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## **The Art of Reading**

### ***A look at student motivation, self-esteem, and self-perception when the Arts are integrated with Reading Curriculum***

#### **Research Question:**

What happens to student motivation, self-esteem and self-perception when visual art and dramatic arts are integrated with reading curriculum?

#### **Sub Questions:**

- How do students connect literature to their personal experiences when the arts are integrated into reading?
- How does arts integration affect classroom behavior?
- How do students manifest their self-esteem through participation in integrated art activities and literature study?
- What do student insights reveal about their own self-perception through integrated art activities and literature study?
- What happens to reading standardized test scores when art is integrated into reading curriculum?
- What are the surprises for the teacher?

#### **Rationale**

In my school where 94% of the students are Hispanic, attaining the stringent reading comprehension requirements mandated by No Child Left behind is a pressing issue. Many children struggle with the English language and I am constantly searching for the most effective way to reach our limited English-speaking students. Additionally, those not labeled as limited English speakers are at a similar disadvantage since English is not the primary language most children in my school are exposed to in their homes and environment.

Approaching the question of how to teach reading effectively required that I confront who I am. I entered teaching from a professional arts background. After three years in the teaching field, I had to ask myself, “Why am I doing this?” To be true to myself as a professional teacher, I had to acknowledge my background as an artist’s daughter and my 18-plus years as a professional actor. Perhaps these were valuable and worthwhile tools that might hold the key to success in my classroom. How might I use my previous experience to my advantage?

Although most students are taught to comprehend text, it is difficult to fully understand anything written without making a personal connection, reflecting on an image associated with the words, or imagining what the scene or characters might look or act like. We have become a predominantly visual society. Outside of school, children are exposed to computers, video games, movies, television, and other visual images on a

daily basis. To ignore this influence on cognitive development would presume that children develop and learn in a vacuum.

The NCLB mandate has put many teachers and administrators in the precarious position of having to make difficult choices about curriculum. Many times, the “more is more” approach is used to increase deficiencies in math and reading. Many schools have expanded reading blocks from one to two hours in hopes of an increase in standardized test scores. I believe that “more” instruction devoted to a discipline does not necessarily mean that mastery will occur. “More” instruction in reading will not make a child, who may require an alternative process, to achieve success in reading. However, couple standard instruction with meaningful engagement in the arts and perhaps that child, who is otherwise unreachable by traditional means, might make vital connections to literature.

Alternative ways to reach the reluctant or struggling readers may lie in the very disciplines that have taken a backseat to the two-subject approach to learning super-imposed by the restrictive NCLB requirements. The arts may be the avenue to reach these children, particularly the ones who culturally are not immersed in English in their daily lives.

The primary casualty of NCLB is the arts. Arts programs, staff and resources have been shoved aside in favor of enhancing test performance in these lower-performing areas. When considering that most under-performing schools are in urban, ethnic neighborhoods, it is tragic to think of the generation of children who are being excluded from participating in the arts. Art is a chronicle of our culture, our race, our heritage and our society. Who will chronicle the essence of these underserved, underprivileged people if we systematically deprive them of the enduring voice engendered in the arts?

I wish to investigate what happens when the arts are integrated into reading. Rather than the “more is more” approach, I wish to explore the essential skills required for success in reading from the perspective of the arts, namely visual art and dramatic acting.

### **School Context**

My school is located in an isolated, low-income industrial area of Chicago. This urban neighborhood has always served as a traditional haven for hopeful immigrant families, although the countries of origin have commuted over the years. The current population is 95% Hispanic, with a 94% poverty rate. Each grade level at my school accommodates the constant influx of new immigrant families with a full bilingual class. Although not essential, it is extremely helpful for teachers to be fluent in Spanish, as most of the parents are not native English speakers. Teachers here describe their students as “sweet” and “darling.” Even the most difficult behavior challenges present little disturbance in the peaceful classroom environment.

The main building is one of the oldest in the city of Chicago, last annexed in 1911 to accommodate overcrowding. It houses 795, which makes us approximately 150% overcrowded with our 1320 students. Overflow is housed in a series of temporary mobile units and rented space in two Catholic schools. Our 5<sup>th</sup> grade’s temporary arrangement has lodged us in the upper floor of a still-operational high school in five rented rooms.

The administration in our school is extremely supportive and allows for considerable latitude in instructional design. Best practices and adhering to the standards are encouraged as well as professional development and sharing. Admittedly, our

teaching conditions at the high school are not optimal, but concerns are addressed with authentic interest and prompt action from our leadership.

Classrooms at the fifth grade high school extension are small and designed for about 20 stationary high school desks. Each room now houses at least 30 desks and the abundant accoutrements necessary for elementary curriculum. It's a tight fit. I constantly remind my students the importance of "loving each other" because from September until June is a long time to be packed in with people you choose to dislike.

Shelving and storage units line the walls with Learning Centers placed at various positions throughout the room. Most materials are mobile, since there is little room for the students to park at a "station and explore an activity. There is a cozy interactive reading corner with pillows, party lights, a reading graffiti board and hundreds of reading reflections taped to the wall. Student work is hung from ropes strung across the room and also clipped to long strings hanging on the window shades. One visitor once informed me that my room looks like a learning "menagerie." I like that comparison, and it is an apt description of my visual-learning bias.

The students in 302 are active, chatty and eager to please. They love exciting new learning opportunities, but lack the maturity and experience at times to contain their enthusiasm. Many of the concepts such as Centers, cooperative group learning and self-directed independent activities are newer to the school and therefore require effort on their part to adjust. Most have, and the classroom is transitioning nicely into a "student-centered" environment.

## **Literature Review**

When examining the role of the arts in education, it's important to consider the broader context of the process of learning. Historically, education theory has supported the idea that individuals acquire, digest and demonstrate knowledge through varying means. The "one size fits all" mentality that pervades the No Child Left Behind era presents a disturbing construct for curriculum. As a classroom teacher, I am confronted with the dilemma of teaching one way for achievement on high stakes tests, or engaging the diverse learners in my class with a curriculum with depth and meaning. Including a non-tested area – the arts- in meaningful classroom learning experiences may be the answer to success with children that are not reached by traditional curriculum.

A widely accepted theory that accounts for the many variables in human development is Howard Gardner's "multiple intelligence" theory. (Gardner, 2006). Gardner's research decries homogeneous educational programs that appeal only to surface knowledge of facts rather than a multi-leveled understanding of subject matter. He proposes an educational environment that fosters the growth and development of individuals' multiple intelligences, which Gardner asserts cannot function in isolation. These intelligences include Linguistic, Logical-mathematical, Musical, Bodily-kinesthetic, Interpersonal and Intrapersonal, Spatial and Naturalist. Individuals embody either "laser" or "searchlight" intelligence profiles (p. 36). The former indicates a sharp spike in an individual's profile that indicates strength in one or two intelligences and the latter suggests equivalent strengths in three or more spheres. Traditional education isolates two of these modes of learning in the majority of standard instruction and high-stakes testing – Linguistic and Logical-mathematical in the subjects of reading and math. Although Gardner's ideals classroom is an environment sated with learning opportunities

that appeal to all of each child's intelligences or strengths, the reality of the NCLB era classroom dictates a sweeping focus on only two arenas of learning despite each individual's tendencies.

Elliot Eisner asserted that art is critical in cultivating a full experience of a person's world. In *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, Eisner promotes the idea of using art education to foster academic performance and claims that integrated arts enhance the student's educational experience (Eisner, 2002). He cites evidence of increased SAT, ACT and other standardized test scores in schools that integrate arts into their curriculum.

If the arts do indeed appeal to various modes of learning, then is it possible for that learning to transfer to other disciplines? In a book published by the National Research Council, editors Bransford, Brown and Cocking compiled an extensive look at the dynamics of learning (National Research Council, 2000). *How People Learn* establishes that the goal of learning is that knowledge will have the ability to "transfer" to other learning situations, not just remain isolated in its original context. The "transfer" of learning refers to the ability of acquired skill or knowledge learned in one discipline to be effectively applied to another. In his essay *Arts and the Transfer of Learning*, James Catterall also builds a case for how arts education "unequivocally impact future learning experiences." (Catterall, 2002, p. 152). Catterall contends that the arts provide unique neurological patterning in the brain that create an invaluable adaptability in the individual when it comes to proficiency in "core" subjects such as reading and math.

Why are the arts important to mainstream education? In his Executive Summary in the compendium *Champions of Change, The Impact of the Arts on Learning*, Edward Fiske addresses the overall picture of the impact of the arts on education (Fiske, 1999). Fiske notes the compelling evidence of the benefits of a learning environment that is blended with exemplary academics and high quality arts instruction. The culmination of this research compendium was a consensus when it came to their overall findings.

Among there are:

- The arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts reach students in ways that they are not otherwise being reached.
- The arts connect students to themselves and each other.
- The arts transform the environment for learning.
- The arts provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people.

-The arts provide new challenges for those students already considered successful.

One longitudinal study of note in the *Champions* compendium followed the Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) over a six-year period between 1992 and 1998 (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999). The study involved 52 comparisons between 26 CAPE partnership schools and 26 control schools without partnerships but similar demographics. In the core subject of reading, the result over the four-year period was an increase of nearly 20% in reading scores in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in the CAPE programs, compared to less than one-half of that in the control schools. Similar increases were exhibited in math as well. It is interesting to note that in none of the comparisons did the non-CAPE schools out-perform the CAPE schools.

Although the arts have been the subject of research with respect to their connections to curriculum, there is a dearth of research connecting the specific genre of visual art instruction with reading. The most telling indication is from a study in 2000,

when Burger and Winner set out to compile an analysis of studies that examined the effects of visual arts instruction on reading skills (Burger & Winner, 2000). Of the over 4,000 individual recorded studies that were originally scrutinized, only 10 were chosen for their validity, reliability and consistency of data.

My concerns lie with the young children in my charge. With education still operating under the looming NCLB umbrella, what is to happen to those students who haven't traditionally responded well to standard reading instruction without the arts? Also, what opportunities are these children missing without having consistent exposure to, and practice in, the arts? I wish to probe this further, and turn an introspective eye on what happens when the arts become an integral part of my reading instruction.

## **Data collection**

### **Tools:**

I collected data from three primary sources: student surveys, student works samples, and teacher observation notes. A fourth source, standardized test data, emerged as a tool that provided some quantitative information on class progress. For student work samples, misspellings and punctuation mistakes were preserved in all work to maintain the sincerity of the student voices. Pseudonyms and identifying initials were assigned to student participants to ensure privacy.

### **•Student surveys**

The students completed two identical surveys asking them to self-assess their reading abilities in comprehension and fluency. Open-ended responses were solicited regarding their likes and dislikes and strengths and weaknesses in reading. The surveys were administered at the beginning of the unit and again at the end. 28 surveys were administered at the beginning and 29 at the end.

### **•Student work samples**

A variety of student work was collected. Student groups completed two mini "plays" that were written and performed for the class. The first "play" was created at the beginning of the unit, while the second was performed at the end. Students also completed an art project with a visiting artist that included a 3-dimensional object connected to the story with an accompanying illustration and letter from a character's perspective.

### **•Teacher observation and reflections**

Throughout this unit, I logged journals about student response and observations including the effectiveness of various methods used in this study. Additionally, dilemmas regarding subject material and subsequent student reactions to that material were noted.

### **•Standardized test data**

Although I did not anticipate that standardized test data would be a mode of measurement, I decided to add the data as an opportunity for an additional perspective on the progress of my students.

## **An Unexpected Journey**

### ***Summary of unit novel***

The unit revolved around a novel “Searching for David’s Heart”, a story about a 12 year-old girl, Darcy, whose brother is tragically killed when hit by a car. The girl believes that her brother’s death is her fault, since she harbored a deep resentment and jealousy over her brother’s relationship with his new girlfriend. After a fit of anger at her own birthday party, David chases after her and is hit by a car. His organs are subsequently donated and Darcy and her best friend Sam run away from home and embark on a journey to find the recipient of David’s transplanted heart.

### ***The story of Talia***

While planning this unit, I felt strongly that the emotional story of “Searching for David’s Heart” would provide an ample opportunity for personal connections and student interpretation and discussion. The topic of an untimely death, the disintegration of a family through grief, the courage of a young girl and her desperate determination to connect to her lost brother all appeared to present exceptional opportunities for integrated learning.

A week before we began our study, I arrived at work one Monday about 45 minutes early to find Talia waiting in the cold. She had been standing outside the school’s locked door since 7:00. Wondering why my favorite classroom helper had arrived so early, I asked how her weekend went and if she was all right. As it happened, Talia’s grandmother, who had stepped in as “mother” when Talia’s mother died from drugs and alcohol and Talia’s father left and went to prison, died on the previous Friday. Talia was left with two brothers, a grandfather and a step-grandmother. We said very little. When the other students arrived she asked to go see our school clerk, the “mother hen” of our satellite location, and sat under her desk in the school office for the remainder of the day.

Talia arrived early every day after, eventually emerging from her safe haven under the clerk’s desk and rejoining the class. She asked that I keep her heartbreak in confidence, which I honored. During that time I was conflicted about my choice in literature. Was it truly fair to this little girl to bring up something so tragic and so recent? Would it be rubbing salt in a wound as we studied the journey of grief and anguish through the book’s characters? Was it too soon for this little girl and should I change course and choose something less emotional and lighter fare? Would it make a public spectacle out of this unfortunate event and create an uncomfortable environment for Talia? I truly doubted my original instinct, but something was still steering me back to my initial choice.

After much deliberation, I trusted my gut and stayed with “David’s Heart”. It turned out to be the portal to an unexpected journey for Talia and me. The story, characters and emotions implicit in “David” appeared to offer a construct for grief that Talia craved. Through the course of the novel and our integrated art activities, Talia connected with the grieving sister in the story and found ways to connect her personal journey with each activity.

Throughout this unit, I took notice of Talia’s journey and her profound connections to this unit. Although she is only one student, her response to the activities presented a surprising turn of events worthy of note.

***What discipline problem?***

I did not set out to examine behavior as part of my study. However, as our class became immersed in the project, I started to notice that the personality of my room began to shift. One primary indicator that stood out was the absence of my traditional behavior “distractions”, particularly during the drama and visual art activities.

Alfonse and Juan had been considered chronic behavior issues and presented challenges that at times compromised the quality of instruction for themselves and other students. Their records indicate excessive detentions and suspensions and low grades. My experience with them mirrored their records, and reading time seemed to provide a forum for unacceptable behavior, particularly in less structured activities.

I was concerned that these behavior issues might present an unwelcome environment for our integrated unit. Because of the sensitive nature of this novel, I was concerned that the material might not be handled respectfully, and expression and discussion might be squelched my unruly behavior and inappropriate comments. It became apparent that these students were uniquely connected to the theatrical and artistic portions of our literature study and Alfonse and Juan’s reactions were quite unexpected.

**Presentation**

I have chosen to present my findings in a way that allows me to incorporate the journeys of Talia, Alfonse and Juan as well as reflect on my class’ response to this unit and their progress. I so doing, each data source will be offered independently, followed by a discussion of that data and the specific responses of my case-study students. Teacher observation journals will be incorporated throughout.

**Data**

**A. Student surveys**

Student were asked to rate their own perception of the reading ability in various categories: skill, comprehension, fluency, word recognition, personal connections to literature and the ability to imagine text in pictures (visualization). Responses from the student reading survey responses are indicated by number of responses in three categories: agree, neutral, disagree.

Survey 1			Survey 2		
Q1: I like to read					
Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
18	9	1	19	9	1

Q2: I am a good reader					
Agree 12	Neutral 12	Disagree 4	Agree 13	Neutral 13	Disagree 3
Q3: When I read, I usually recognize all of the words.					
Agree 12	Neutral 12	Disagree 4	Agree 15	Neutral 11	Disagree 3
Q4: When I read, I can remember the details of the story.					
Agree 14	Neutral 10	Disagree 4	Agree 13	Neutral 14	Disagree 2
Q5: I like to write.					
Agree 17	Neutral 10	Disagree 1	Agree 16	Neutral 11	Disagree 2
Q6: When I read, I am able to see the characters and events in my mind.					
Agree 16	Neutral 10	Disagree 2	Agree 25	Neutral 3	Disagree 1
Q7: After I read, I find it easy to talk about what I have just read.					
Agree 15	Neutral 11	Disagree 2	Agree 18	Neutral 9	Disagree 2
Q8: In stories, I usually connect to characters or situations because they are just like me.					
Agree 15	Neutral 9	Disagree 4	Agree 13	Neutral 10	Disagree 6

## Open-ended Survey question results

Question #	Survey 1	Survey 2
<p>Question 9: What do you like most about reading?</p>	<p>9 students responded that plot was the element they most enjoyed when reading            7 students responded that character development was important to their enjoyment while reading            4 students responded that acquiring knowledge contributed to their enjoyment of reading            4 students responded that fluency and reading proficiency gave them satisfaction            1 student liked being read to rather than reading himself            1 student expressed a desire to only read happy books            1 student said that writing made his reading experience more enjoyable            1 student said that talking about reading was what she liked most</p>	<p>7 students stated that they liked making connections to and visualizing characters            7 students said that getting involved in the plot was what they enjoyed the most            5 students said that reading quality literature was what they most enjoyed            3 students said that they enjoyed creating pictures to go along with a story            2 students said they liked becoming more fluent in reading            2 students stated that learning was what they liked most            1 student noted they become more relaxed when they read            1 student said she enjoyed extended novel activities            1 student said he likes having the teacher read to the class</p>
<p>Question 10: What do you feel are your strengths I reading?</p>	<p>7 students felt as though their strength was fluency and reading speed            4 students felt as though their greatest strength was visualizing story elements            3 students stated that their reading strengths were story recall and memory            2 students felt as though vocabulary was their strength            2 students felt as though their strengths lie in comprehension            2 students felt their strength was making connections to literature            1 student felt as though her strength was that she got excited about reading            4 students felt they had no strengths            2 students did not appear to understand the question</p>	<p>9 students noted fluency as a perceived strength            6 students felt that vocabulary recognition was a strength            6 students said that story comprehension and recall were strengths            3 students noted greater character understanding as a strength            2 students felt as though their progress/improvement was a strength            1 student felt that her ability to choose good literature was a strength            2 students stated they did not feel as though they had strengths in reading</p>



<p>Question 13: What do you like about writing?</p>	<p>9 students liked the fact that they could express themselves through writing  8 students expressed that they liked the mechanics of writing in either cursive or specific writing structure such as essays  7 students liked the elements of fiction writing  1 student said that he enjoyed his improvement in writing  1 student expressed that he liked being assessed in writing  1 student said he didn't like anything about writing  1 student did not appear to understand the question</p>	<p>10 students said that they liked being able to express themselves in their writing  8 students enjoyed making connections to characters and storied through their writing  7 students liked meeting the challenge of answering a prompt  3 students said they enjoyed the mechanics of writing  1 student said he liked writing paragraphs only</p>
<p>Question 14: What do you dislike most about writing?</p>	<p>11 students responded they disliked mechanics of writing such as cursive, essays  6 students did not dislike anything about writing  5 students thought the physical act of writing was too challenging  3 students were frustrated at their level of skill in spelling  2 students stated they didn't like writing at all</p>	<p>12 students stated they disliked required format writing taught for standardized testing (extended response)  5 students disliked their inability get started when writing  4 students disliked their inability to write well mechanically (cursive)  3 students disliked writing 5 paragraph essays  4 students stated they disliked nothing about writing  1 student did not appear to understand the question</p>
<p>Question 15: If you could change one thing about reading class, what would that be?</p>	<p>13 students said they would like to have more independent choice in reading and more self-directed reading  4 students had ideas about specific literature in the curriculum  3 students said they would prefer less writing  3 students suggested that it be more fun but no specifics were given  2 students said he would prefer to read books with less challenging vocabulary  1 student said he wished he could make poor readers better  2 students did not appear to understand the question</p>	<p>9 students requested a longer reading period  8 students suggested more extended activities  7 students asked for more art and/or drama in class  3 students said they would change nothing about reading  2 students did not appear to understand the question</p>

## **Discussion:**

What is noticeable in this data are the slight shifts in responses between the pre- and post-survey. Students appeared to be relatively unchanged in their attitudes regarding their own reading when asked to respond on a Likert scale. Comparatively small changes (1 to 3 points) both in agreement and disagreement occurred with the students' perception of their own ability to comprehend text, read fluently, recognize words and make, personal connections to literature. One shift in particular was the only stand-out. Although the Likert responses remained fairly constant between administration of the first and second surveys, there was a noticeable change in the response to question 6: "When I read, I am able to see the characters and events in my mind." On the first survey, 16 students responded that they agreed with that statement, where 10 were neutral and 2 disagreed. At the end of the unit, 25 students agreed, 3 were neutral and only 1 disagreed. This shift also indicated a change from 10 students expressing a neutral opinion of that statement in the original survey, to 3 students in the second survey.

Teacher observation notes from the week of January 12, near the beginning of the study, noted that students were, as a rule, primarily responding to character and plot questions with markedly concrete answers. It was not surprising, then, that the first survey indicated that slightly less than half of the students felt as though they could visualize characters and events. Observation notes from February 23<sup>rd</sup>, the week that the artist visited our classroom, indicated that students were engaged and enthused about the visual art activity. Notes indicated that students had been focused and the connections they made with the story were implicit and personal (see "Student Work")

In the open-ended portion of the surveys, some notable trends appeared. In question 10, "What do you feel are your strengths in reading?" student responses noted fluency in both the first and second survey. However, in the first survey, 5 students said that recall and memory were strengths, but that number increased to 9 in the second survey. Additionally, the number of students stating they had no reading strengths decreased from 4 to 2 in the first and second surveys. The same trend occurred with question 12, "What are your weaknesses in reading?" In the first survey, 1 student stated he did not have any weaknesses, while in the second survey, 6 students asserted the same about their abilities. Since this question required the students to construct their own responses to answer, it was remarkable that 6 students were able to conceive identical responses to the open ended question. This presented an indication that perhaps there was a sense of confidence that was sincere and original in these students that emerged sometime during their experience in this unit.

One interesting comment on the surveys came from Alfonse, who had presented chronic discipline issues throughout all subjects, particularly reading. In the first survey, when asked what he would change about reading, he answered that he wished to make "bad readers good so they could read better." While we attempt to remain attuned to our students, their abilities and their progress, it was a comment that made me stop and wonder if I were really doing such a good job since his assertion came as a complete

surprise to me. Although I profess to know each of my students, it shed some light on the possibility for me that perhaps his “behavior” issues were rooted less in his need to disrupt and more in his need to remain in control or comfortable. His response on the same question on the second survey, after the unit was complete, was that he would change “nothing” about reading class.

## **B. Student work samples**

### **Student “mini plays” – Performance 1**

#### *Description of activity*

After literature circle discussions, the groups were allowed to choose two characters to write a dialogue for, to be performed in front of the class. Since this was their first endeavor into theatrical writing, the students were instructed to write 10 lines of dialogue and choose two members to perform the piece.

Five of the six groups chose to write a dialogue between Darcy and her brother David, after he had passed away. One group chose to write a dialogue between Darcy and her best friend, Sam, who accompanied her on her trip to find David’s heart.

Of the five groups that chose to write about David and Darcy, all of them wrote about forgiveness. The group that wrote about Darcy and her friend, Sam, also wrote about forgiveness.

#### Script Excerpt – Darcy and Sam

##### **Magenta Group script excerpt**

**Darcy:** *Sam, I am so glad you took me here!*

**Sam:** *It’s not problem Dee Dee. Are you still mad at me?*

**Darcy:** *No, I’m not. Bur can you please forgive me?*

#### Script Excerpts- David and Darcy

##### **Emerald Group script excerpt:**

**Darcy:** *I am sorry I screamed at you and threw the necklies at you.*

**David:** *I understand. I should of told you the truth. Instead of lieing to you.*

##### **Crimson Group script excerpt:**

**Darcy:** *David, was it my falt you died?*

**David:** *Don’t worry it’s nobody’s falt. It was my falt for not looking.*

##### **Amber Group script excerpt:**

**Darcy:** *I am sorry I acted like a jeark because you wear going out with Jayne and I felt left out ever since you started going out wit her.*

**David:** *I forgive you and I am sorr too for leaving you out of my life. I was to much in love with Jayne.*

**Darcy:** *I forgive you and I should have had expted Jayne in the first place instead of breaking you guys up. I miss you a lot.*

**Indigo Group script excerpt:**

**Darcy:** *How can you be here David?*

**David:** *I thing[think] its my falt.*

**Violet Group script excerpt:**

**Darcy:** *I am so glad I-I could talk to you.*

**David:** *Its not your flaut I died.*

**Darcy:** *It is my flaut I ran off.*

**David:** *Its not your flaut its mine I did not look both ways.*

**Darcy:** *Lets just top fighting. D-David your fading away.*

**David:** *I have one last thing to say I'm sorry! For bringing Jayne over.*

**Student “mini-plays” - Performance 2**

A similar assignment was given in the latter part of the unit. Students were to choose a mystery object blindly from a bag and to conceive a scene that utilized the idea of that object of the object itself. All objects were connected in some way to the novel's plot or characters. They were to include all the members of the group somehow in performing a scene from the novel. The scene could be a reenactment of an actual event in the story, or an event or situation they created, but they must use the characters in the book in their scene.

The sentiment of these scenes was lighter and more sardonic than the previous assignment. Of the six story lines, two of them were scenarios in which David lived and didn't die after all. One had David returning from the dead to “hang out” with his sister and friends. One group's scene was a depiction of ancillary characters from an out-of-town carnival resituated in Darcy and David's hometown. One scene did not articulate the fate of the characters, but portrayed a much more understanding Darcy and a communicative David settling their differences over the new girlfriend. The implication was that all was well, and the fateful argument was not imminent. The final enactment had sinister undertones, with the fatal car crash being the concoction of a conniving girlfriend and cab driver.

**Magenta Group script excerpt:**

**(Darcy and David settle their differences before the incident so he does not die)**

**David:** *Why are you so mean to Jane?*

**Darce:** *You mean the J-word?*

**Narrator:** *Darcy felt her whole body quivering.*

**(Later in the scene)**

**David:** *Darce, I am sorry for yelling at you about Jane. I know you feel uncomfortable with her.*

**Darcy:** *I know that you like her so I will give her a chance.*

**Narrator:** *Then they hug and kept being friends.*

**Emerald Group script excerpt:**

**(David does not die)**

**Narrator:** *Darcy gets mad and runs. Daid runs after her but she runs too fast for Daid to catch on so theres a car and the car does not see Daivid and he get hit but does not die. Darcy was so sad then she relized that she should let her brother love who he wants to and she expests [accepts] the neckless.*

**Crimson Group script excerpt:**

**(David returns from the dead twice to speak to his friends, family, and Winston)**

**Narrator:** *One day Darcy, Same Winston were on the beach and found a sea shell.*

**Darcy:** *What a beautiful sea shell.*

**Winston:** *What should we do with this sea shell?*

**Narrator:** *Darcy, Same, Winston were hearing the shell and suddenly heard David's voice.*

**(The voice of David apologizes for not spending time with Darcy. Later in the student scene, the character of David visits the other characters while they are playing games)**

**David:** *I'm back.*

**Darcy:** *David is that you?*

**David:** *Your dum. I am a spirit. It was nice to see you guys but I got to hit the sky!*

**Amber Group script excerpt:**

**(Girlfriend Jane hires a hit man to kill David with a car. All characters live but Jane goes to jail)**

**Jane (off to the side):** *Here's the money.*

**Car Driver:** *\* Grabs money\* Ok. I'll run him over*

**Indigo Group script excerpt:**

**(Fate of the characters not clear, but forgiveness was evident)**

**Darcy:** *I wish I could be a better sister.*

**David:** *It's ok. I wish I could be a better brother.*

**Violet Group script excerpt:**

**(Characters progress, students insert themselves into the scene)**

**Darcy:** *Hey Winston, want to come to the carvial with us.*

**Winston:** *Yah, I'll come. I will be their in a week.*

**Darcy:** *Why a week?*

**Winston:** *Because I'm in Calafornia vistin my grandparents.*

*(change of scene to the carnival – now located in Wisconsin)*

**Charlene [from the carnival scene]:** *Hey twerp! Long time no see!*

**Darcy:** *Where's stinky Eddy?*

**Charlene:** *There is no Eddy here. Its now Amanda [class member] the Great!*

## Discussion:

During the first mini-play activity, it became evident that the students were taking to this new form of character study and student participation. It was noted in my teacher observation journal for the week of January 12<sup>th</sup> that although the noise in the room was considerably louder than usual, most of the students appeared on task. All deadlines were met and each group was eager to perform.

Both sets of plays yielded some interesting results. In the original portrayals, the characters remained true to their form and interacted similar to their counterparts in the novel. The five groups that chose to bring David back from the dead did so in a way to resolve a yet unresolved issue in the story – that of Darcy’s guilt over being responsible for David’s death. What was interesting as an observer was the apparent need (4/5 of the students in the room) to rectify Darcy’s guilt. To me this demonstrated not only an ability to carry the storyline beyond its original context, but also to remove characters from the storyline setting, and apply their traits and sentiment to student-constructed plot lines.

The second set of plays took this idea much further. There was a higher level of student input in constructing the story extensions and groups explored story

### *Talia’s Connections*

In Talia’s group, she took the reigns and decided on the character choice for their scene – David and his sister. Her group followed suit and enthusiastically participated yet I noticed that Talia assigned herself the role of director and scribe as well as lead actress.

Although theme was not the intent of the assignment, Talia’s group, as were 4 others, was focused on “forgiveness.” In her group presentation, “Emerald”, Darcy offers an apology to David, “*I am sorry I screamed at you and threw the necklies at you,*” and David offers his consolation from beyond the grave, “*I understand. I should of told you the truth. Instead of lying to you.*”

In the teacher journal for January 12<sup>th</sup>, I noted that the day after these presentations, Talia came to school with a present for me. It was an essay that she had written on her own and she wanted to share it. Here it is in its entirety, with original grammar, spelling and punctuation in tact:

*My gramma Nena*

*Hey! DiD you know my gramma? Well she was great person to me and everyone around her. even people she did not know cool right?*

*One, the things she loved to do is 1. she loved her garden expecilly taking care of it. 2. she loved me and my 2 brothers. 3. she loved being our gramma.*

*Two. The wonderful things she did for me. 1. Is she took wonderful care of me. 2. She loved me with all her heart. 3. She was kind sweet. And all the most just “NenNa!”*

*Three. The things she was proud of me for is me going to school and how I'm doing good and I'm trying.*

*Finnily, my grandma loved me and that's all I need to keep in my heart forever.*

Talia was anxious to share her writing with me and even gave it to me as a “gift” and suggested I keep it. I was encouraged by this demonstration, because Talia had been noticeably silent and withdrawn since the death of her grandmother, and her enthusiasm for this project and her self-motivated sincere response were heartening. At this time, I felt as though perhaps a moment of clarity or inspiration from some other source (she was also in counseling) might be responsible for Talia’s motivation. I was hopeful that this might be the start of Talia “opening up” and processing some of her difficult year. I was struck again after the second drama activity.

When the second wave of plays came further into the unit, Talia was once again a driving force in her group. As was noted in my teacher journal for the week ending March 2, Talia assumed the leadership roles in her group once again and the theme for their presentation. The narrator says, “*Darcy gets mad and runs.... Daivid ... get hit but does not die. Darcy was so sad then she relized that she should let her brother love who he wants to and she expests [accepts] the neckless.*”

The next day, Talia had once again been inspired to write. She offered me her “present” that she had penned the previous night. It is as follows:

*The story of my life*

*Hi. I am [Talia] I am 11 years old in age. I love playing all kinds of things.*

*First, I am living with 2 brothers and a grandpa and a xgrammma. I am Not so happy that I used to be. I mean imagin.*

*Next, imagin having no mom and no dad and no gram that seemed like your mom. I have imaged. But what I imagined came true. And I mean live true.*

*Then, I not happy because my mom passed away from drugs and my dad got in jail. My “super” grandma passed away from a strok but I love my life still because of my family and teacher Mrs. Burns.*

*Finnily I love my family and every one in it.*

Although Talia’s connections are not explicit, something in these two activities sparked a connection in her that prompted her to face the elements that were transforming her life. What was evident the second time around was that perhaps this was not a coincidence and that somehow engaging in dramatic play utilizing these characters had allowed her to turn an introspective eye on her own life and connect in a truly meaningful way.

### *The Behavior Issue*

In both activities, the two most prevalent behavior issues in my class had noticeably shifted. In the first session of dramatic play writing, rehearsing and performing both Alfonse and Juan were engaged and focused. This was a perceptible change from both students' standard classroom comportment. It was noted in my observation notes from the week ending January 12<sup>th</sup>, that both Alfonse and Juan exhibited "an unusual level of heightened participation and meaningful contribution to group work."

During the second round of dramatic plays, both students were once again involved and centered during the process. Alfonse took a leadership role in his group and worked on developing a "back story" for one of the central characters of the novel. Juan was equally focused in his group work and visibly enjoyed what he was doing. In the final presentations scripts were allowed in performance. Alfonse and Juan were the only two students in the class to fully memorize their lines.

### **Character Postcards – Visual art project**

A visiting artist worked with me to develop an art lesson that would emphasize character development and plot as well as provide an opportunity for a unique artistic outlet for the students. We collaborated on developing a list of easily attainable objects that would trigger recognition of significant scenes in the story. These objects could be hand held and easily wrapped and placed in bag. The students then were to blindly choose an object, open it, and work with their group to determine the meaning of the object they chose.

*Examples of some of the objects are:*

<u>Object</u>	<u>Story significance</u> <u>(as determined by teacher and artist)</u>
toy football	-David was a star football player
feather	-Darcy found a bird on a sidewalk and tried to save its life when she was little
sea shell	-Darcy and Sam stayed on the beach
red balloon	-carnival balloons
daisy	-Darcy and David rode in a truck on their journey with a donkey named "Daisy"

Once the students had determined the significance of the object, their challenge was to work it into a postcard depicting a scene from the book and then write a postcard from a character to another character in the novel

Many of the students identified the objects immediately, while others were perplexed. The visiting artist noted that a few students linked the object to an obtuse reference that we had not originally identified. This was surprising and offered insight to a deeper understanding of the connection and the plot than either the artist or me could contrive.

The two following student samples demonstrate the variety of final products this project yielded.



Maria randomly chose a miniature football as her object. The original intent by the artist and me was to solicit a connection with the main character, David, as a star football player. Maria picked up on the imagery of the football as it was used later in the book when Darcy threw it to win a carnival prize during her journey. She wrote as Sam to Darcy:

*Dear Darcy,*  
*That throw was magnificent and then you made [it] and got the bunny. I wish I got to throw the football well. that throw was great. were [did] you learn to throw that great it was probly David sorry I asked. so great throw.*  
*Love,*  
*Sam*  
*p.s. those 3 kids that laughed were evil!*



Carlos chose a seashell as his object. He depicted a scene from the story in which Darcy and her friend Sam go to the beach while in Florida looking for David's heart. His letter is written from Sam to his father, a peripheral character in the novel. His scenario describes a scene that never occurred in the novel.

*Dear dad,*  
*I left a note somewhere at home. I am in florida to help darcy find david's heart. I will come home but darcy might not. Please tell darcy's parents to come hear so darcy could get over what happen.*  
*Sam*

## **Discussion:**

Although not all student work exhibited the depth of connection or understanding that these two students demonstrated in their projects, the class was engaged and productive. The class also illustrated a comprehension of the tokens they selected and their significance. It was noted in my teacher journal during the week of February 23<sup>rd</sup> that the sense of excitement in the room was palpable as the students anticipated opening their concealed objects.

What is apparent in the works shown above is that the two students exhibited an ability to assign meaning to the objects in a way that had not been anticipated by either the artist or me. In Maria's postcard, the football had been offered as an obvious connection to the main character's star quarterback status. This we felt was clear. Maria connected an obscure scene from the book in which Darcy used a football in a carnival during her travels and demonstrated her skill by winning a stuffed animal. She also shows sensitivity to Darcy's difficulty in dealing with her brother's death by apologizing for a reference she made to David's football talent.

Carlos identified the seashell as it had been intended. However, in his letter, he writes as Sam, Darcy's travel companion, asking for assistance in getting Darcy home. He also indicates an erroneous note to his parents, not originally in the plot line. Carlos shows a deep sensitivity to the character's dilemma by suggesting that the parents' arrival may help Darcy "get over what happened."

What is interesting about Carlos, is that he recently (two years) lost his own father to cancer. His sensitivity and understanding shows through in his writing and his ability to connect with Darcy. Carlos is also a chronic "non-worker." Although not conclusive, it was encouraging that he pursued this project with focus and effort and enthusiastically turned in a completed post card.

## ***Talia's Response***

Talia had been engaged and enthusiastic throughout this unit, so her attentiveness did not surprise me. By the time we arrived at this part of the unit, Talia was invested in the novel, the characters, and her connection to Darcy's journey.

Talia chose once again to reach back to David as a character after he passes away. Although this had been a theme in the original dramatic plays, most students chose not to tap these characters for this project and focused on the living characters in the novel. Talia did not. Her postcard is from David to his sister. In it, David asks Darcy to forgive him.



Talia chose hearts as her object. These were thematic throughout the book in the form of the actual heart David donated after his demise to the heart necklace David gave to both Darcy and his girlfriend, which prompted the fight ending in fatal accident. Talia fashioned them into a necklace on a teddy bear (as in the book). Her letter was from the deceased brother:

*Dear Darce,  
I am sorry Darce. I did not know you would get mad. I just wanted you to have a great present and wanted you to have a great birthday. Sorry.  
Love,  
David*

As had happened after previous arts activities, Talia arrived in the next day with her own version of the post card project. I noted in my journal for that week that she brought with her several of her grandmother's earrings that she wrapped carefully in blue tissue paper as well as a post card made from the supplies she had at home. She used the "heart" theme from her in-class project.



The front of the post card shows Talia and her grandmother exchanging a heart. Underneath the caption reads, “*my gramma hugs me because she loves me. She has a heart of gold.*”

On the reverse side, she writes a letter, as herself, to her grandmother:

*Dear nena,  
I just still want you to know I ♥ u! because you're my life and I  
will always keep you alive!*

Talia chose to address her grandmother, as David did Darcy, in her post card. Each endeavor illustrated a connection between someone who had passed away, and a loved one who remained alive. She also utilized the same tools implemented in the classroom, namely tactile, connected objects and a thematic post card written between characters.

Talia's response touched me. Although it is difficult to ascertain an explicit connection, her consistent replies through personal application with each of the unit's activities appear more than coincidence. Her reactions demonstrated that the arts were perhaps helping to fill a void in this young girl and assisting her in the process of grief and acceptance during this tragic chapter in her life. Talia's final response was the most indicative of a solid personal connection with the actual classroom activity.

### ***Behavior Issues?***

The most striking comment throughout this unit came when the visiting artist came to my class to implement this lesson. I had dutifully tried to inform her of possible issues of discipline and forewarned her that I may need to escort a few (namely Alfonse and Juan) of my students from the room in order to maintain a productive environment. The lesson went off without a hitch and there had been no need to address some of the chronic behavior problems that normally arose in my room. As the artist was leaving, she asked me quizzically, “were those ‘problem children’ absent today?” Although I hadn't noticed, there had not been one incident of disruptive behavior from either Alfonse or Juan and yes, they were present for the entire period.

The behavior of Alfonse and Juan were an interesting aspect of this study. Their consistency of involvement throughout the artistic portions of the unit, and the conspicuous shift in behavior were too blatant to ignore. The visiting artist's observation was encouraging and likewise illuminating.

### **C. Standardized Test Data**

I have a personal issue with standardized testing. It is not my traditional mode of measurement for successful teaching. It is, in my opinion, primarily a mode of measurement for successful test taking, which is an entirely different issue from

meaningful learning. I would hope that my classroom would be a place in which students would explore, discover and delve deeper. By making learning “meaningful”, I desire to provide ample opportunities for personal investment and an application of acquired knowledge that makes sense to my students and makes them want more. I tell my kids “Learning is fun. If it’s not, I don’t want to do it,” and I try to carry that credo into everything we do. Sometimes even with a modicum of success.

Standardized tests are not fun. They do not even present the information in the variety of ways that my students have become accustomed to being assessed, since we are trained appeal to the “multiple intelligences” of each student and to assess them keeping this in mind. Although it is a convenient buzz phrase, true “multiple intelligence” standardized testing would be difficult to implement because the notion is in itself a contradiction.

Reluctantly, I try to prepare my students for these tests. I attempt to make it fun, but the instruction is noticeably different and the students know it.

Yet standardized testing, or some kind of quantifiable data, seems to be the predominant measure that brings credibility to “soft” or qualitative data. If I had exclusively endeavored to implement art lessons and then test my students to see the quantifiable effect, I would have missed the rich experiences afforded me through teacher observations and student interaction with the material and activities.

I had ascertained that the abundant tools at my disposal were sufficient to develop a complete picture of the dynamic of integrated art and reading. I felt I did not need to examine standardized test scores because I felt that personal progress and self-perception were entirely more useful to me as a tool for measuring success. That said, when I was presented with the progress of my students through their standardized test scores in the spring, it became apparent that progress had been made, at least by a standardized measure. For that reason, I am including this as part of my data.

#### Learning First Overall Class Average Score

Fall	Winter	Spring
49.4%	49.9%	73.4%

In the fall, the students in my room tested at a baseline of 49.4% total correct on the Learning First standardized measure used in our district. There was an increase of 0.5% indicated on the winter test, which aligned with the beginning of our novel unit. The final test in the spring yielded an average class score of 73.4%, which demonstrated an increase of 23% overall for the class.

Since Talia and Alfonse and Juan have received an abundance of this study’s focus, I would be remiss if I were to leave out their testing data. Both Alfonse and Juan showed a marked improvement in their scores. Alfonse began the year with a 28.1% baseline. His final score increased 12.5% to 40.6% on his Spring assessment. Juan’s scores increased 31.2% from a baseline of 46.9% in the Fall to 78.1% in the Spring. On Talia’s Fall

assessment, she scored a 43.8%, which increased to 87.5% on the Spring test – an increase of 35.7%.

### **Discussion:**

It would only be fair to admit that the increase in scores is at best interesting. I cannot say that it is connected to this unit since my students were also taught testing skills in order to prepare them for this assessment and material from this unit did not appear on the test. These scores may indicate that my students, after seven standardized tests, perhaps became better test takers. During the course of the year, I also implemented a self-choice reading workshop that may have been a contributing factor.

Increases in scores for students like Alfonse and Juan bode well for schools that typically are faced with the challenges of trying to boost standardized test data in order to comply with NCLB. When coupled with Alfonse's response to the second survey's open-ended question, "What would you change about reading class" – his response being "nothing" – Alfonse's confidence appears to be reflected in this data. Talia, although not typically low by my school's population standards, still demonstrated an ability to perform better on a high-stakes assessment through her gains.

To be fair, my class experienced an increase in their math scores as well, a subject not directly tied to this unit, so perhaps the increase could simply be a class-wide trend across those two subjects. I must admit that I have not experienced this large of an increase in reading scores in my previous years of teaching.

These scores do indicate something very conspicuous, however. For ten weeks, my reading class time was divided between reading and art. At any given time, anyone could have entered my room and seen my children drawing, painting, acting, rehearsing, performing and yes, reading. What is apparent is that despite taking designated "reading" time to devote to the arts, the data indicates that learning did indeed occur at some time and according to the Learning First scores, that learning was sufficient and then some.

### **Summary of Findings**

When undertaking this integrated unit, my class and I embarked on a journey. In attempting to answer my question, we took some unexpected excursions, which were not only delightful and profound, but also insightful for me as a teacher.

The student surveys indicated that in some areas, students' perception of themselves as readers did not change significantly in pre-designated areas. The shift in responses in the question addressing the students' ability to visualize characters and events was the most marked change. Additionally, when asked to construct their own response describing their weaknesses, the number of students indicating they had no weaknesses in reading increased from 1 to 6 in the final survey. Another key indicator in this survey was a response from a child with a history of behavior issues. He indicated a desire to have better reading skills as a way to improve reading class. The student mini-plays

demonstrated a variety of levels of understanding and extensions of the characters and story. A theme of “forgiveness” arose from the various groups in the first round of plays as well as the pairing of a live character and one that had passed away. The second round of plays exhibited an even bolder “poetic license” with characters and plot, and the students took liberties with developing sub-plots as well as creating scenarios in which the main character did not die. The level of student engagement was considerable in both projects and the students with chronic behavior concerns demonstrated an intensity of focus and involvement not observed before. The visual art portion of the unit yielded some surprising connections, and revealed more extensive student insights into the story line and characters. The standardized test data indicated that the class had a significant rise in reading test scores.

The story of Talia unfolded throughout this study. Her investment in this unit led to an entirely new strand of investigation for me. Talia’s consistent connections to the drama and visual art activities and her correlation between her life experience and that of the characters in the story were unexpected yet remarkable. Her narratives of her tragic life and her communication with her deceased grandmother presented a picture of a profound connection to the text as well as a courageous little girl who desperately needed to process her unfortunate life. There is ample evidence that the arts activities in this unit, combined with the material in the novel, offered her the chance to do just that.

## **Conclusion**

So, what does happen to student motivation, self-esteem and self-perception when visual art and dramatic arts are integrated with reading curriculum? There are clear indications that the arts are a vehicle through which students that who normally are not touched by traditional curriculum are reached. In my study, the two salient issues that arose were students with behavior issues and a student in the process of grief. Motivation factors were extremely high with both of these conditions, but also were apparent class-wide. This motivation also appeared to be transferable between arts activities and designated “reading” time.

There are also indications from the two surveys that students’ self-perception as proficient readers increases with integrated arts as well as their ability to imagine, or visualize, story elements. Self-esteem was also demonstrated through involvement in class activities, assuming leadership roles in arts projects, and student indicators on surveys that displayed confidence in each student’s own reading ability.

Behavior became a salient theme, particularly through observations of Alfonse and Juan. In addition to being a surprise aspect to this investigation, both students indicated a marked change in their behavior, initially through the arts projects that eventually transferred to their behavior in more traditional classroom activities.

Reading standardized test scores in my class rose significantly, although these scores may not be directly related to the activities in the study. What these scores do indicate is the inarguable fact that a departure from standard reading curriculum and focusing on the arts

for a significant portion of classroom reading time did, in no way, detract from student achievement on standardized tests. Whether or not these tests indicate that the students learned to read or learned to take tests well is up for debate. However, in an NCLB climate where test scores are the primary measure of success, a strong argument for the validity of arts instruction can be made from the indications from this data.

The strongest connection to this unit emerged from Talia. Her data supports Fiske's notions of connections to literature and reaching students not otherwise reached. While school counseling was in place for Talia, she had made little progress in processing her losses. Talia's connections presented compelling evidence for the power of the arts and their ability to tap certain sensitivities in the human psyche.

### **Policy Recommendations**

- Provide professional development for administrators and teachers and policy makers educating them in the merits of utilizing integrated arts activities during regular instruction time. *More* reading time is not necessarily the best practice when trying to reach all students.
- Make the state arts standards as readily available to teachers as reading and math standards to reinforce their importance.
- Hold districts accountable for ensuring these standards are being addressed.
- Include regular classroom instructors in all dialogues regarding national and local policy changes and national and local initiatives that affect our teaching practices and thus our students.
- Provide funding for arts coordinators in all public schools using the "Literacy Specialist" model. Each school should have an "Arts Specialist" that collaborates with teachers in helping to develop curriculum that reaches all students.

### **Final Thoughts**

I taught an after school arts program this year to students from various classrooms. When I received the final verification paperwork, there was an indicator on the form that classified the class as either "instructional" or "recreational." "Recreational" was indicated. It was, by no fault of the person completing the paperwork, a misnomer. It is a popular conception of the arts, but it made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. Why was my reaction so strong? I ran through the reasons and it came down to this: the arts have become an afterthought in the development of our children, namely those in underserved, low-income urban communities. They are no longer a valid form of learning or expression. They are a luxury only to be allowed once the "real work" is done.

As quoted in my literature review, Fiske's final assertion derived from the compendium *Champions of Change, The Impact of the Arts on Learning* is "The arts provide learning opportunities for the adults in the lives of young people." I am that adult. My admitted bias certainly lies in the arts. However, the transformation of my classroom and the

unexpected journeys of three of my students provided abundant support for the arts as a valid tool in the classroom rather than a “recreational” activity. We all learned and we all emerged with a new knowledge and understanding of ourselves and our abilities.

So where does this leave us? What next? I can’t help but think of the thousands, perhaps millions, of children in our classrooms across the nation who present the same challenges as Alfonse and Juan but because their school dollars are spent on test prep or special intensive reading programs, are never afforded the opportunity to learn or express themselves through the arts. I think of Talia, who immersed herself in the richness of these arts experience in order to seek closure in the tragedies of her life. Working in an urban environment, I am well aware that there are a multitude of Talias out there whose families do not have the resources to assist their children in the healing process through difficult times. I am not an “art as therapy” advocate, yet these three children were clearly reached and transformed through the integrated study of the arts and literature.

And finally we face the question of “culture.” I shudder to think of the statement we are making as a society when the funding we are providing for the arts in our underserved communities is sparse at best. What are we saying to our urban children about their culture and their legacy? Are only our more affluent children in traditionally higher-performing school districts deserving of an artistic chronicle?

Time will tell what price we paid for the watered down curriculum in this generation of NCLB children. A continued effort to preserve the dignity of these cultures and children is a paramount concern. If no child is to be left behind, then they need to be regarded as more than a number, or test score. They need to be celebrated and respected for being.....children.

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