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# How the Arts Help Children to Create Healthy Social Scripts: Exploring the Perceptions of Elementary Teachers

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Although there is widespread recognition that arts experiences enhance children's social-emotional development, the mechanisms through which this process takes place are little understood. This article provides insight into the role of the arts in development, through a review of recent research on child development and interviews with inner-city elementary teachers who have participated in an artist-in-residence program. The author presents evidence that arts experiences—and drama activities in particular—help children to develop an enhanced understanding of the responses, emotional expressions, and actions of other people, as well as a comprehension of what to expect from others and what social scripts should be used in different situations.

**Keywords:** dance, drama, elementary school, emotional development, social development

Long before the academic effects of arts-based learning became a focus of public attention, a widespread belief existed that arts experiences contribute to individual moral and emotional development. As William Congreve observed in 1697, “Musick has Charms to sooth a savage Breast” (Gee 2004, 122). Three centuries later, this idea has attracted renewed interest. In research studies focusing on such relationships, high-quality arts lessons have been found to have an impact on character understanding, comprehension of character motivation, increased peer-to-peer interactions, increased conflict-resolution skills, and improved problem-solving dispositions (Catterall 2002).

In the performing arts, the emotional element is often apparent, whereas the emotional component of a visual art lesson may be less clear. However, children do use art media to express and come to terms with their own desires and fears. For example, “A thinking, feeling, and human pilot, constructed in the child's mind, controls the airplane drawn in a Singapore nursery. Perhaps the airplane contains passengers. If it crashes, the imaginary rescuers of the injured will also be motivated by imagined human emotions” (Matthews 2004, 291). A child's ephemeral tracings build a hypothetical world in which objects and events are organized according to

the child's developing understanding. By creating an external representation of an internal mental image, the child is able to explore, critique, and revise the representation.

This process does not take place in a vacuum. Thompson and Bales characterize preschool drawing as “a performance unfolding in time, in which speech and gesture, word and image, are intertwined” (1991, 43). Even when children work alone, their behavior reflects social practices; even talking to themselves, they mimic social speech. By the age of seven, egocentric speech can operate as a kind of spontaneous self-assessment process that eventually transforms into inner dialogue. More recently, Thompson (2000) has investigated dialogues among young children to show that the development of artistry is both personal and social, dependent not only on the child's intentions, but also on the extent to which those intentions are mirrored or deflected by the responses of others.

However, large gaps still exist in our knowledge of how the interpersonal interactions of arts activities affect the evolution of the children's social scripts in interacting with peers. This article reviews the available literature on the impact of arts activities on social-emotional development and explores the observations of elementary teachers who participated in an inner-city arts program. The teachers were interviewed about their perceptions of the impact of weekly visits from teaching artists and follow-up activities during the week on student social-emotional development.

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Twelve veteran elementary teachers participated in the research study. Each teacher had participated in the artist-in-residence program for at least one semester prior to the study. As part of that program, each teacher worked with teaching artists to create arts lessons that could be easily integrated with other content areas, as well as to plan follow-up activities. In the interviews, I paid particular attention to how the teachers perceived arts experiences to have affected the social scripts that children followed when interacting with peers.

### COUNTERACTING THE EFFECTS OF A MEDIA-DRIVEN CULTURE

In our fast-paced era, adults often complain of stress. It is easy, however, to overlook the cumulative impacts of sensory overload on children. Worried that our children may not be learning enough, we push them to experience an increasing number of learning activities, toys, and virtual worlds, and we devote little thought to the importance of helping them achieve a balance between calming and arousing activities. However, when children are bombarded by a steady diet of heightened stimulation, they may have difficulty later with responding appropriately in structured classroom situations.

Without balanced interpersonal interactions, the task of learning healthy social scripts<sup>1</sup> becomes difficult. This challenge is exacerbated by continued exposure to televised images of aggression. As Bushman and Huesmann (2006) point out, long-term increases in children's aggressive behavior are now generally agreed to be a consequence of the child's learning scripts for aggressive behavior, cognitions supporting aggression, and aggression-promoting emotions through observation of others behaving violently. Researchers have known for decades that excessive media use and frequent exposure to problematic program content are detrimental to children's healthy development (Jordan 2006). Yet, in a culture in which stay-at-home mothers are increasingly rare and more children live in neighborhoods where it is unsafe to play outside, the substitution of unsupervised television viewing for adult-child interaction has become common. According to the Center for Media Education, the average child will witness more than 100,000 acts of televised violence before completing elementary school (1997). By modeling and glorifying violence, televised brutality can trigger aggressive impulses in children and decrease their feelings of empathy for victims (Aronson 1999; Huston and Wright 1998). Additionally, on television, perpetrators are seldom held accountable for their actions. Death and physical injuries from gun violence are usually glossed over or completely ignored (Price, Merrill, and Clause 1992). Long-term exposure to this type of vicarious conditioning desensitizes emotional reactions and encourages social scripts that prime children for antisocial behavior. When exposure to televised violence is not balanced by prosocial experiences within the family or at school, children can begin to perceive unhealthy behavior as normal.

Insight into how to counteract this conditioning comes from an unexpected quarter. Scholars have argued that violent video games are more detrimental to children than violent television programs because of their interactive and participatory nature. For example, playing "killing" video games allows young people to practice violence—often gun violence—in ways that television does not (Dill and Dill 1998). Several studies have demonstrated that teenagers who play violent video games are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior and violence than those adolescents who play nonviolent video games (Dill and Dill 1998; Anderson and Dill 2000).

Both the active nature and the violent character of "killing" games are factors in determining a child's response. As disheartening as the existing research may be, data also suggest that active engagement in constructive human interactions may help children learn healthy social scripts. Active learning is a natural component of the performing arts. Creative dramatics mirror both the active nature of video games and the peer group role-playing in which young children naturally engage (e.g., reenacting superhero adventures or playing house).<sup>2</sup> Such imaginative activities not only encourage a heightened awareness of others' reactions and expectations, but also hone social skills.

### THE ARTS, EMOTION, AND COGNITION

During their pre-kindergarten years, children spend a large proportion of their waking hours engaged in expressive activities such as drawing; painting; molding clay; singing; and pretending to be heroes, parents, babies, monsters, or animals. As soon as children arrive at school, however, they are expected to put aside such activities and sit quietly at desks. Kindergarten classrooms now resemble the first-grade classrooms of past decades, in that they emphasize formal reading and math instruction instead of play and socialization (Elkind 1986; Hatch and Freeman 1988; Plevyak and Morris 2002; Shepard and Smith 1988; Walsh 1989). Opportunities for imaginative engagement are greatly diminished.

Little attention has been paid to the potential impacts of this singleminded academic focus on children's social and emotional development—in part because of a longstanding belief that young children are egocentric and therefore do not need much interaction. Research has demonstrated, however, that preschoolers are not egocentric; instead, they show great interest in the beliefs of others and how these beliefs compare with their own (Dunn 1998; Saarni 1999). Additionally, by the time children reach kindergarten, they have already become experts in using and interpreting social comparison information (Pomerantz et al. 1995).

Denham found that young children who are more socially competent and emotionally perceptive are capable of more success in their relationships (2006, 1998). Similarly, children who experience greater peer acceptance and more

positive peer relationships tend to feel more positively about coming to school, participate more in classroom activities, and achieve more in the classroom (Buhs, Ladd, and Herald 2001; Ladd, Birch, and Buhs 1999; Ladd, Kochenderfer, and Coleman 1996). As a result, those children who are more competent in understanding the feelings of others are often more academically competent in the primary grades (Izard et al. 2001; Dowsett and Huston 2005; Raver 2002).

### SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

Emotion and social skills affect children's ability to persist in goal-oriented activities, seek help when needed, and participate in and benefit from relationships. *Social-emotional development* includes a child's experience and management of emotions, as well as their ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others:

The core features of emotional development include the ability to identify and understand one's own feelings, to accurately read and comprehend emotional states in others, to manage strong emotions and their expression in a constructive manner, to regulate one's own behavior, to develop empathy for others, and to establish and maintain relationships. (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004)

Through learning to recognize, label, manage, and communicate about their emotions, as well as perceiving and trying to understand others' emotions, children build skills that connect them with family, peers, and teachers. These developing capacities help children negotiate increasingly complex social interactions, participate effectively in relationships and group activities, and reap the benefits of the social support that is crucial to healthy human development. Young children who exhibit healthy social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment are also more likely to do well academically in elementary school (Cohen et al. 2005; Zero to Three 2004). Therefore, implementation of an arts curriculum that promotes healthy social-emotional development may also boost academic achievement in the schools.

### THE ARTS AND SOCIAL EQUITY

For the aforementioned reasons, fostering social-emotional development in early education may be seen as an issue of equity. For all children to have an equal chance of success in elementary school, educators must have the tools to help all students develop social-emotional competencies, which some children may not have had an opportunity to acquire before entering kindergarten. The arts provide an arena for fostering these competencies. Given the opportunity, young children readily dance and recreate stories. After entering

school, children continue to derive important feelings of accomplishment and competence from the creation of artistic representations. At the same time, participating in visual and performing arts activities promote skills and dispositions that lead to social-emotional development.

The arts frequently involve group tasks. Activities such as dramatic play or dancing in unison provide a venue for developing collaboration and cooperation skills. Successful engagement in activities such as group singing, dancing, and dramatic play requires sharing, taking turns, and subordinating individual urges to the intentions of the group. While carrying out cooperative tasks, children learn initiative, leadership, and respect for others' ideas, as well as the reality that they cannot have their own way all of the time. Through such experiences, children learn how to get along with others and how to regulate themselves.

### RESEARCH ON THE ARTS AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The arts, especially creative dramatics in the early grades, have repeatedly been associated with improved social skills. *Critical Links—Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy 2002), a research compendium published by the Arts Education Partnership (AEP), reviewed sixty-two arts education studies and found important relationships between learning in the arts and cognitive capacities. Studies also found connections between arts experiences and underlying motivations for academic achievement and constructive social behavior. As the following section shows, integration of the arts into the curriculum allows lessons to simultaneously address both social-emotional and academic issues.

Research has shown that cognitive processes, such as decision making, are affected by emotion (Barrett et al. 2007). Emotion and cognition jointly contribute to attentional processes, decision making, and learning (Cacioppo and Berntson 1999) and work together to inform a child's impressions of situations and influence resultant behavior. Arts integration is a powerful tool for helping students engage in meaningful learning (Bresler 1995; Brewer 2002) and demonstrate a depth of understanding (Eisner 1998) in ways that directly connect and transfer to their lived experiences (Luftig 2000).

### USING THE ARTS TO CREATE HEALTHY SOCIAL SCRIPTS

Most of what children learn in schools is directed toward outward applications. Schools are judged by how effectively they convey information about the outside world to students. In contrast, artistic expression requires a person to turn his or her attention inward and become aware of responses that

are usually automatized, such as perceptions and feelings, the movement of muscles, shifts in mood, and emotional responses to external events. For many students, participating in the arts is the first time that they have focused on such responses in a concentrated way or consciously decided what they would or would not pay attention to over the course of a day.

Through choosing their focus instead of allowing their attention to be pulled toward the most compelling sensation of the moment, children learn that they do not need to respond emotional impulses unthinkingly. This kind of learning does not take place quickly, nor is it inevitable. By its very nature, such interior work requires choice on the student's part. For this reason, the experience of one child—or one classroom—cannot be generalized to other children or classrooms. Still, commonalities can be found and patterns can be identified from multiple experiences. This research project aimed to discover such patterns.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study investigated the impact of arts activities on the social scripts of children in Grades 1–4. I conducted interviews in which I asked teachers to describe the impact of arts integration on the emotional development and social interactions of their students. In this instance, *arts integration* refers to a creative, inquiry-based approach to education in which concepts are first learned in a workshop taught by a teaching artist and are then explored in other lessons during the week. An example of a lesson is the concept of *binary opposites*, which can be explored in dance through movements that are fast/slow, high/low, or sharp/smooth. In the science classroom, students can explore binary opposites as properties of the physical world, or they can focus on binary opposites that are parts of a greater whole, such as day/night or land/sea.

All of the twelve teachers interviewed had previously participated in an inner-city artist-in-residence program for at least one semester. Many teachers had little access to arts instruction prior to the weekly visits of teaching artists to their classrooms. Teachers who had previously lacked access to high-quality arts instruction were able to make thoughtful comparisons between the social scripts developed by children in their current classes and those developed by children in earlier years.

Each teacher participating in the artist-in-residence project received at least fifteen hour-long visits from a teaching artist. As part of the program contract, the teachers agreed to conduct follow-up activities during the remainder of the week. Through in-depth interviews, teachers shared their observations about the effect of artist visits on the social-emotional development and behavior patterns of their students. I used open-ended interview questions to encourage spontaneous observations. Interviews varied in length from

twenty to fifty minutes, depending upon the extent of teacher responses. One limitation of the study was that all respondents volunteered to participate, and it is therefore possible that only the more enthusiastic teachers agreed to be interviewed.

## RESPONSES

### Arts Integration and Classroom Culture

When asked about the nonacademic effects of arts integration, teachers tended to begin with observations about how the arts lessons had affected the classroom culture. Although the teaching artists visited for only one hour each week, many teachers had conducted follow-up activities during the remainder of the week that further integrated the arts into their teaching. This strategy allowed them to use arts-based techniques to encourage prosocial behavior. When asked about the nonacademic aspects of arts integration, the effectiveness of these techniques in fostering prosocial behavior came to teachers' minds most quickly.

Although the program included all four arts disciplines, the teachers whose students had participated in drama workshops spoke most eloquently about the impact of the arts lessons on students' interpersonal skills. The teaching artists who taught drama placed a strong emphasis on teamwork and insisted that the children act as respectful and responsive audience members when others presented their work. The teachers' comments included:

- The teaching artist has taught them: “We are very respectful of each other. We will work as a team.” So I think they are really close. They are a close-knit group.
- There's no violence with each other. That's pretty much the main thing . . . honoring each other and honoring the arts as well.
- They have developed a very close relationship, a camaraderie. We have that and I think that's very important.

After drama, the art discipline that teachers mentioned most often was dance. Many teacher comments focused on the strategy of envisioning a “personal bubble,” in which children were asked to stretch out their arms and imagine a bubble surrounding them exactly an arm's length away from their body. The teaching artists then challenged the students to move without allowing their personal bubble to touch that of any other child. Teachers easily built on the idea of respecting another child's personal space to explain the concept of personal boundaries that should not be crossed without an invitation. A second dance-based strategy valued by teachers is described below:

I told the teaching artist that my class was really rambunctious. So she played a game with them. At first, she had them be like animals, just wild running. After that, she said to pick

a really quiet animal, take all that energy and make it really quiet. That was how she showed the kids how to control their energy.

Many teachers' descriptions of what happened in the classrooms after the teaching artists' lessons resonated strongly with Efland's (2004) description of imaginative cognition. Teaching artists helped children create new images through the reorganization of previous experiences. In the preceding case, the imaginative exercise was able to achieve a balance between arousing and calming activities. Imaginative cognition enabled the children to construct meanings that allowed them to expend their excess energy in a healthy way, without becoming so overstimulated that planned learning activities had to be abandoned.

When teachers spoke of building a sense of classroom community, they mentioned music and visual art less frequently, perhaps because music and visual art have traditionally been taught in a highly structured, teacher-centered manner in elementary school. The teaching artists in this study tended to follow a similar pattern; their lessons did not emphasize student interaction. Nevertheless, a third-grade teacher whose students did a digital arts project in which they took disposable cameras home and wrote narratives about their pictures observed: "Students expose a bit of themselves through the photographs they have taken. They introduce their families to their friends in school. They get to know each other and the acceptance level is higher."

### Multimodal Learning of English Language Learners

The teachers interviewed for this study worked in inner-city schools with large numbers of students who spoke a language other than English at home. Many students experienced frustration when they were not able to find the right word to express an idea. The arts provided an outlet for self-expression that was less dependent on a student's English language vocabulary. As one teacher explained:

I have students who are very limited in English, and they are unable to express themselves via written language. They may not be able to express themselves orally. However, they can express themselves artistically, whether... through movement, through dramatization, or through visual art.

Teachers who mentioned communication skills in connection with music or visual art tended to dwell on the importance of offering English language learners (ELLs) the opportunity to express themselves at their true developmental level, instead of at the level of their written English. One fourth-grade teacher with many ELLs commented: "In the visual arts, [the students] have created things that I know, as a classroom teacher, I do not have the artistic ability to do. It's been wonderfully... uplifting for children. I think it has been terrific that way."

Teachers who worked with teaching artists in drama commented on the impact of the dramatic activities on classroom dialogue. As one second-grade teacher pointed out:

We [the teacher and the teaching artist] let the students analyze the situation, as far as teamwork. If, when we're setting up the set, people are bickering and fighting, then we take a time-out and ask: "Why are we having problems? Why is there so much bickering?" Then they step back and tell us. For example, one of the students said, "We didn't have a head crew member of each group." "Okay, pick your crew member." So even though we're giving them that time-out, they're actually figuring out what the problem is. We're stepping back and saying, "Let's see how they're problem solving, how they're developing it."

A different second-grade teacher, who worked with a dance teaching artist, mentioned an effective strategy that was used in the dance lessons to teach observation and critique. Barrett (1994) has characterized critique as a mode of argumentation and evidence-based persuasion. This activity works best when the instructor plays the role of an "elder" who facilitates the critique through a relationship with learners that is affirming, nurturing, reciprocal, and marked by shared responsibility (Barrett 2000). Learning how to offer constructive feedback is important outside, as well as within, the classroom. A ten-year national study of community-based youth organizations found that, in young people's eyes, some of the most robust features that distinguished the effective arts sites were directly linked to self- and peer assessments (Soep 2004). The teacher in this study observed:

After we had learned the dance, [the teaching artist] would have some kids dance it while other kids watched. They would learn to critique, not necessarily criticize, like, "Oh, you're doing it wrong!" She taught them how an artist would critique art. I liked that a lot, because it taught kids to critique, not in a mean way, but in a more sophisticated way. It was more like a positive critique. So the kids who were being critiqued felt, "I'm making changes to help myself, not because they are making fun of me." So it worked on both ends.

### Arts Integration and Social-Emotional Development

Of special interest for this study were the comments teachers made about the impact of arts activities on children's social-emotional development. For example, a first-grade teacher who had worked with a music teaching artist observed: "What was really amazing was that those kids who were very reserved and did not participate in other school things became totally involved. So it brought out a lot of very positive feeling."

Teachers who had worked with theater teaching artists made the most specific comments. The Appendix provides

examples of teacher observations from settings with theater teaching artists, with teacher reflections sorted by grade level.

Most drama activities were designed to explore narratives that had already been encountered in language arts or social studies texts. By incorporating creative drama into the curriculum, however, teachers felt that children experienced familiar material in a deeper way. Acting out a scene required increased exploration of the meaning of the words (e.g., in interpreting a character's motivation) and therefore led to better comprehension. Teachers especially valued the opportunities that the acting exercises provided to discuss emotions, bullying, friendship, and other sensitive topics that were difficult to address elsewhere in the curriculum without producing feelings of embarrassment or defensiveness in students. Acting allowed third and fourth graders to externalize and rework social scripts that they had absorbed unconsciously, weigh the comparative advantages of alternative reactions, and discuss which response might deliver the most advantageous outcome.

### Building a Shared Understanding

One fourth-grade teacher, commenting on the effect of creative dramatics workshops on her classroom culture, explained: "I think [students] are able to look and analyze and evaluate, not only from their standpoint but from that of others—to step into someone else's shoes and to look at things at different levels and in different ways." Asked to explain further, she noted: "When we talk about ethics, they are able to switch hats and play devil's advocate and switch back and forth with multiple perspectives. Before that, I had a really hard time drawing that information out of them. After [the teaching artist's] work with them, they are a lot more eager to do that."

This kind of teacher observation is congruent with research findings that show children developing a progressively more complex "theory of mind," by which they explain people's behavior with respect to internal mental states (Wellman 2002; Harris 2006). This enhanced social and emotional understanding enables children to better coordinate their own desires, needs, and interests with those of others as they develop a more advanced theory of mind. Such coordination facilitates, in turn, the ability of children to collaborate in group activities (Thompson 2006; Harris 2006).

Over time, children learn to maintain relationships of mutual cooperation. Gradually, they proceed from a primarily "external" view of classroom expectations and standards—cooperating because adults expect them to—to an "internalized" desire to perceive themselves as cooperative and helpful (Kochanska 2002; Thompson 2006). By developing a constellation of dispositions, children develop healthy social scripts and become more constructive group participants. The social-emotional development that children experience as a result of participating in high-quality arts programs in the classroom is therefore substantially greater than

can be explained by simply noting the specific social skills learned.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ARTS EDUCATION POLICY

The inner-city arts residencies described in this article took place in California, a state with an education policy that assigns the responsibility for elementary arts instruction to the classroom teacher. Elementary arts specialists are rare. Therefore, the choice to focus on teaching artist residencies as opposed to instruction delivered by certified arts teachers employed by a school district was a pragmatic decision. Given the current national, test-driven focus on literacy and math, most California teacher certification programs provide only cursory exposure to the visual and performing arts. As a result, relatively few elementary teachers are equipped to provide standards-based arts instruction to their students.

The dearth of arts instruction at the elementary level has also placed the survival and health of secondary arts education in jeopardy (Hope 2004). When students arrive in middle and high school with little arts experience or interest, secondary arts programs inevitably struggle. Since 2006, both the University of California and the California State University systems have required students to have one year of standards-based arts instruction for admission. This criterion has kept high school arts departments from withering, but vibrant arts programs include more than the repeated teaching of beginning-level courses. For this reason, teaching artists (often funded by grants) who nurture elementary students' interest in the arts make a key contribution to public arts education.

## THE ARTS AND SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CONCLUSIONS

The teachers in this study perceived drama and dance workshops to be of special value in helping children to better understand other people's responses, emotional expressions, and actions. Thompson has pointed out that over time, "social cognitive understanding contributes to social competence, interpersonal sensitivity, and an awareness of how the self relates to other individuals and groups in a complex social world" (2006, 26).

ELLs can derive additional benefits from the development of their social cognitive understanding. Both the understanding and the expression of emotion are influenced by culture. Cultural factors affect children's growing comprehension of the meaning of emotions, their developing knowledge of what situations lead to which emotional outcomes, and their knowledge of which emotions are appropriate to display in which situations (Thompson and Goodvin 2005). Through interacting with others in dramatizing stories, ELLs gain

both language skills and a comprehension of school-specific cultural roles. The arts also provide an expressive outlet for children whose English language skills might otherwise limit their classroom participation, bolstering their self-esteem and helping to integrate them into the school culture.

In this case study, however, teacher reports of enhanced social-emotional development were not equally distributed across all arts disciplines. The strongest results were associated with participation in creative dramatics and—to a lesser degree—dance. Teachers felt that evidence for the social-emotional impact of visual art and music lessons was less strong. This perception perhaps derived from the instructional style of the teaching artists in these disciplines. Thus, teachers' reflections may reveal more about current pedagogical practices than about the inherent character of specific arts disciplines.

Young children naturally engage in painting and drawing. Through encouraging dialogue around children's art, teachers may nurture deeper levels of perception about the feelings and perspectives of others. However, arts experiences do not inevitably enhance social-emotional development. As Bransford and Schwartz (1999) point out, some music, drama, and athletic teachers are able to help students learn about themselves, even as the students struggle to perform in subject-specific arenas, but not all teachers choose (or are able) to take advantage of opportunities to stimulate "mediated reflections." Some teachers focus solely on performance. For policymakers, a question arises: Should a focus on the social-emotional development of students be an expectation for all arts teachers?

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Efland observes that "education should have as its ultimate purpose the maximization of the cognitive potential of individuals" (2004, 770). Individual development is extremely important if young artists are to use their skills in the arts to actively discover insight, knowledge and understanding of their own life experiences. Even so, it is reasonable to ask: How much responsibility for the social-emotional development of students can we reasonably require arts teachers (or teaching artists) to assume, given the large number of students that most arts teachers see in a week (not to mention their heavy exhibition/performance schedules)?

The evidence presented in this article may point the discussion in a different direction. In these interviews, classroom teachers reveal their students' responses to arts-based activities. However, the teachers themselves conducted much of the arts integration by building on the concepts and skills presented by the teaching artists. Changes in classroom culture depended on teachers following up—and sustaining the learning—during the rest of the week. Only when teachers began to routinely use such concepts as the "body bubble" to

help children understand the importance of respecting personal space did the students begin to internalize these strategies and revise their own social scripts.

On closer examination, the key factor leading to the students' social-emotional development was the professional development opportunity that the arts workshops provided for teachers. Although the teaching artist was undeniably important as a catalyst, the classroom teacher played the pivotal role. What does this mean in terms of arts education policy? A brief glance at the history of arts education in California may be helpful. Several decades ago, the ability to play the piano was a requirement for becoming an elementary teacher in California. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the pendulum had swung in the opposite direction, and a single-minded focus on literacy and math skills had become the hallmark of good teaching. The arts have virtually been ignored.

Tragically, the arts have been absent from the schools for so long that many teachers have little awareness of the enlivening, humanizing influence that an active arts program can exert on school and classroom culture. A decade into the twenty-first century, an increasing recognition exists that a test-driven focus on literacy and math has not resulted in the anticipated academic benefits. Student achievement has improved only marginally, while skills that are basic to the maintenance of a healthy democracy have received little attention. As Goldberg notes:

The arts and physical education . . . teach students much more than disciplinary content. They teach lessons that enable students to look at their world with a more complex lens by building critical thinking skills . . . and they engage students in learning how to play well together, to be team players, to be responsible, and to take risks. (2008)

Arts advocates would be well-advised to broaden their agendas. Equipping all teacher candidates at the elementary level with arts-based techniques for supporting the social-emotional development of children not only would benefit students, but would also create a broader base of support for the arts. Every teacher may not master the technical skills of each arts discipline, but all teachers should be able to use arts-based strategies to foster their students' social-emotional development. Why leave the teaching of democratic values to high school civics classes? All areas of the curriculum—especially the arts and physical education—should be vehicles for teaching democratic principles to children of all ages.

## NOTES

1. *Social scripts* are defined here as interactions such as joke-telling, sharing life stories, and general conversations.



2. The many books by celebrated kindergarten teacher Vivian Gussin Paley vividly describe such spontaneous role playing.

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## APPENDIX

## Teacher Comments about the Impact of Drama Lessons on Social-Emotional Development, by Grade

Grade	Comments
1	I believe that performing in a culminating performance has given the kids a lot of self-confidence and ability to get up in front of groups and be proud.
2	You just see the personality come out. We had one student, she was so quiet. Now it's "Mrs. A., da-da-da." I'm thinking: "You have a voice!" The teaching artist unlocked a lot by interviewing them and then developing their own poems to recite. They figured out, "Well, this is how I feel." I think it has a lot to do with getting out the feelings. The students have become a lot more introspective. They are able to deal with their own emotions a lot better and to sort out what they are feeling.
3	I believe it's had a great effect, because a lot of students do not know how to use their imagination. When they are asked to develop another character that is not a third grader, you see the little lights come. They say. . . "Well, my costume should be like this," or "I think they walked like this. . ."
4	Improvisation has opened up my students' ability to discuss and not feel like they are being judged for having the wrong answer or having their own opinion. They are less inhibited and it's just formed a good foundation. When we did improvisation, they had to take on their own emotions, then transfer them to another character. They were asked, "What are you feeling? Well, show me." "What do you think this guy is feeling? Well, show me." Their emotions became a part of it, and that tied in with perception: "How do you perceive him as feeling?" They are able to judge. . . not judge, but just understand the emotions of others and their thinking. . . It has made them much more able and competent in recognizing different things and a lot less judgmental.

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