression, gesture, and intonation are the subtle aspects of language. These aspects are sometimes overlooked in classrooms where conversational language is taught. More emphasis is placed on formal language skills instead of natural conversational speech. Expression, gesture, and intonation are important aspects for language learners to grasp and understand in order to become fluent speakers. Drama activities involve learning through the use of these important aspects of language.

Performing Arts and Social/Emotional Development

Drama activities are useful in helping students to access standards-based content. Studies have also shown that drama activities have an impact on the social/emotional development of students. Clarifying the definition of drama in order to understand its impact is important. In 1967, Way defined drama as having a high level of awareness of
your inner self. Schattner and Courtney (1981) further defined dramatic activities as holistic in nature, requiring students to represent externally what takes place internally. The combination of internal reflection and external representation is inclusive of the cognitive, affective, aesthetic, and moral domains. Similarly, Burton (1981) described drama as a total activity, concerned with the inner self and surroundings, the physical and the mental self, the individual and the community, and the human situation and potential.

Way (1967) believed that creative drama (improvisation) contributed to an improved self-concept by providing opportunities to gain personal confidence by working in a non-judgmental environment. He determined that drama gives students the opportunity to overcome self-consciousness in favor of a positive consciousness of self. This process leads to the discovery and acceptance of self, an awareness of personal resources, and awareness of the internal and external influences on living. Way felt a positive self-concept was foundational in an individual’s development of healthy relationships with others and the development of other personal attributes. Coopersmith (1967) supported the importance of a positive self-concept in the healthy development of an individual when he wrote, “My studies have provided substantial evidence that children with a more positive self-concept are less anxious, better adjusted, more popular, more effective, more honest and less defensive than children with a lower self-concept” (p. 65).

McCaslin (1981) also thought drama activities facilitated social growth. He believed students could learn to understand and accept themselves through drama.
Students would then be able to accept and share with others. Specifically, creative drama gave students an outlet for emotional release and the opportunity to develop social skills in a non-threatening environment.

Likewise, Sternberg (1998) believed creative drama was a forum where students could practice constructive behavior and learn to cooperate and collaborate. Emotional experiences of students and their peers are used as a springboard for exploring problems and finding solutions. As students develop more emotional control and acquire additional skills to enable them to cope in a variety of situations, behavior is improved.

Hence, creative drama can have an impact on how students think and act in relation to others. This is based on the idea that a person can create what happens in his or her own mind. The aim is to allow students to grow, emotionally and socially, so that they can see the world in different ways. Creative drama provides students a safe place to learn about life, as they act out plots that contain truths about living. Students explore the actions, motives, and lives of a range of different characters within stories and, thereby, reflect on their own attitudes toward self and others.

Drama activities can also be utilized as a means of helping students build self-confidence. Bidwell and Garuthier (1992), in their article “In the Classroom: Ideas for Using Drama to Enhance Reading Instruction,” discussed using drama in the form of puppetry, to help shy students who were not comfortable speaking or performing in front of others. Bidwell and Garuthier allowed students to use puppets as the performers. The shy students sat hidden backstage as their puppets performed. The audience could only
hear the students’ voices. When Bidwell and Garuthier used puppetry to lower the students’ affective filter, the students were willing to participate and began to gain self-confidence when performing on a stage. Eventually, the students were able to speak and perform in front of others without the use of puppets.

Heath and Soep (1998) provided an overview summarizing ten (1987-97) years of research into numerous creative arts programs that were held during non-school hours. In their article, “Youth Development and the Arts in Non-School Hours,” Heath and Soep wrote,

Using a wide range of qualitative evidence, we were able to pinpoint common characteristics, or outcome indicators, such as the development of personal and social skills and increases in academic achievement, and other general beneficial effects of participating, that were a reported result of, and indicated, ‘good-quality’ community arts projects. In addition, the effects evidenced included a perceived increase in motivation…in which creative arts participants were compared to non-arts-participating respondents (control group)….Overall, not only do these comparisons provide a picture of increased motivation within the field and across wider curricular areas, they also give a picture of more confident, self-effective and satisfied individuals. In short, participating individuals had some indicators of more positive or enhanced self-esteem when compared with the control group. (p. 32)
Mussoline (1993) also believed that art activities could help build self-esteem in children. Children who generally struggled academically might be highly successful in art activities like drama. Their classmates would view them as experts in drama making them feel special and part of the group. Mussoline (1993) said, “Participating in an art activity is generally a joyful experience for a child, regardless of his academic achievement level…Peer group acceptance through art work builds self-esteem in the child who feels accepted and important” (p. 83). Children with strong self-esteem are motivated to try hard in subject areas that are difficult. She wrote, “Art can be a powerful motivational tool to those who are successful. It can provide the impetus to succeed in other areas of school work” (Mussoline, 1993, pp. 84-85).

Theatre education has a crucial role in the education of intellect and emotion. It allows students to approach text by developing an empathy with characters, mood, situation, and content, resulting in a higher level of comprehension. This learning process makes curriculum more exciting, relevant, and meaningful by providing students an avenue for the exploration of experience, feeling, and emotion.

Drama activities provide an opportunity for students to learn by doing and from experiencing. These activities nurture students’ natural desire to relate to the world and other individuals. Drama helps students internalize the process of self-reflection, as well as reflecting on their interactions and relationship with the world around them.
Robinson (as cited in O’Hara, 1984) said, “The old dichotomy between intellect and emotion can only be overcome once it is understood that what we know affects how we feel and that perception is inclusive of emotion” (p. 317).

This chapter has examined the scholarly literature on The Theory and Practice of Arts in Education, Integrating Performing Arts with Content Standards Based Curriculum, and The Effect of Performing Arts on Social/Emotional Development.
Chapter 3
THE PROJECT

This project was an Alternative Culminating Experience for a Master of Arts in Education, Curriculum and Instruction with an Elective Emphasis on Arts in Education. It follows Pathway III: Developing a curriculum, program, or performance related to arts education or arts in education. This project investigated whether learning through the arts, specifically performing arts, helps students interact with social studies content standards in a meaningful and engaging manner that would extend their interest, knowledge, and skills in the content area. The perceived impact of theater education on the social/emotional growth of the students was recorded and observed as well. The project involved a study of a variety of theatrical performances produced over sixteen years as a teacher at three different schools within a local school district, specifically focusing on the 2009/2010 project.

The methodology of research was narrative inquiry, which included observations of students’ learning and interactions between the students as they collaborated. Anecdotal notes taken during observations and discussions, results from parent and student surveys given throughout the project, and learning reflected in student journals as they completed their projects was collected as data for this research. The understanding of content knowledge demonstrated in each student’s final project was recorded and analyzed. Pictures, samples of student work, and video taping with parent/student written permission was used as evidence for student learning from the beginning of the project.
until its completion. Oral interviews were documented in narrative form as further evidence that students are more engaged in learning through performing arts than by traditional methods. During the interviews, students commented on their social/emotional growth throughout the project and their subsequent gain in self-confidence. Because this is narrative research, Chapters 3 and 4 are written in the first person.

The interest in investigating this question began when my son entered preschool. I enrolled my son in a private preschool that required parent participation. The teachers in the preschool were energetic, knowledgeable, and well educated. The room was bright and colorful. Many centers had been set up about the room for exploration and creativity. The daily schedule was a mixture of structured and active learning times. Each day the children sang songs, explored different art media, made science discoveries, practiced kindergarten skills, and listened to wonderful stories. They put on full costumed plays, such as *Stone Soup*, several times a year. My son was eager to attend school each day.

This was surprising because my son was very quiet. He had very limited hearing since birth, which resulted in severe speech and language delays. He had undergone two surgeries by this time, and his hearing had improved. However, his speech was still difficult to understand. His teachers organized an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting so he could attend a public speech and language development preschool two days a week. (He already was attending a private preschool three mornings a week.) His public school did not allow parents to participate. His teachers did not smile. They spoke in loud tones, giving short, firm commands. The room was filled with tables and chairs
with arms. The walls were barren. There were no discovery areas or artistic creations hanging on the walls. There was no laughter, just children seated at tables surrounded by teachers helping them with worksheets. I wondered how he would learn to speak in a room where the teachers talked to each other, but not to the children. My son cried all day at his new school. It wasn’t long before he was refusing to get dressed on the two days he was attending public school. His teachers complained that he was uncooperative and angry. He did not speak at the public school. He only mimicked the guttural tones coming from some of the other children. The teachers’ reports were confusing because I had never seen these behaviors with my son at home or at his other preschool. On the days he attended his private preschool, he was happy, respectful, and cooperative. He was increasing the length of his orally spoken sentences each day. He sang the words to all of the songs.

Soon, I attended another IEP meeting at his public preschool where I was advised to place my son in a special day class at another school. He would have to be bused four hours a day. The IEP team said my son would never attend a regular public school. I declined further services and removed my son from the public pre-school. I knew my son was intelligent. He was well behaved at home and at his other school.

He continued to learn at his other pre-school. From this experience, I began to read literature on the impact of the arts on academic learning, sensory integration, and speech therapy. I took my son to clinics for speech, sensory integration, and physical therapy. Each of the therapists trained me to work with him at home as well. I later
enrolled my son in a parent participation public school. This school embraced the arts. Here, my son bloomed. He was happy and very talkative. He loved learning. My son’s speech development caught up with his classmates by the time he was in second grade. In later years, he became an award-winning speaker at the national level.

This experience changed my life. I realized the importance of providing an environment that allowed all children to learn. It was also clear that the teacher had control over creating that learning environment. With that in mind, I returned to college. I entered the teaching profession four years later.

My first assigned teaching position was at a school located in the suburbs of Sacramento, California. The surrounding neighborhood was a mixture of rundown houses with rotting couches and cars littering the front yard, and older tidy homes with carefully tended flower gardens. Most of the houses had bars across their doors and windows. Crumbling apartment buildings sat neglected on the outskirts of the neighborhood. It was not uncommon to hear the sound of a gunshot, siren, or squealing rubber tires during the day or night. The school grounds were surrounded by chain-link fencing with barbed wire running across the top. The area was known for having crack houses and issues between rival gang members.

The school was comprised of approximately 450 students (roughly 30% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, and 40% African American, Asian, Filipino, Pacific Islander). It had a population of low socioeconomic status with a majority of the students receiving free and reduced lunch each day. One-third of the population was English Language
Learners, consisting of mostly Spanish and Russian speakers. The Russian population had recently immigrated to the United States. They were non-English speakers. Racial tension was high on the school campus, so fights were a common occurrence during recess.

My classroom population consisted of students who were primarily unsuccessful learners. They spent most of their recess fighting or in detention classrooms. Family members did not attend school functions or return phone calls from the school. The school administration and teaching staff supported a behaviorist approach to classroom and school-wide management. Teachers wrote citations, placed students in detention classrooms, took away recesses, and pulled cards. They also rewarded students with table points, stickers, prizes, parties, and free play. Nothing seemed to work.

I decided to manage my classroom differently. I had no card systems or reward programs. Instead, I taught the students how to solve problems through role play activities. I put students into different groups every day and gave them a card with a situation on it. They had to act out the situation and then create a new scene that would demonstrate how to solve the problem. The students liked the discussions that followed the activities. They spoke earnestly about their views and liked having a forum where they would be listened to respectfully. As the year went on, the students took over writing the situation cards for the game. They were so excited to write about real issues that they started a school newspaper with an editorial page. I discovered that drama activities not only engaged my students, but motivated them to extend learning as well.
I began to incorporate drama activities into their reading assignments. I would select books from a wide range of reading levels that all had the same central theme. I would come to class dressed like a used car salesman, grab my microphone, and try to sell the books to my students by sharing an interesting part in the book. The idea was to try to stimulate enough interest in the book that a group of students would choose it for their next Literature Circle book. For the culminating book project, I created contracts in which students could choose how to demonstrate their understanding of the text. I would list activities, such as act out the scene in the book that represents the turning point or climax of the story, pretend you are a reporter and interview the main characters in the book, role play a scene in the book as it was written and then role play the same scene from the perspective of a different character, etc. After these experiences, students’ journal reflections grew in length and demonstrated deeper understanding of the characters, problems and solutions in the book. This activity also increased fluency because the students wanted their scene to be perfect. So students would practice their parts again and again.

Soon, I decided to add music into their day. Having grown up in a home where music was highly valued, this was not a daunting task. I had 10 years of music lessons and instruction to support my ambitious undertaking. After my students learned the songs, I introduced the students to an hour-long theatrical production about the history of the United States. Everyone wanted a part. Students who were known to be the leaders of the gangs at school tried out for lead roles. They knew if they fought at recess, they
would lose their part. The fighting stopped. They began to solve their problems through
discussion or by walking away. Teachers and staff began to build positive relationships
with them. The students worked before and after school learning their lines. Parents
recorded the performance so my students could watch it later and reflect upon their work
in writing. Their journal reflections showed that they had learned and retained a lot of
information about the history of the United States from the facts presented in our
historical play.

After the show, my toughest students became school leaders. They wanted to find
new ways to continue receiving the positive attention they had received during the
performance. Class meeting topics changed from conflict resolution to brainstorming
ideas for projects that students could undertake to improve their learning environment
school-wide. They started a clean-up committee for eradicating the graffiti written on
playground equipment and walls each night. They dug trenches, put in a water system,
and started a school garden. They took the produce home to their families at the end of
each week. Some of the students started a buddy reading club for the primary students
that lived at their apartment building.

Overall, academic achievement in the classroom increased as well. Some of the
students, who had been failing, were now getting average to high scores. One gang leader
came in before school and asked if I would teach him how to read. He said he discovered
he was smart during the role play activities. He realized he understood the characters and
story when it was acted out before discussions or journal writes. He knew if he could
learn how to read, he would be able to understand the story and improve his grades. It wasn’t his lack of intelligence that was causing him to struggle in reading; it was his inability to read the words. So, I agreed to work with him before school each day. He came every day and learned to read that year. After he learned to read, his mother came to me and asked if I would teach her to read as well. An evening literacy class was developed so that she and three of her friends could learn to read. Once again, I was aware of the powerful impact of theater education on student engagement and motivation.

I looped up to sixth grade with this class. By the end of sixth grade, I had watched my students become positive leaders and seekers of knowledge. As I reflected on their growth, I realized what a difference the arts had made in the lives of these students. Students had learned through drama activities how to look at a situation or conflict from different points of view. This had reduced conflict between students on the playground, in effect destroying the longstanding racial tension that had perpetuated hate on our campus. Theater arts had been a process ending in a transformation for these students. I have since received letters and emails from many of those students. Some students have been the first in their family to graduate from high school, while others were the first to graduate from community college. I have even received a few announcements saying they are graduating from a four-year college. One student was even applying to attend law school.

Several years later, I ran into the mother of one of my students from this class. I didn’t recognize her because she had lost over 150 pounds. She told me that she hadn’t
been able to see her daughter star in our performance years ago. She was too heavy at the time to walk. After the performance was over, her daughter had cried for hours because she hadn’t seen her perform. This was the first time her tough daughter had ever shown emotion in regard to education. She was determined never to let that happen again, so she began a weight loss program. Her daughter continued to sing throughout her high school years. She was able to attend many of those performances. Her daughter was the first one in her family to graduate from high school. She said it was her daughter’s involvement in the high school performing arts program that kept her interested in attending school.

I continued to integrate drama activities into my classroom each year. Students looked forward to the experience of producing a play. Each year a large majority of the student population increased in academic achievement and grew socially and emotionally. I wondered if drama activities would make an impact in a classroom consisting of students from a more affluent home.

The following year, I accepted a teaching position in a rural town, just outside Sacramento. The majority of the students attending the school were Caucasian. Students came from middle and lower income families. Once again, performing arts was used as a means of teaching a variety of content area standards. Interactive drama games were written to teach science and math concepts. An after-school arts academy was created to ensure all students had access to learning how to draw, play recorders, and sing in harmony.
Every year, I continued to produce one or two musical productions with my students. Reflection during the process of production became a key component. Students wrote daily reflections about their experiences in their journals. They recorded their perceptions of self and others in their journal before the performance process began and then after the performance had concluded. Parents videotaped interviews of other parents, teachers, and students commenting about their experiences. Practice sessions were periodically recorded to document students’ growth in areas such as dance, music, theatrical skills, and self-confidence. Anecdotal notes were taken during student observations as well. Notes were kept on comments from staff, parents, community members, and students noting changes in students’ behavior at home or at school. A sample of comments and reflective thoughts follow.

Primary Teacher Comment – I see a lot of change in my former students after they finish the production. For instance, A.D. was too shy to look you in the eye, let alone speak! He was just learning English. He had that lead part in your show and now he looks you right in the eye when he talks. He can project his voice clear across the cafeteria. He just won the speech contest. It is amazing how much he has grown in one year.

Parent Comment – D.J. will never forget what he learned in the play. He told us what the bald eagle symbolized and has spent hours talking about how unfair the child labor laws were when the kids worked in factories. I learned a lot
from the play about our history, too. I didn’t know much about immigration before the show.

Parent Comment – I couldn’t believe K.D. actually learned all those lines. It was a lot of lines. I didn’t know she was so smart.

Student Comment – I loved learning how to sing. I have a great voice and I didn’t even know it. I will never forget the words to the songs. The songs taught me all about history. You might hear me sing a little when I take my test. That’s not cheating, is it?

Former Teacher Comment – S.T. can never sit still. She is so hyperactive. I couldn’t believe how focused she was. It looked like she was doing exactly what she was supposed to. She didn’t pull on her hair or fidget.

Former Teacher Comment – You got J.F. to speak! He is a Newcomer. I couldn’t get him out of the silent period. He refused to speak. He said several lines and smiled the whole time.

Parent Comment – S.O. tells us we should turn off the T.V. and read a book. At first, I thought he must be in trouble at school or something…but I guess he is just way into learning about the American Revolution.

Community Member Comment – I just love coming to these shows! Every year the kids get better and better. Is there something I can do to help you guys out?

Student Comment – I’m always in trouble. I’ve never been any good at school. I can’t believe you gave me a lead part. Weren’t you worried that I would blow it
off or get suspended or something? …. I was really good, huh! I love to sing. Heh, did you know that I got compliments from some of the teachers, yea, and a lot of comments from the kids. My dad came to the show. He was in the front row.

Parent Comment – I’m going to get my kid some dance lessons. She’s really good.

In accord with the discussion in Chapter 2, Review of Related Literature, the results continued to support the notion that content is more memorable when it is experienced by the learner. Observations, comments, and reflections also indicated social/emotional growth in some of the students. At times, theatrical performances revealed hidden talents for students that would change their lives forever.

For example, I had a gifted student (C.C.) in my classroom. He had skipped a grade, so he was much younger than the rest of the class. C.C. was highly intelligent and friendly, but he didn’t really fit in with the other kids. He always marched to the beat of his own drum, which was clearly not in sync with anyone else. He demonstrated frustration at not fitting in at times. He seemed to parallel play with most of the children. He was with the group, but not really an interactive member of the group. C.C. had a unique sense of humor that could only be enjoyed by those that could keep up with his intellectual wit.

Through the use of drama activities, I discovered that C.C. had an amazing voice and an aptitude for acting. So, I gave him the opportunity to sing a song from “The Phantom of the Opera” in our next production. The more we practiced the better he
became. His family was shocked when they heard C.C. sing. They had nurtured him academically, but had never even considered that he might have talent in the arts. So, C.C.’s parents decided to let him try out for the Music Circus production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. He auditioned with 400 actors and was given the part. For C.C., this was only the beginning of his career. He left school to travel with the Best of Broadway Production Company as an actor in *Les Miserables*. He performed for a year and a half returning home to finish his education with his peers. He was welcomed back into the classroom. His peers now saw him as a very special person. They accepted and celebrated his uniqueness. He was no longer viewed as the funny kid with the high I.Q.

He continued to perform in many productions after his return. He graduated from college with a major in drama and a minor in puppetry. He has designed puppets for shows and is currently directing one-act plays. Theater education helped C.C. find his niche, a unique environment that would nurture his creative intellect for many years.

Several years later, I was assigned to an academic coaching position at a small elementary school built in the heart of a rural town located northeast of Sacramento. The school faced a quiet street lined with a mixture of homes, some quaint and tidy, and some which were run down. Next to these houses were muddy, barren pastures that were home to swayed-back horses. Unleashed dogs were a common sight on the streets. A church, the local florist, fire station, and the public park surrounded the rest of the school grounds. The school grounds were often used for community activities such as baseball
practice and car shows. The elementary school student body was comprised of approximately 350 students (3.5% African American, 64.7% Caucasian, 16% Hispanic, and 7% Asian, and 8.8% other), who lived primarily in apartment complexes and rental homes. It was a population of low socioeconomic status with approximately 70% of the students receiving two free or reduced meals each day. One third of the population was English Language Learners. Parent involvement at the school site remained low, but had increased over the past two years. The school had a low mobility rate as most families have lived in the small town for many generations. However, in the past year, the mobility rate had risen due to increases in unemployment and homelessness.

As a coach, one of my responsibilities was to improve academic achievement at my school site. I knew from past experience, that if I could encourage teachers to integrate performing arts with content standards academic achievement would increase. With this goal in mind, I began to plan a project that would include third through fifth grade students. The 2009/2010 project would integrate performing arts with content standards in social studies. It would continue my investigation on whether learning through the performing arts would help students interact with social studies content standards in a meaningful and engaging manner that would extend their interest, knowledge, and skills in the content area. The impact of theater education on the social/emotional growth of the students would continue being documented as well.

After reviewing the content standards for each grade level in the California State Frameworks, for both performing arts and social studies, I divided the curriculum into 16
historical events that played an important role in the development of the United States of America. I carefully selected songs that were both authentic and appropriate to connect each historical event with the ensuing one, creating a smooth fluid program. It was important to choose songs that were actually sung during the period of time each group would be researching.

This way the songs could be used to teach history to the whole group, allowing access to the curriculum for students with different learning styles. A timeline for teachers was created to ensure the completion of the project by December 2009 (see Appendix A).

The next step was to set up a meeting with the teachers I would be working with. As a team, we brainstormed ways students could demonstrate understanding of the significance of their historical event through performing arts. The list included skits, puppet shows, interpretive dance, mock television show, interviews, dramatic poetry readings, and music. I explained the methodology of research was narrative inquiry which would include reflective journal writing, observations of student interactions, anecdotal notes taken during discussions, oral/written surveys from parents and students given periodically, and a collection of pictures, student work, and oral interviews throughout the project. Oral reports and the final project for each group would be evaluated as to the level of understanding of the content knowledge that was demonstrated.
During this meeting, teachers expressed their concerns to me about their students’ readiness to participate in this project. They felt the students in their classrooms had experienced very little exposure to the arts in past years. Students would need to receive instruction in the basic skills of drawing, painting, drama, puppetry, dance, and singing. It was decided that some skills would be taught whole class while others would be taught on an as needed basis. Teachers also expressed concern over the lack of student motivation. One teacher commented, “This is a great plan, but how are we going to get the kids to do this in just a few months? I can’t even get them to try in class.” I knew once things got started, students would be engaged and motivated to learn about history.

The next steps were to create parent permission slips allowing students to participate in the project, gather resources from the library and reading room, and organize lesson plans from the core curriculum that covered specific skills in a variety of areas pertaining to the project. A meeting was held to introduce the importance of allowing students to experience the arts in education to the students’ families. The project was explained and parents were asked to sign permission slips allowing their children to be involved in this study (see Appendix B).

On the first day of school, we introduced students to the project and taught theatre improvisation games. As the months progressed, students were exposed to a timeline/synopsis of historical events in U.S. history, graphic organizers, note-taking, simple dance steps, painting techniques, songs, and drama games. Students worked with Reader’s Theatre to develop fluency and to get used to reading scripts expressively.
In September, I helped the teachers place their students into cooperative learning groups according to interest within their grade-level content area. For example, third and fourth graders chose an area of interest connected to California history, and fifth grade students chose an area of interest connected to U.S. history. I gave students supplemental resources, including materials at a lower reading level, to assist students in their research. Students researched and organized their information and thoughts on a graphic organizer. When students had completed their research, each cooperative learning group presented their work to the rest of the class in the form of an oral report. This gave the students an opportunity to synthesize their work as they taught their peers about each historical event.

After oral presentations were completed, students decided how they were going to present their information using performing arts. Each cooperative learning group chose a type of performing art experience such as writing a script for a vignette or puppet show, writing a poem for a dramatic reading, creating a PowerPoint slide presentation or a dance, etc. Students used improvisation to assist them in creating their scripts (see Appendix C).

After the cooperative learning groups had edited and written final drafts of their script or presentation, they began to rehearse. I assisted students in determining what props, costumes, backdrops, etc. were needed for each vignette. Some items needed to be created while others were simply borrowed. Students also continued to learn appropriate historical songs as a whole group. The classroom teachers assisted me in working with each project group to block their performance. Students learned some basic theatrical
terms as they worked on stage each day (see Appendix D). Then, dress rehearsals were scheduled.

Students performed their finished projects for two separate audiences. Students performed once as a day show for students and staff, and once as an evening show for families, friends, and community members. The night show opened the evening for each classroom’s Project-Based Learning Night. Families and friends watched the performance and then went to each classroom to look at their project research, read their reflective journals, view pictures showing work throughout the project, and see some work from lessons that helped students develop the skills needed to complete the project.

After all performances were concluded, students, parents, and teachers reflected on their experiences. This information served as some of the data for this project. The following comments are a sample of the students’ and parents’ reflections and thoughts gathered throughout this project:

Student Comment – I didn’t know immigration was so interesting. I checked some books out of the library, so I could read more about Ellis Island. It is pretty cool. I have been asking my mom a lot about our immigration. I have learned a lot about my own family.

Student Comment – My mom said she came to America from Mexico when she was pregnant with me. She had to lie down in the trunk where you keep your spare tire for a long time. She was really scared. I’m not supposed to tell
you that. She just wanted a better life for me, just like the immigrants.

Things really haven’t changed too much, have they.

Student Comment – I think Harriet Tubman was really brave. She risked her life again and again to help other people escape slavery. I don’t think I’d do that. Not if I was free already. I guess she cared more about doing what was right for everyone, instead of looking out for herself. It makes me feel kind of proud to be African American, you know what I mean? She kind of represents all of us. Maybe I’ll do something really great in my life some day. You know, like make a difference.

Student Comment – I don’t understand why the Chinese and African American workers were paid less than the white workers. They worked on the same railroad and did the same things. It’s not right! Teachers don’t get paid differently if your skin is brown instead of white. The boss just made up his own rules. My dad says that is why we have unions. They protect the workers from the owners so you don’t get treated unfairly. They should have gone on strike.

Student Comment – I didn’t know there were so many things to do in California. It is such a huge state. I want to go on a vacation some day and go all over California. It would probably take a year. I want to see the desert, the mountains, the big cities! That’s why people are always fighting over water. We are just so big. The desert part needs water, but so do the people in the Central Valley. Did you know they grow most of the food for the
whole world? It’s a big responsibility. That’s why people are always fighting over water.

Student Comment – Are we going to stop learning about history, now that the performance is over? I think history is fun. I want to learn more stuff.

Most of the comments and reflections demonstrated understanding of social studies content. In fact, many students were able to make personal connections to what they had learned about the researched events. This allowed them to relate to the past in a more meaningful way. They learned enough about their topic to stimulate curiosity and motivate them to continue researching. By the end of the project, the individual learning groups were working in a highly collaborative way. This was in stark contrast to the observations and journal entries received in the beginning of this project, some of which are listed below.

Student Comment – Hmm… I think the Civil War took place a long time ago in Vietnam.

Student Comment – Abraham Lincoln wrote the Declaration of Independence. He was our first president. He freed the slaves you know.

Student Comment – I think the American Revolution was a fight between the North states and the South states. The Redcoats were from the South, I think.

It was readily apparent that the students had grown socially, emotionally, and academically during this project. Although the process of creating and teaching this project was primarily positive, some challenges surfaced during the course of the project.
For example, there wasn’t always enough time to teach as deeply as we wanted to. The students had very little background knowledge of history, as evidenced in some of their comments. Also, they had never researched or written a script before. Furthermore, they had few art skills and had little experience working cooperatively. In addition, teachers were concerned about keeping up with their pacing guides for reading and mathematics, so they were not always eager to participate in the project. Planning and coordinating this project with the classroom teachers had to occur before or after school, because of the demands of the mandated curriculum. Space for practicing songs, dancing, and blocking their vignettes was limited at times due to weather and facility usage. One glaring problem was the lack of financial support for purchasing materials for costumes, props, backdrops, etc.

Financing a performance will always be an issue. Elementary schools rarely have funds set aside to support the arts. Most of the time, expenditures for costuming, props, backdrops, musical scores, etc. will become the responsibility of the teacher. Therefore, teachers need to be resourceful and thoughtful when planning the costuming. Costuming can be extremely expensive, especially when students have more than one part in the performance.

In order to keep expenditures to the minimum, I haunted thrift stores, which are a performing arts teacher’s gold mine. Some thrift stores sell costumes from $5-$10 year-round. Other stores only display racks of used costumes September to early November. Staying alert and willing to search, one can gather many costumes. Thrift stores also
carry men’s pants for $3-$4 apiece. Then, with very little sewing, pants can be transformed into knickers for children. Add a vest, taken in under the arm and on the shoulder, and a quality historical costume emerges for a low cost. Purchasing items when the store offers additional discounts is another money saving tip. Props and many other clothing items are available at these stores, however to be successful one must shop often and plan ahead.

Thrift stores are also a great source of fabric. Searching the bedding and linen sections of the store, can yield comforters, sheets, and table cloths that are made of beautiful brocades, perfect for designing renaissance costumes. Bags of new fabric are often available as well.

Yard sales and flea markets can be good sources of materials, too. The drawback to yard sales is that one can spend a lot of time and gas looking for things and come home empty handed. Flea markets sometimes have fabric for good prices. Remember to test the fabric to see if the dyes in the fabric are set. It is easy to ruin an entire load of costumes when fabrics lose dye each time they are washed. Otherwise, watch for coupons and sales in local fabric stores. Fabric prices are very high, so determining yardage carefully before shopping matters. Another way to get fabric, props or costumes is to send a flyer home with every child in the school. Often times, parents will have fabric they never used or outgrown costumes taking up garage space, and are more than happy to send them off to school.
Finding ways to draw parents into the process of creating the performance became another challenge. Establishing a weekly sewing night at school encouraged parent participation. The parents brought their portable machines to school and sewed for a night out. I supplied snacks, beverages, thread, fabric, patterns (purchased or drawn out on newsprint), etc., which enabled a lot to be accomplished. It became a weekly evening of laughter, stories, and lasting memories for parents. Some of the relationships built will last for years. I found from past experience that sometimes, parents helped even after their child has gone on to middle school. Backdrop painting nights were well attended, too. Parents, students, siblings, former students all came to help create the backdrops. This became a fun time of fellowship. Inexpensive, full sized sheets were an economical substitute for canvas and could be painted with Tempera. One drawback to parent and family participation, is that sometimes one has to accept work that does not meet the standards. Again, the process or journey is most important, not the product.

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that using performing arts to engage learners in social studies positively impacted the social/emotional development and academic learning of the participating students. Giving students’ choice in learning created ‘buy-in.’ Students really wanted to research and learn about their topic. The journal reflections were brief and shallow to begin with, but as students learned to reflect and think about what they were learning the depth and breadth of the response increased. Students became very motivated to learn about the past. They enjoyed discussing what they were learning with other students on the playground. Students also gained
confidence in speaking publicly and thinking out of the box. They took pride in creating their representation of their assigned topic. More importantly, they loved the process of learning.
Chapter 4

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results from this project reaffirmed my conviction in the value of theatre education in schools, today. In this study, performing arts activities were integrated with social studies content matter in an effort to increase student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement. This, in turn, created a learning environment for students conducive to social/emotional development. The methodology of research was narrative inquiry. Student outcomes were met as evidenced in journal reflections, observations, anecdotal records, interviews, and oral reports culminating in each learning group’s performing arts project.

Student outcomes included the development of stronger learning communities, expanded student perspectives, and an increased knowledge in content subject matter. Students were observed using higher order thinking skills to overcome challenges. For example, the learning group working on the Underground Railroad script could not decide how to portray a scene involving Harriet Tubman saving a slave from a beating resulting in her subsequent head injury. They all agreed that it was an important moment in her life and should be included in their script. However, they could not agree on how to do it. One of the students was African American. She felt it was wrong to have a white student play the part of the slave. Others felt showing a beating was too graphic. Preschool and kindergarten children would see the play as well. Finally, they decided to make a list of what they wanted the audience to walk away with after viewing the scene.
Then they brainstormed ideas that might give them the desired outcome. They recorded the positive and negative points of each idea. After an hour of work, they emerged from their room, with a new plan for the scene. The new idea satisfied everyone’s concerns and yet, made the point that they wanted the audience to get. They would act out part of the scene behind a screen. Only the silhouettes of the players would be seen.

This worked well during the performance, the audience sat in silence after each scene, and the learning group felt the result was exactly what they had wanted.

Participation and collaboration increased over the duration of the project. I noticed that in all of the groups, students were engaged and motivated to learn. They were leaning in to listen, giving eye contact to each other, and offering ideas with enthusiasm. I watched as students’ self-confidence grew each day.

I believe these outcomes were a product of the inclusion of improvisational, creative drama. Creative drama is critical in that it challenges students to take risks and shift out of their comfort zones. Performing arts is a process of learning, not a product. It is a process of learning that encourages interactions between oneself and the surrounding world. It is a process that builds relationships that stimulate constant reflection. It is a process that encourages creative, innovative thinking.

In performing arts, students learn to look for many solutions to a problem instead of just one. They learn to consider multiple perspectives when making decisions. One example of this occurred when I was teaching songs to the whole class. I had researched thoroughly the historical origins of each song I was going to teach. I selected multiple
songs for each historical event so that the students could choose what songs they would like to include in the performance. Before teaching the song, I explained the background and meaning of the lyrics in each song.

One song was “Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore.” Historically, Michael was a conductor of the Underground Railroad. Slaves would sing this song to guide runaways to Michael’s location. Later, it became a gospel song, and Michael was believed to be representing an archangel. The students loved learning this song because of the beautiful harmony. It was unanimously voted as a song for the show.

The next day two girls came to class crying. They were Jehovah’s Witnesses. Their mothers had told them they could no longer be in the show because we were singing “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore.” After speaking to their mothers, it became evident that the song would have to be cut. I presented the issue to the class. We discussed different religious beliefs, cultures, etc. At first, the other students didn’t think it was fair. The girls volunteered to participate in an alternative activity. The class didn’t want that either. They began to discuss how they all had different points of view. They discussed how they might feel if they were the girls. They decided that it wasn’t right to value one point of view more than another. All points of view should be considered in an equal way. It was suggested that maybe they could choose a different song that had harmony that would work for everyone. The song was replaced with “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” which was acceptable to all families participating in the show.
The skills used to resolve this issue, are the same skills that students will need to use in solving real world problems. Therefore, it is clear that performing arts provides students with the vital skills they need to live in a global world. This leads to the development of productive citizens that will have the skills needed to make contributions in the 21st century, such as appreciating and valuing diversity, honoring different points of view, asking probing questions, actively listening, generating multiple possibilities or solutions, expressing their own feelings clearly, and thinking critically and creatively. It is imperative that our students are prepared for the future. Ongoing experiences with the arts can enable that.

As I reflected further on this study, I wondered if theater education provides a powerful forum for teaching the whole child, then what skills will teachers who facilitate this process of learning need to acquire?

First, teachers need to understand that if they want their students to work effectively in teams, then they will need to learn how to work in teams themselves. Student learning goals will have to be determined and agreed upon prior to implementing lessons. Teachers will need to work as a team to agree on student outcomes and how they will be recognized and evaluated. At times I found it difficult to foster consensus during this project.

Also, teachers need to be willing to discuss and integrate their overall philosophies. This is important because teacher interactions, classroom experiences, student reflections, and content all have an impact on each other. Teachers must firmly
believe in the value of teaching critical and creative thinking through performing arts. They must understand that putting together a performance is a journey of learning that is organic in nature. I have discovered that the end product will not be known until I reach the end of the journey with the students. The product will evolve as students and teachers engage in thinking, creating, self-discovery, reflection, and interactions with content and people. This process is dynamic in nature, and it is a significant, aesthetic experience.

Therefore, teachers involved in the performance not only must have strong convictions, but also they must be flexible. Timelines are important, but must be viewed as skeletal maps. The detours and deviations from the original plan are the result of the creative process of learning and should be expected and celebrated. Teachers will have to constantly adjust schedules and be willing to be creative in their use of time. For example, in this project I found out that many students had absolutely no concept of history and time. They did not understand when events took place. It was all a blur to them. We had to detour from the schedule. We had to go back and have the students make a visible timeline of events in history. Although this took extra time, it cleared up a lot of confusion for our students.

Furthermore, the teaching team must have a passion for performing arts. Performances take a lot of time and energy. The process can be draining, if passion is missing. Teachers must be willing to give up personal time in order to pull-off a quality show. Those who are passionate about drama will savor every minute spent sewing, painting, hauling, learning dance steps and songs, working with students and parents, etc.
Yet, often teachers, parents, and students acknowledge a sense of let down or sadness after the final performance. The final show is an exhilarating moment, but also it marks the end of a personal, intimate journey of learning for all involved. The journey will be remembered, more than the final show. Students will remember the feeling of achieving something that they thought they could never accomplish. Those memories might include the sense of triumph over not quitting when things got hard or didn’t go their way, finding a solution to a problem when their teachers were at a loss, designing a time machine from accumulated junk that shook, smoked, flashed, and whistled as they journeyed to an ancient civilization, or the look of pride and amazement on their parents’ faces as they heard them sing for the first time. Learning interlaced with emotion, builds meaningful connections and relationships to academic content and the other participants. The work of producing a show becomes a labor of love.

When a team is comprised of teachers who understand the importance of these elements, trusting relationships can develop. Individual strengths can be honored, and the workload can be shared. Multiple hands and minds enrich the process of learning, resulting in a stronger performance. Without the development of trusting relationships, the workload falls on the shoulders of one or two teachers, which can limit the creative process and result in a “watered-down” production.

Finally, performing arts teachers need to have the courage to be teacher leaders. During this study, I discovered that more traditional colleagues do not always appreciate teachers who integrate the arts into their curriculum. Some colleagues feel that all
teachers should teach in the same way. According to some more traditional colleagues, when a teacher uses a different process, such as integrating the performing arts, to foster learning, students and parents may perceive it as a precedent for learning. When these students enter more traditional classrooms, where the arts are not integrated into the curriculum, parents and students may exhibit dissatisfaction with their new learning environment. Some traditional colleagues feel that puts pressure on them to do things differently. However, they do not want to change, and they begin to resent teachers who integrate the arts into their curriculum. This resentment can isolate the arts integration teacher and discourage other teachers from integrating the arts into their own curriculum for fear of rejection by their colleagues.

I discovered several solutions through this study to resolve this issue. At times, innovative teachers must be teacher leaders. I found it important to be open to the feelings and needs of colleagues. My aim was to build positive relationships that would benefit the entire learning community. One solution was to find thirty minutes a week to partner with a concerned teacher. As a teaching team, drama activities can be easily taught to both classes at the same time. In this way, the partner teacher is exposed to the benefits of the arts. When doing this, we need to remember to “show not tell.” Still, some teachers simply do not feel they have the skills to integrate the arts into the classroom. However, once they have their own meaningful experiences in the arts, drama activities are quick, simple, and easily learned. Furthermore, learning from each other is a
necessary attitude and aim. More traditional teachers may have a variety of wonderful lessons to share with colleagues, too.

Another possibility to foster the arts in schools is to develop a plan for an after-school arts academy, open to all students. In this way, parents who want the arts for their children during school will find satisfaction through after school arts activities. Allowing classroom teachers to pass out the flyers and talk to parents about the program makes them a part of the school team. The arts integration teacher will do the teaching after school, alleviating the pressure on classroom teachers to offer it during the day. This eliminates competition among teachers, helps to build positive relationships among colleagues, and gives all students access to the arts. As the program builds in popularity, other teachers can be invited to assist the arts integration teacher. This is a non-threatening way to train teachers. Before long, they can teach a class after school as well. Once they feel comfortable teaching the arts in isolation, they may feel confident enough to integrate the arts into their curriculum during the day.

If we want all children to have access to the curriculum, then the performing arts need to be integrated into every area of the core curriculum. In today’s political climate, this will only occur when it is written into the California State Frameworks as a tool or process for learning.

For example, when technology first appeared, it was seen as an expensive toy. As the merits of technology became evident, affluent schools began to use it as a tool for learning in their classrooms. Today, policymakers view it as a powerful tool for
communication. They see it as a critical component for preparing our students to live in our global world. Now, technology is integrated into the California State Frameworks in the major content areas and is a funding priority at school sites.

If policymakers viewed performing arts as a process of learning, they would not continue to reduce funding in the state budget year after year. If they understood how the performing arts prepare students to live productively in the 21st century, they would make it as much of a priority as technology. Educational leaders need to work with policymakers with this aim in mind.

I trust that this study will inspire other teachers to integrate performing arts with other content areas of the core curriculum. This project may also encourage teachers to collaborate and work as a team to improve learning experiences for children. Teachers will see that when we empower children, offer choices, allow for creativity and divergent thinking, and continue to encourage parent involvement, then children will flourish. A primary aim of education is to establish in children a disposition for learning, a sustained tendency to love learning. Integrating the arts across the curriculum creates opportunities for that to happen.
APPENDIX A

TIMELINE

for

MAKING CONNECTIONS: ENGAGING LEARNERS THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS

Sharon L. Glover

June 1, 2009

☐ Meet with partner teachers to plan

☐ Divide curriculum into major historical events in U.S. history and California history

☐ Discuss and gather resources (books, music, instruments, costumes, artifacts, human resources, materials for puppetry and costumes)

☐ Choose period appropriate songs and dances to teach

July 1, 2009

☐ Meet with partner teachers to plan

☐ Write or organize lesson plans for painting techniques needed to complete backdrops

☐ Write or organize lesson plans for drama games and puppetry unit

☐ Write rubric and requirements for historical projects

☐ Write or organize lesson plans for historical events, timelines and synopsis

☐ Write or organize lesson plans for script and poetry writing
Write or organize lesson plans for creating PowerPoint slide shows

August 12, 2009

- Teach script writing to students
- Complete request for transportation and send to District
- Introduce parents to project and have them complete research permission slips at Back to School Night
- Explain the importance of children participating in the arts and Service Learning Projects to parents at Back to School Night
- Have parents sign-up to volunteer to help with the project
- Introduce students to a timeline of U.S./California historical events
-Expose students to a brief synopsis of each historical event to stimulate student interest and curiosity
- Teach students how to take notes using graphic organizers
- Introduce students to songs, simple dances, painting techniques, and drama games

September 1, 2009

- Students form research groups based on interest
- Students read, research and complete graphic organizer for chosen historical event
- Distribute and discuss rubric and requirements for students’ historical vignettes
- Plan and organize fundraiser for transportation costs if needed
- Introduce students to improvisation and drama skills games
- Expose students to puppetry, poetry, dance, and theatrical performances
- Begin painting backdrops and designing costumes
- Introduce students to papier-mâché techniques
- Form parent work groups and call Sacramento Theatrical Company

October 1, 2009

- Add instruments to song practice
- Students choose method for demonstrating understanding of content standards
- Students write scripts for historical vignettes, puppet shows, etc.
- Students decide what props will be needed
- Review the process of creating a power-point slide show with students

November 15, 2009

- Fit and begin costume alterations
- Parent Work Groups complete projects
- Call Sacramento Theatrical Company to schedule delivery of borrowed props
- Create additional props

November 1, 2009

- Block vignettes, puppet shows, dances, etc.
- Continue to design costumes, puppets, props, and backdrops
- Complete work order for risers, spotlights, etc.
- Practice songs

December 1, 2009

- Begin vignette dress rehearsals on stage
- Send home permission slips
- Send out invitations to families and district guests

December 10, 2009
- Create performance brochure and print

December 14, 2009
- Organize costumes
- Set-up props, backdrops, equipment
- Replace batteries in all microphones

December 15, 2009
- Day Show for staff and students
- Night Show for families and friends

December 16, 2009
- Organize costumes
- Set-up props, backdrops, equipment
- Replace batteries in all microphones
- Double-check permission slips

December 17, 2009
- Write and distribute project evaluation/reflection forms to parents, school, students
- Breakdown set, return all equipment and borrowed props, and store costumes
Dear Families,

I am excited to share with you that I am working hard at improving my practice as a teacher! I will be completing my Masters Degree in Curriculum and Instruction this year. As part of this experience, I am researching ways to motivate and engage children in learning. Past research has shown that children become engaged in learning through art experiences. I will be researching this method in our classroom with your permission.

I would like to have your child learn history through the arts! Your child will study skills in several areas of performing arts (dance, drama, music, etc.) this fall. I will introduce U.S. history and some important events in California to your child. Your child will work in a collaborative group to study an event in history of their choice. The collaborative group will research, complete a graphic organizer, and then give an oral presentation about their event. Then they will use an area of performing arts to demonstrate their understanding of the event. I will also be teaching the children songs to tie our vignettes together for a show.

Time in class will be allocated to complete their projects. Children will be assessed based on journal writings, reflections, observations, interviews and their culminating performance. Some of their work will be used and discussed in my thesis project. I will refer to your child as Student A, Student B, etc. in my paper. Your child’s name or picture will not be published in my thesis.

Please sign this permission slip and return it to me as soon as possible. If you choose for your child not to participate in my thesis project, he/she will be required to write a research paper on an event of their choice in history. The oral presentation will still be required.

Thank you for supporting my learning. There will be opportunities for you to become involved in their projects as well!

Sincerely,

Ms. Glover
☐ I would like my child to participate in your thesis project. I want my child to experience history through the arts. I understand that my child’s picture and name will not be published at any time.

☐ I would not like my child to participate in your thesis project. I would like them to write a research paper and give an oral presentation instead.

________________________________________              ________________
Parent Signature                                                                    Date
Scene 1: The setting is a home with a fireplace. Mrs. Kelsey, an old woman, is knitting in a rocking chair and two children are playing marbles at her feet. The old woman is humming an old Romanian song as she knits.

Fernando: What are you humming, Mrs. Kelsey?

Mrs. Kelsey: I am humming an old song I learned when I was a child. I had a couple of Romanian friends that I played with in New York. They played this song on their violins. They lived in the same tenement that my family did.

Tamara: What’s a tenement?

Mrs. Kelsey: The tenement buildings were like today’s apartments, except that they had only three tiny rooms: a kitchen, a bedroom, and a parlor. Gaslights lit the rooms. There were no bathrooms in the tenements. We used a chamber pot which we kept under our beds. In the morning we would empty the chamber pot in the privy outside. The privy was a little shed outside that had a hole in the ground. Everyone in the tenement used the same privy. Every family had to dump their garbage in the middle of the street. The garbage fed the rats and people got sick a lot. There was poor ventilation in the tenements, so sickness spread quickly from family to family. The death rate was high. You must remember jobs paid very poorly then. Parents and children had to work in the factories just to get by. The three rooms we lived in housed families with 8 or more children. Children did not go to school because they didn’t speak English and they had to work.

Tamara: It must have been tough, then.

Mrs. Kelsey: Yes, it was. We were just glad to be in America. Anyway back to the song… the walls between our rooms were very thin. There were no TV’s then. Families didn’t have lots of toys. They sang or told stories at night. When I went to bed, I would lay awake and listen to my friends playing their violins. They would play songs from their homeland. I fell asleep each night listening to wonderful songs from Romania. When I close my eyes, I can still hear the songs as I did then.
(Mrs. Kelsey closes her eyes and listens as Diana and Betty play the Romanian tune on their violins. The children quietly play marbles. Mrs. Kelsey hums with the music.)

Felipe: Are you from Romania?

Mrs. Kelsey: No, dear child. I am from Ireland. Over 40 million people immigrated to America between 1800 and 1970, you know. My family came to America when Ireland’s potato crop failed in the late 1840’s. In Ireland, over a million people died. We came in search of a better life. The boat was very crowded. Many people got sick and died on the ship. We were happy when we got to America.

Tamara: Was it just Romanians and Irishmen that came to America?

Mrs. Kelsey: No, the tenement across from us was the home for many Italian families. A lot of people from Europe came to America during that time. For instance, the Russian Jews came to America because of violent attacks on the Jews in Russia during the mid to late 1800s. The government supported the attacks, so the Russian Jews were not safe in their own country. Some immigrants came because of religious or political persecution. Some immigrants came to escape plagues and poverty. Everyone had their own reason for wanting a new life in America.

Felipe: My teacher says people had to go to Ellis Island before they could come to New York. Is that true?

Mrs. Kelsey: Yes it is. Later, in 1892, immigrants had to stop at Ellis Island before they could enter America. They had to go through checks on their immigration papers and then quarantine for anyone the officials thought was not healthy enough. It was pretty scary for them. Sometimes families were split apart because one member had gotten a disease during the boat trip. That person would be sent back to their homeland without their family.

Tamara: My teacher says I am a modern immigrant. My family moved to America because we wanted to have a fresh start. We were invited to come to America by our aunts. I came to America with my mom, dad, brother, and sister. We flew in an airplane from Moscow, Russia to Maine. From Maine we flew to California. I remember that the plane was huge. My mom held me in her arms. I imagined how big America would be.

Felipe: I am an immigrant too. I was born in Tijuana, Mexico. My family came to America when I was three years old. A couple of years later, my friend Jose came to America. I was so excited. We would all have a new start in this country. Me vista America por que en escuela.
Tamara: I guess most of the people living in America today were immigrants or had ancestors who were immigrants.

Mrs. Kelsey: Yes. We are truly a nation of many people and cultures. Now, you children play quietly and let this old lady rest for a bit.
Underground Railroad  
(Barry, Jayden, Deja, Nick)

Narrator (Barry): This is a story about Harriet Tubman. Harriet’s grandparents were captured in West Africa and brought to Maryland to work as slaves against their will. Harriet’s parents were born as slaves. Harriet, her brothers and sisters were born into slavery, too. They all worked on a large plantation.

Harriet was five when she started working. She went to work at a neighbor’s plantation taking care of the babies. (Behind the screen.) (Deja rocks a baby singing, “Rock-a-bye baby, in a treetop. When the wind blows the cradle will rock. When the bough breaks the cradle will fall. And down will come baby cradle and all.” Then she puts the baby to bed and picks up her sewing.)

At six years old, she could weave and make clothes. As a teenager, she worked long days in the fields. She was strong but she often got into trouble with her master. Her master would beat her for punishment. (Deja makes motions like she is picking cotton behind the screen. She cries out, “My fingers are raw from picking this cotton. They are bleeding so badly, that I cannot bear to pick another cotton boll. I have worked from sunup until sundown. I won’t work no more!”)  
(Behind the screen)

Nick pretends to whip her. Nick shouts, “You will do exactly as I tell you. You are always causing trouble. I have half a mind to sell you at the next auction. Now get back to work!”

One time a man left the field without permission.

(Behind the screen) (Jayden says, “I am headed to the store. I don’t think anyone will see me. Wish me luck.”)

The overseer saw him and quickly followed him.

(Nick, the overseer, yells, “Yeh you! Stop or you will get the beating of your life!”)

Harriet chased after them.

(Harriet screams, “Don’t hurt him. He was coming back. He wasn’t running away!”)

The overseer caught the man.

(Nick orders, “Harriet, you hold him down now so I can beat him!”)
Harriet refused.

(“NO! I won’t let you. Get up and run, Run!”)

The man got up and ran away while Harriet blocked the overseer. The overseer threw a heavy weight at the man, but hit Harriet in the head instead. Part of her skull was crushed and she fell to the ground. Harriet never fully recovered from the hit. She would suffer from sudden blackouts the rest of her life.

Harriet got strong again and went back to work in the fields. She worked like a man. She learned a lot about the woods from her father as they chopped wood together. Harriet saw many slaves badly beaten in her life. She vowed to free her family.

Harriet got married. She learned that she might be sold at the auction. Harriet made plans to escape. Her husband wouldn’t go with her. He didn’t want to risk getting caught and beaten.

(Jayden and Deja come to the front of the screen.)

So, Harriet took her brother with her. They ran through the woods at night. She was very afraid. At night, they met with a woman who was part of the Underground Railroad. This was a group of people who helped slaves escape to the North or Canada. She told Harriet and her brother to Follow the Drinking Gourd. There would be a conductor at the river to take them to freedom. The song was filled with directions on who to meet and how to follow the North Star.

(Choir sings Follow the Drinking Gourd.)

Jayden tells his sister, “Look there is the North Star and the drinking gourd. We are on the right road. We must travel only at night and hide during the day. You know if we get caught master will beat us for sure. He will sell one of us too.”

At the river, the conductor hid her brother in a wicker basket on the raft.

Conductor (Nick) “You get up on in here, boy. Don’t you make a sound. Even if we get stopped, you don’t speak. Got that? You’re going to be in there a long time, but when I let you out you will be free. You hear me, free! Harriet, you are tall enough to wade across the river. You go on now. Follow the river bank. Hide behind the trees until I say it is safe.”

Harriet crossed the river on foot. On the other side of the river, they were in safe country. They were free.
Harriet Tubman died at age 93. She was a famous and respected American. She went back and helped over 300 slaves escape to freedom. She was a spy, nurse, and scout in the Civil War. In her later years, she opened her own home up to former slaves who were old and needed care. She was a courageous leader who helped change the lives of many people in America. She spent her entire life fighting for freedom.
APPENDIX D

Glossary of Theatre Terms

**Antagonist** – the character who creates obstacles for the protagonist (example: the villain)

**Apron** – the area downstage from the curtain line (doesn’t have to have a curtain)

**Arena Theatre or Theatre in the Round** – staging in which the audience is on all sides of the acting space

**Arena Staging** – audience is on all four sides of the stage

**Aside** – a comment from an actor spoken directly to the audience (example: “Little do they know…”)

**Blocking** – the actors’ movement on stage (blocking is the responsibility of the director)

**Bunraku** – classic Japanese puppet theatre

**Cheating Out** – positioning the actor’s body to an angle to be more visible to the audience (example: Two actors talking to each other shift their bodies slightly diagonally toward the audience.)

**Comic Relief** – theatrical device made to relieve tension in an otherwise dramatic piece

**Downstage** – part of the stage closest to the audience

**Drama** – creative performing activity which does not require an audience

**Drop** – wooden screen or curtain that can be lowered and raised to create scenes
Exposition – foundational information of a story

Fourth Wall – the imaginary boundary between the actors and the audience

House – refers to the audience portion of the theatre

Improvisation – setting out to solve the problem without any idea of how to do it (Viola Spolin) or spontaneous unscripted performance

Mask – partial or full covering of the face, quick way to transform a person to another character

Pantomime – performance without words or in place of physical props (raising your hand, waving goodbye)

Pitch – how high or low your voice is

Project – to use the voice in such a way to reach the necessary distance

Prop – a small item that an actor can carry around on stage (examples: knife, gun, tray of glasses, book, bouquet of flowers) All actors are responsible for their own props.

Proscenium – staging in which the audience is on one side of the acting space

Proscenium Arch – structural opening to the proscenium stage

Protagonist – the character whose goals create the story (examples: the hero, the good guy) The playwright wants the audience to care about the protagonist.

Raked Stage – stage that is on a slant or sloped (high upstage, low downstage)
Rate – how fast or slow someone speaks (rapid speech suggests high-energy, high-anxiety, or younger characters while slow speech suggests more serious, simpleton, or older characters)

Scenery – larger semi-permanent set decoration (meant to indicate location)

Scrim – curtain made of loosely woven fabric which when lit from in front appears solid but when lit from behind it disappears

Set Dressing – furniture (examples: couches, desks, tables)

Sight Lines – imaginary lines within which the actors or stage can be seen by the audience

Spike Mark – marks on a stage surface for the placement of scenery or actors

Stage Left – left side of the stage as determined from the actor’s perspective

Stage Right – right side of the stage as determined from the actor’s perspective

Stage Whisper – using the voice to give the illusion of a whisper but the audience can still hear you

Staging Directions – tells the actors what to do on stage, the playwright puts staging directions in parenthesis

Suspension of Disbelief – an unspoken agreement between the actors and the audience to enter mutually shared fantasy

Theatre – creative, performing activity which requires an audience, a performing activity that is observed by others

Three-Quarter Staging – staging where audience is on three sides of the acting
**Upstage** – stage area that is farthest from the audience

**Vocal Variety** – using lots of inflection and intonation, not monotone

**Wings** – area immediately off stage
REFERENCES


