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### Elementary Theater Programs and Benefits to Child Well-Being and Academic Success

Maria Droz-Kreutinger  
*Buffalo State College*

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## Elementary Theater Programs and Benefits to Child Well-Being and Academic Success

Maria Droz-Kreutinger

Buffalo State College

### Author Note

This paper was prepared for EDU 690, taught by Dr. Hibajene Shandomo

This study was supported in part by the SUNY Buffalo State Institute for Community Health Promotion Collaborative Research Initiative.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Program Description.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Literature Review.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Data Analysis.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Methods.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Results.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Appendices.....</b>	<b>52</b>
<i>Appendix A: Survey Part 1 .....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Appendix B: Survey Part 2 .....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Appendix C: Survey Coded for data.....</i>	<i>55</i>

### **Abstract**

In recent years, studies have shown that a number of students have experienced a positive effect in student development inside and outside of the classroom when they participate in a musical theater club. This study determined the degree to which musical theater clubs impacted student confidence and social skills. It was important for this literature review to determine the different methods and strategies, teachers, students and administrators used in order to create a positive outcome for student development, social skills and building confidence. It was discovered that there was not many studies that showed using creative drama as a treatment for students with behavioral issues and had a positive impact on their behavior.

The lack of research prompted the further inquiry to study information about how theater affects student behavior. This study also includes students from many diverse backgrounds and how they benefited from taking musical theater club. The research in this study was focused on the impact musical theater had on students in grades 4 and 5 at a public school in Amherst, New York.

### **Elementary Theater Programs and Benefits to Child Well-being Academic Success**

There is a Chinese Proverb that says, “Tell me, I’ll forget. Show me, I’ll remember. Involve me, I’ll understand.” I find that this proverb is a parallel to teaching drama at the elementary school level. As a professional actress for 13 years, I found a passion for theater, due to the fact that as a student, I was mediocre. I was shy and had low confidence. However, when I was introduced to the school play, I was immediately hooked and began to ignite a spark inside to have a need to perform.

In addition to performance, I later decided to pursue a masters in Elementary Education at Buffalo State College. During this time, I began working at an elementary school and began to inquire about the school’s after school activities. I remembered every year how important the school play was. I learned that the school was starting a musical theater club. This was a perfect opportunity to be able to mix my passion for theater and a new love to pursue a teaching career. According to Dutton (2001), “The arts are no longer simply a form of entertainment. They go beyond a role into a world of healing, teaching and building. Youth are drawn to the arts because it is in their nature to want to ‘play’” (p.56). I began to inquire more by researching the effects theater has on students, as it has had such a positive impact on my life and became a gateway to so many possibilities for my own future.

Research shows that involvement in theater has produced many positive outcomes on student social behavior. However, there is not enough research on how theater affects student behavior problems. According to Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan (2003),

Only a relatively small number of studies have evaluated the effects of creative drama on self- concept and social skills. No studies were located with creative drama as the treatment and problem behavior as a dependent variable. The small number of experimental studies in these areas indicates a need for well-designed and documented studies on the effects of creative drama on self-concept, social skills and problem behavior. (p.134)

In order to inquire more on this study to determine the benefits of child well-being, I decided to assist in musical theater club, and donate some of my experience and skills to the faculty, staff and assisted the students, while also observing student behavior from rehearsal process to the final performance. Through the rehearsal process I found many different patterns between the students. Some instances were very positive; others were negative. However, this particular experience outweighed any negative behaviors. Students who were once shy started to come out of their shell. I also noticed that a group bond grew and the show became a community. On opening night, I was overwhelmed with the way the show turned out, and it was magical in every way. That spark I saw in each child, was there lighting up the stage. I couldn't have felt more proud of them.

After the final performance, a survey was distributed to the parents of 80 students in musical theater club at an elementary school in Amherst, New York. The students were in grades 4 and 5. The parents were surveyed one week after musical theater club ended. They were asked questions on how musical theater impacted their child. During their time in musical theater club, the students performed a 40 minute show called, *Disney's Aladdin JR*. During the rehearsal process, I came once a week to observe student behavior, which included social interactions,

levels of confidence and even their listening, reading and behavioral skills in working together as a team to put on the end result of the performance.

Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan's (2003) work concluded that the instructor who implemented creative drama activities reported that very shy children became more relaxed and overcame inhibitions to participate. In contrast, more outgoing students became aware of the need to work cooperatively. As a mentor to these students I felt a deep connection to them, and shared that same love of theater which brought me back to the fond memories. These are memories which made me enjoy it in the first place. I had hoped that my own passion for the stage evoked something in the students. Even if I made an impact on one student's life for their own future, whether it is confidence, social skills or developing a talent they never knew they had before, I will be pleased with the positivity that formed a community of young student actors. This research focuses on the study conducted to determine the impact musical theater has on 4th and 5th grade students' behaviors, the benefits of musical theater on student academic performance, and the degree to which musical theater impacts student confidence and social skills.

### **Musical Theater Club Program Description**

In the winter of 2017, an elementary school located in Amherst, New York created a musical theater club. The musical theater club was designed as an after-school activity for 80 4th and 5th graders that would take place twice a week from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Students began rehearsals at the beginning of January and put on performances at the end of March. The show was called, *Disney's Aladdin JR*. During the rehearsal process, I came once a week to observe student behavior, assist with students and assist in the production process backstage with the students. After the performances were complete, I sent 80 surveys out to the parents of the students who participated in musical theater club.

During musical theater club, students met together with a music director, choreographer and acting coach /director to put together and perform a musical called, *Disney's Aladdin JR*. The musical itself was performed at the end of March with two school time matinee shows at 9:15 am performed for the students and teachers of the elementary school, and a nighttime performance at 7:00 pm free of charge for parents and guardians. This performance was also open to the public for viewing.

The project was approved by the school last year in 2016. A generous donation was made by a grandparent of a student in the school in order for the program to get started.. The first year that musical theater club made its appearance, the school put on the performance of the musical, *Disney's 101 Dalmations*.

The staff involved in the musical theater club consisted of a 4th grade teacher who worked in the school and also served as the director. She did not have any theatrical background,



but was, nevertheless, heavily involved in school activities. The other staff involved was a 5th grade teacher who was a cheerleader before teaching and served as the program choreographer. The music teacher of grades K-5th in the elementary school was appointed the music director and program coordinator of parent/teacher volunteers. These volunteers worked on the set, lighting, and costume needs. The program had a teaching assistant to help corral students and work with students individually on lines, choreography and exercises. This helped prepare the students for the performance.

I had the pleasure of assisting on Wednesdays from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm. I would assist with individual rehearsals of student actors, went over lines and musical numbers (assisted with singing and dancing), stayed backstage during the nighttime performance, and helped with makeup application. During this time, I nurtured students and applied my knowledge and experience as a trained professional actress and director to foster their love for theater and their excitement and ability to perform.

All students in grades 4 and 5 were invited to participate in this program. About fifty-six (70%) of the 80 students were female and forty (30%) were male. All students, without any discrimination were invited to join the club. The students participating also had the option of taking an “alternate after school bus” home in order to accommodate parents and guardians who were unable to find their own rides home. This was especially helpful for students who were not able to receive a ride home and accommodated parents that had to work. This also made it accessible for all students to have an equal and fair opportunity to attend musical theater club.

The students began rehearsals in the beginning of January 2017, immediately after the school’s winter recess. Prior to winter recess, if the students were interested in attending the club,

they had to get parent permission, stating they could commit to the club and were able to either receive a ride home from rehearsal or take a bus home or to an additional after-school program. If the students had their permission slips signed by their parents or guardians, the students were then eligible to audition for lead roles in the musical theater club's production, *Disney's Aladdin JR*. The leading roles had more lines than just participating in the club. This would require more additional work time to study the lines in the play and work closely with the club's director, music director and choreographer. If the student felt comfortable doing this, auditions for the leading roles took place before school. Even though all students were able to attend the club, without auditioning, the directors wanted to see the students that wanted to try out for leading roles to read aloud to see if they were eligible to audition for a lead role.

On the second day of musical theater club, students who were selected by the director, music director and choreographer auditioned in groups of 3 for the director. During that time, the directors had the students sing a few bars of music and perform a 30 second dance routine taught to them by the choreographer. After the second set of auditions, the director, choreographer and music director met and decided the leading roles of the production and assigned them to students.

The students who did not receive leading roles were assigned other important roles. These additional roles were essential parts of the production. Some students had speaking roles, others had solo lines to sing, and there were also featured dancers and acrobats to show off those specific talents. Each student had a very important part in the show which was essential to the club's general morality and the quality of the production. In order for the students to develop interest in musical theater club, the job of the staff was to make sure that each student had a pleasurable experience, and the outcome of the performance to be a success.

The musical theater club met in the auditorium of the school, where students would begin the rehearsal process sitting in the auditorium seats. During the rehearsal process, students walked down from their normal class schedules, put their backpacks underneath the auditorium chairs and began by signing in with the staff members. They would then receive a greeting from the director, music director or choreographer. They went over the schedule for the club, passed out any papers to go home to parents or guardians and then would begin with a vocal warm up. The musical director played the piano and had the students warm up by singing a song from the show. After the warm up, the students worked on singing songs from the show, or were placed into groups to work on other elements of the show.

A typical rehearsal in groups consisted of a group of students working on dance numbers, the leading actors working on scenes, and groups of students working on individual or group numbers. Time was short, and for an hour and a half the groups spent their time very wisely and worked diligently to create the end product, the performance.

At the time of the performance(s), parents, guardians, teachers and school staff members banded together and volunteered to assist with moving sets, backdrops, helped with costuming the students, applying makeup and assisted students who were waiting backstage during the performance. Without the help from these individuals, it would have been extremely difficult for the students to succeed.

With the addition of hard work from students, dedication and commitment from staff and many hours from numerous volunteers in the school, the two month rehearsal process and dedication from musical theater club became quite a success. In my opinion the response from students', teachers and their families was extremely positive. As a researcher and volunteer

assistant, watching the students come to musical theater club, bursting with excitement and their ability to learn how to work together as a team, from my observations was essential to the students' personal success in putting the show, *Disney's Aladdin Jr.* together.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theater Positively Affects Student Behavior**

Theater positively affects student behavior through many different mediums. Teamwork, building student focus, developing characters, increasing confidence are just to name a few of the ways theater can positively affect student behavior. Bungay & Vella-Burrows (2013) concluded the positive impact the arts had on building confidence:

The most commonly reported outcome in all the studies reviewed was that of increased confidence. It is also noteworthy that increased self-esteem, sense of achievement, empowerment, social skills, and positive behavioral changes are consistently reported outcomes throughout the review. (p.51)

Another important factor of how theater affects student behavior is the notion of adolescent identity. Hughes & Wilson (2004) stated "Adolescence is a time when issues of identity and autonomy become acute and in the current climate young people have fewer structures to support them in managing the transition to independence" (p.67). Hughes & Wilson (2004) stated that a number of responses were improved confidence, performance skills, ability to be one's self, ability to express selves and increased happiness.

According to Nigh (2013), during the study involving student theatrical participation, "students experienced numerous benefits from the exercises, for example, calmness, focus, an active imagination, an awareness of different modes of consciousness (thought, imagination,

feeling) and a vivid understanding of mind-body inquiry” (p. 641). These exercises are essential to the growth of the student. Theater impacts not only student performing on stages and different arenas, but also their daily lives and growth. Nigh (2013) described deepening awareness through the students’ imagination and taught them to learn how to become sensitive to others’ feelings and have a deepening understanding of each other. Learning how to channel certain emotions through meditation, transformation and the use of the mind and body are very important in the development of awareness in theater performance and self-growth. This can also be used as an example of building positive dramatic student discipline. Classrooms that have hyperactive students or are antisocial can best be described by Wagner (1983):

If a class is hyperactive and a bit antisocial, then you're going to have to put them in a situation where they have to work together and cooperate and listen to orders. Thus if they choose to do a drama about pirates, you don't begin with the segment of a raid of another ship at sea, because you know all you'll get is a lot of fighting and punching. Instead you start by having the crew work together to prepare for the voyage, battening down the cargo and storing the provisions. Then they all have to work together to get the sails up. These activities use their hyperactivity but begin to modify their antisocial behavior. (p.57)

According to Nigh (2013), an example of a result from this study came from one student named Isabelle. In working on this project, she felt that due to the competitive nature in her school, she was so glad she was able to work in a program that made her open up to new ideas and stay present in the moment when performing. She also concluded that being more aware of her surroundings on stage and having faith that her performance would thrive alleviated any

feeling of the competitive nature that surrounded her at school. The students also benefited from meditation to keep themselves grounded during performance exercises. The students were focused on creating positive energy together as a group. Nigh (2013) stated, "Without feeling the care of his/her classmates, the student actor is unable to take the risks necessary for creative exploration" (p. 658). This concluded that the more the student has support from those around them; their ability to thrive is greater. Nigh (2013) dug deeper into the conclusions that actors have to dive into their consciousness and will be able to become more truthful and aware of their surroundings and the people around them:

A powerful actor learns to access complex aspects of their consciousness. To evoke these different areas of consciousness, an acting student will learn to be well situated within his or her body. They will learn to speak truthfully with a voice that resonates from that body. A student actor also requires opportunities to experiment with the more subtle regions of their imagination. To become a convincing character a student actor will also learn to access their emotions. Ultimately they will need to foster the capacity to feel, to be viscerally and energetically present to the moment- resonantly alive to what is happening in the here and now. (p. 643)

Theater can also positively impact different ways of education, not only theater but other topics that can be difficult to understand and teach, such as sexual and mental health, and obesity. Bunday & Vella-Burrows (2013) stated that there are positive impacts the dramatic arts had on the wellbeing of students focusing on educating on sexual health, obesity, and mental health. Bungay & Vella-Burrows (2013) found the importance of students' new perspective non-traditional topics. For example, they determined the use of theater on teaching sexual health.

Overall, it was found that drama is a particularly effective health education intervention because events are used from everyday life and the visual format demonstrates examples of how to deal with difficult situations; it also allows discussions to be depersonalized while dealing with issues from a teenager's point of view. The strength of such activities is that done properly, they are culturally appropriate and have the ability to engage and interest young people.

In addition to health, students that live in high risk areas can also benefit positively from participation in theater. According to Hughes & Wilson (2004), researchers found that students that youth theater have an added advantage. It is an important protective factor for students that grow up in high risk areas and who live in social exclusion. The impact of youth theater was so positive because theater provides an environment and activities which support young people in making transitions to adulthood and involves a method and setting particularly relevant to young people's needs in the current social and economic climate. Hughes & Wilson (2004), concluded the importance of youth theatre through many different positive group work outcomes. They stated:

Young people empathize the importance of acceptance, tolerance, equality and teamwork in the process of making and performing theatre. Many young people describe youth theatre as somewhere where they feel known, accepted and supported; a means of establishing positive identity and relationships with peers and adults outside of their day-to-day lives. (p.64)

The arts are common method for creating a positive environment for youths. Dutton (2001) stated that drama is a natural method for children to make sense of and to explore the world around them. Using group work is one way for youths to join together to form a small

community and feel a belongingness and sense of comradery in putting a production together. In a study by Dutton (2001), a production was put together. The results were extremely positive. Students rehearsed the play, and they really worked together helping one another with difficult words and prompting for entrances. Individual members also felt safe enough in the group to ask questions about the play and what they should do at certain times.

Flemings, Merrell and Tymms' (2004) study had a transformation and a control group of students. The study found that the groups were then compared to find out if there was a difference in academic achievement. The transformation group and the control group both had the same academic assessment. However, results concluded that the pupils in the transformation group had significantly more positive attitudes and self-concept than the pupils in the control group.

Students also positively benefited from theater and academic achievement was heightened. According to Collins (1999), after using this program the reading levels soared. The study had a tremendous positive impact on the students who participated in theater. According to Collins (1999), it was determined that the group members in the theater class who had difficulty sharing their name on the first day of group could now retell and re-read comic books that they had written to other group member. The results were remarkable because the idea of creating an interesting hook for students to find ways to learn positively impacted the way students learned and kept their new interests, and helped them to enjoy an after school activity called, *Stories, Games, and Writing*.

*Stories, Games, and Writing* were formed to focus on reading and writing as an additional attempt to help children with schoolwork. This group was similar to the theater group that I



worked with that consisted of 20-25 children, divided by age and sex, and met every other week. As the year moved forward, the group turned into a fun activity for group members. In fact, group members, who initially disapproved of the group, began to request to join the group. The group's activities, initially viewed as "boring," became exciting and meaningful for the children, just as the theater club became of interest to the students at the Amherst elementary school theater club.

In addition to student achievement, teachers of theater also benefit from creating positive theater-related relationships with students. Pitfield (2012) found that, central to the transformation process is the student-teacher relationship with drama regardless of the differences in the way they conceptualize subject content at this stand in their development. No matter how the student-teachers felt about drama and what parts of drama were most important to them, it did not make a difference in the positive results that came from working with students. It was more important for the study, to put teaching styles and importance aside and be able to be more of a facilitator to the students. Pitfield (2012) noted "Facilitation of that debate by mentors is important in developing the student-teachers philosophical and practical understandings of the learning process in drama" (p.440).

In another study, six students spent 12 years at a community arts center drama class in Ontario, Canada. The students shared their experiences and feelings throughout the program to reveal the positive effects drama had on the youth's development and how theater affected their lives and for their future in a positive way (Nigh, 2013, p. 641). According to Nigh (2013), the classes ran weekly, and students not only rehearsed for a play that included a set, costumes and lighting, they also played improvisational games and prepared themselves for comedies and

drama. The students ranged from age 9-13 years old. During that time they performed comedies, dramas, musicals and Shakespeare. They performed all over the community. This gave the students versatility and helped them to understand more of the materials they were working with in order for them to grow as actors and future young adults.

A study was done to show the positive effects drama has on students and their development and growth. The study took place in New England for three months in the town's youth development center. According to Dutton (2001), there were three main goals given to the students in order to create their own dramatic interpretation of a performance for the group:

- (1) To form a drama group (or to form a task group on drama); (2) To provide a vehicle for youth to learn to work together and gain a sense of group identity and pride, and (3) To provide a forum that would serve to enhance the decision making skills of the members of the group. (p.46)

The students' ages ranged between 10 and 13. The students were given the freedom to incorporate what they wanted in their group play. For example, rap. They were exposed to the behind the scenes using props and costumes and then attending a play to see the parallels between a professional show and their own. Dutton (2001) concluded that the students gained more knowledge looking at "the behind the scene" components of the theatrical world. The students were educated first hand being able to see a professional theatrical show and implement those techniques into their own productions. The students were also able to put their own spin on their productions by choosing topics they were interested in for their group plays. The students learned basic fundamentals of how they could put on their own theatrical productions and the work that went into making them cohesive.

## **The Importance of Theater**

Through the methods of teaching drama from Dorothy Heathcote, Wagner (1983) stated, “Once we accept this in our self, we see the absurdity of pressing a class to forget who they are and what their values are at the moment-regardless of how much we might personally regret that they have these values-and pretend to be totally different people” (p.119). Putting oneself in another's shoes is a way to channel realism and putting it into action as an actor. These methods are a way to learn how to empathize, grow and socially become a more aware young person.

Wagner (1983) admired and applauded the work of drama teacher Dorothy Heathcote. Wagner (1983) stated fondness of Heathcote, “Whatever the top layer of the drama might be, Heathcote is always tunneling beneath the surface to get the belief going and the attitude right” (p. 69). Wagner is a firm believer in Heathcote’s methods as a theater teacher and how she actively engages students in real experiences through drama to create realistic results and creating a positive experience for students.

Another term to describe theater for students is *youth theatre*. *Youth theatre*, which is another term for describing students involved in theater arts, is something that takes place in Europe. What consists of *youth theatre*? Hughes & Wilson (2004) identified it as a wide variety of organizations that engage young people in theatre-related activities in their own time. The research findings suggested that *youth theatre* has a number of important functions for young people positively contributing to their personal and social development. The findings are placed in the context of youth transitions research that has identified the skills, capacities and recurrence

that help young people make successful transitions to adulthood in the current social and economic climate.

In relation to the importance of theater, if the student-teachers have a passion for the subject matter, the students will be able to see that, and from those passions the students will be able to thrive. Pitfield (2012) reported on the student- teachers in the study, “They remain passionate about the importance of drama to young people’s educational development and staunch in their support for its unique place in the secondary curriculum” (p.435).

It is vital that the teachers in schools who are focused on academics and also in theater and arts have knowledge on the subject matter of theater. In addition to the student-teacher relationship and philosophy on drama, it was still a vital asset as a student-teacher to have knowledge of the subject content. Pitfield (2012) stated that the study “offers some tentative findings and adds to an expanding field of inquiry relating to the development of drama teachers’ pedagogical content knowledge during this critical period” (p. 440). The results were that the student- teachers placed a lot of value on their importance of prior work experience related to teaching drama. At the end of the study, the student-teachers were interviewed on their experience. Wagner (1983) described Heathcote’s teaching styles as one that all teachers from all subjects can stand behind and support:

Some of Dorothy Heathcote’s most enthusiastic followers are not teachers of drama at all but teachers of other subjects-especially literature, social studies and history. She has shown how the discipline of theater can be harnessed to the service of other academic disciplines.

Pitfield (2012) described that drama teachers need to create a narrative on their teaching which assists them in creating experiences and helps them to develop new ways of teaching. The more a teacher is able to engage students and encourage them in a positive way so they can thrive inside and outside of the classroom, whether it is in the classroom or in afterschool activities, the more they have the potential to thrive. Pitfield examined extensive responses to draw conclusions about the transformation process between teachers having passion for the subject; pre-course experience; exposure to the community of practice in schools; and the act of teaching. These ways significantly help a teacher thrive, but also teach students a love or passion for a subject matter, such as theater.

### **Group Work and Student Involvement in Theater**

Students who are involved in theater find that growth happens through group work, building teams and creating a product, whether it is through a school run production, or small group work. Collins (1999) studied the impact group work has on enriching students in afterschool programs. Most of the time after school activities are an extension of the school day that can focus on something other than meeting academic needs. Collins (1999) argued that group work builds academic enrichment. Group work is essential in afterschool programs because it gives students who normally wouldn't work together during the school day, to connect and learn from each other in a diverse setting. Collins (1999) stated:

Group work has also become an integral part of many after-school programs with children being assigned to a “group” for the year. Group workers apply the variety of skills that they bring in those settings and in those traditional groups. However, group

work principles have not been applied in programs that stress academic enrichment. (p. 61)

Nigh (2013) concluded that the students connected on a much deeper level by working together in such close proximity. The students began to transform themselves and used exploration and creative inquiry in order to define the outcome of the creative process of the production. Nigh referred to this process as something called a *transition*. Nigh's (2013) study discovered the following while using group work and having students forced to work in a close proximity of the group:

Over time, the six students who have been given the above-mentioned pseudonyms, experienced something that overturned my understanding of body, thought and the imagination. Along with the deep affection that year after year grew between them, I was privileged to witness the evolution of a continually arising phenomenon that was wonderful, strange, and particular to the intimacy of this drama group as a whole. (p. 642)

The drama group became very aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses. They formed a community and were extremely sensitive to their feelings and the feelings of peers in order to work closely together as a group. Nigh (2013) developed an approach to help better understand feelings through the body or through imagination.

According to Wagner (1983), young students who work in theater will have a better realization of self and become more open to growing and learning not only drama, but other subjects academically. "Drama puts children into situations of pressure; they have to try harder and realign the relevant information from their past experience and bring it to bear on the present

imagined moment” Wagner, (1983), (p. 228). This is something that is essential to student growth, especially when it comes to the dramatic scene work with students. Wagner recognized that when students are given scenes to work on either from texts or different scripts, they are forced to act in the moment and have to react with their scene partners creating a world around them and adapted to those changes. This is something Wagner stated that could be very difficult for some students.

In working in theater, students sometimes find that performing alleviates some anxieties in front of groups of peers. Hughes & Wilson (2004) agreed that in addition to channeling anxiety and feelings through performance, the idea of providing a “safe space” within students, most who are younger (elementary grades) can take the risks that are given to them in a scene study and end up emerging very strongly from the accounts of youth theater leaders. Taking a risk can involve introducing challenging or controversial subject matter, handing over responsibility for processes or bring young people to take on more demanding roles within the creative process or wider organization.

One student teacher in Pitfield (2012) found that one of his students gained certain social skills and fought stage fright and speaking in front of crowds through the process. This student also gained the courage to develop problem solving skills. It was determined that:

The rationale for drama in school is not about being a talented actor. It's not about that at all. It's about learning to experiment and use your imagination and having the confidence to stand up in front of people. (p.434)

In addition to group work building confidence and strengthening student performance, group work is also positive in creating and fostering problem solving skills. Wagner (1983), recalled how Heathcote described how groups in a drama class with young students have to decide their own problems and figure out how to solve them while Heathcote facilitates. She made sure she was careful to becoming solely a watchful eye, but didn't want to stunt their creative team building work. Wagner (1983) described this process as, working intuitively, creatively, with technique, confidence, and involvement, in a situation where students are making most of the decisions and neither she nor the class knows what will happens next. Heathcote works knowing which decisions she doesn't dare let out of her hands-such as those that could destroy the belief of the participants- and which she'll leave to the class. She takes risks, but she never plays so risky that the class doesn't sense the authority and leadership.

Another study by Collins (1999), focused on students aged 5-12 years old in an after school tutoring program. It studied group work and the students ability to find their own interests and show growth during that time. The program took place in New York City with poor and working class students. The program was called, "Stories, Games and Writing." Its purpose was to enrich reading and writing skills that the students lacked using group work. Collins (1999) recalled a day in the afterschool program where stories, games and writing were taking place. Students used different mediums or outlets to describe themselves in order to feel more comfortable in the group:

A typical first activity for groups in the *Stories, Games, and Writing* program consisted of members choosing objects to represent themselves and illustrating or writing about the objects. Early readers can focus on illustrating and introducing themselves through



objects; while more advanced readers have the option to write about their objects. Such an activity can be used to assess the writing skills of group members while also allowing members to introduce themselves to the group.(p.64)

Collins (1999) stated that the principles of group work that are inherent in other groups need to be incorporated in groups whose purpose is academic achievement. Members, with the help of the group and the group leader, can take risks, find and explore interests, use other group members to problem solve, and build an interest in academic skills that is not always apparent in academic enrichment programs. Since academic skills are sometimes not apparent in academic enrichment programs, using this study assisted in proving the effectiveness of group work in afterschool activities.

The term “mutual aid” came into play and was used throughout the study and how it made a positive impact on student growth. Mutual aid is the use of working with a group to learn new information. Mutual aid included sharing ideas and assisting each other through group work and assisted with ensuring students were conferring with each and creating positive group work and the skills to work as a community, much like actors working together on stage in a theater. Collins (1999), concluded:

Mutual aid among members also included sharing reading and writing with group members. In this study, each group began and ended with a circle, the ending circle bearing the title, “Sharing Circle.” In the sharing circle, members had an opportunity to share their writing with the group. From the beginning, ground rules were set forth by group members about how the person who is sharing is to be treated in the sharing circle. (p.66)

### **Theater Builds Confidence and Grows Social and Emotional Skills**

According to Freeman, Fulton, Sullivan (2003), 3rd and 4th grade students in an elementary school participated in a study one day a week for 18 weeks. They were 23 participants in the study, and all were 3rd and 4th graders. The study focused on self-concept, problem behavior and social skills in relation to the effects of creative drama activities.

Freeman, Fulton, Sullivan (2003), stated, “Creative drama activities include the four components of social skills training: response acquisition, response practice, response shaping and cognitive restructuring” (p.132).

During this process, the students worked in groups to act out certain situations. This was designed to assess the students on how they deal with certain situations involving emotional control. Although, this situation was also a part of group work, it was essential in determining the growth of students’ social skills, confidence and emotional skills. A description of the various activities were as followed by Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan (2003) determined the importance of being aware of student emotion and building trust and confidence amongst peers:

Activities were planned that required participants to act out various situations that dealt with emotional control through role play, skits, and dance movements. Activities required participants to role play, analyze roles, work cooperatively in creative tasks and express actions and emotions. (p.134)

When discussing the use of drama for education purposes, the dramatic situations that were performed were not for the purpose of the 237 students to perform in front of an audience, but intended to prepare them to handle emotional situations in their future. “The drama that was

used for educational purposes in the study included, “creative drama, child drama, play making, child play, and educational drama” Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan, (2003), p.131).

In the use of these dramatic situations, the students discovered that they were able to use the four components of drama activities and implement them into their work. By the end of the dramatic situation role playing, students were able to implement the four components: response acquisition, response practice, response shaping and cognitive restructuring. They not only confidently performed these situations in front of an audience, but they were able to integrate them into their everyday lives. Not only did their social skills improve, their academic, problem solving skills and ability to think on their feet held the 3rd and 4th graders to thrive in future endeavors.

Wagner (1983) found through the teachings of Dorothy Heathcote, “Whatever the prejudices of the class, you can put the students into a situation where they have to work through them to a new awareness” (p.228). Heathcote also taught about the importance of how drama can build confidence in students. Wagner (1983) stated:

Thus drama builds confidence. In drama, students’ life “in advance of themselves” as it were: they face challenge and crisis in imagination before they find themselves overwhelmed by them in real life. They gain the feeling of mastery over events, the sense that they are equal to life. This in turn helps them relate more comfortably and openly to others. (p.228)

Wagner (1983) applauded Heathcote for her methods because, “She’s always looking for the precise dramatic pressure that will lead to a breakthrough, to a point where the students have to come at a problem in a new way, to fight for language adequate to the tension they feel”

(p.13). Wagner (1983) also assured Heathcotes teachings are legitimate for students to figure out new ways to have students have more self-awareness and discovering new breakthroughs by stating that using drama to expand students minds and get them to think in new ways:

She does not use children to produce plays. Instead she uses drama to expand their awareness, to enable them to look at reality through fantasy, to see below the surface of actions to their meaning. She is interested, not in making plays with children but in, as she terms it, burnishing children through the play. She does this not by heaping more information on them but by enabling them to use what they already know. (p.15)

Wagner (1983) stated that: “In any drama, the isolation of one factor that a student can relate to makes focus possible. Without this focus, a situation is less significant less dramatic, less tense” (p. 52). It is very important for students to be able to stay in the moment when working on a scene. This helps to build a discipline in the student actor and can trickle off to other aspects of their life. According to Wagner (1983), “Education is a continuous process of assimilation of incoming data together with constantly developing ability to respond” (p. 192).

In addition to educational positives through working in theater, students who do not choose a future in acting still benefit from theater. According to Nigh (2013), during the student's' late adolescence, she became concerned that no matter how hard the students worked, there was no way to ensure that they would be chosen for a university acting program. However, she was free to optimize the conditions through which they could come to know their own consciousness. The students would thereby perhaps gain more insight into the specific path that they wished to pursue. (p.645) It was found that even though some of the students were not interested in pursuing a theatrical career in the future, Nigh became aware that more students had

a greater sense of self for making future academic and/or career choices. Giving the students more ability to have self-awareness, they were able to have more knowledge about what they would want to continue in the future.

Dutton (2001) stated, “Amazingly even something as seemingly simple as a mural can teach lessons, build confidence, and strengthen a community” (p.43). Theater is also another way for students to form a group and strengthen a community. According to Dutton (2001):

In relation to education and healing, the arts have been known to be used for psychodrama, art therapy, building resiliency, prevention programs, delinquency prevention, education, youth development, and community building. Although these areas range from therapeutic to enriching, they all utilize some aspect of the arts to help build, educate, encourage and heal. (p.40)

As the findings in Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan (2003), were not able to fully conclude the positive impact on problem behavior, it was concluded by one instructor that some physical changes to the students’ behavior began to show a glimmer of hope. Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan (2003) responded, “The instructor who implemented creative drama activities reported that very shy children became more relaxed and overcame inhibitions to participation. In contrast, more outgoing students became aware of the need to work cooperatively” (p.136). This study is vital to the research of the positive impact of theater on education due to the fact that Freeman, Fulton, and Sullivan (2003) concluded:

That only a relatively small number of studies have evaluated the effects of creative drama on self-concept and social skills. No studies were located with creative drama as the treatment and problem behavior as a dependent variable. The small number of

experimental studies in these areas indicate a need for well-designed and documented studies on the effects of creative drama on self-concept, social skills and problem behavior. (p.134)

In Bungay & Vella-Burrows' (2013), study it was noted that there was "some evidence that using creative activities as part of a health-promoting strategy may be a useful method of increasing knowledge and positive behaviors in children and young people" (p.44). Bungay & Vella-Burrows (2013) also argued, "It was found that participating in creative activities can have a positive effect on behavioral changes, self-confidence, self-esteem, levels of knowledge and physical activity" (p.44).

Hughes & Wilson (2004) recognized "The greater freedom to 'be yourself' was a strong and recurring theme of both youth theatre staff and participants' narrative of *youth theatre*" (p.65). They also found that participating in successful rehearsals and public performances helps young people develop the confidence, skills and personal resources to perform in a wide range of contexts.

Hughes & Wilson (2004) made it clear that "the growth and development of youth theatre has been sustained by the enthusiasm and commitment of individual practitioners and young people; the sector has traditionally struggle for recognition (in the form of financial and/or other support) from the state and other external audiences" (p.61). They also stress the importance of living in the moment on stage to embrace feeling anxious or nervous about performing and how expressing themselves through drama helps reinforce those feelings of anxiety. According to Hughes & Wilson (2004), "Channeling feelings, energy and anxiety through performance helps

young people learn how to cope with and control their feelings and express themselves more effectively in a range of contexts.” (p.66)

Through these ideas about creating dramatic situations where students were forced to work together, Wagner found that social health was greatly impacted by the use of dramatic scenes. Drama can improve a class’ social health because it requires that a person do certain things in relation to other people. Wagner (1983) demonstrated to each participant that:

You have to take in other human being and relate your response to what they are telling you, verbally and nonverbally. To have a drama at all, a class of students must cooperate; all have to agree to try to sustain the drama, to support one another’s efforts to believe, to share their personal ideas and interpretations with others. (p.227)

As an advocate for the arts and a firm believer that drama has a positive influence on students’ growth and development, Dutton (2001) stated, “Arts Programs have long been used to help people communicate, share beliefs, learn skills and communicate information” (p. 39). This article suggested that reaching out and doing theater created a sense of community with the students involved and they created a group bond that resulted in lasting friendships and a new confidence that was not embedded in the students’ prior to working in theater arts.

Dutton (2001) described that when engaged in arts such as drama, puppetry, dance, writing, painting, or drawing, learners are provided an opportunity to be active participants in their own education or healing, thus giving them more power to affect change in their own lives. In Dutton’s findings, it was concluded that many of the students found drama to be a positive

impact in their life and the sense of community and skill building to help them with important situations for the future. Dutton (2001) recorded, through practicing decision making and group cooperation, the youth begin to learn skills which can later be applied to important situations in preparation for students' futures.

In Dutton (2001), the study that involved seven parents or relatives of children in the play filled out questionnaires along with eight non relatives. One adult who was a non relative commented that they felt drama should be offered more often to youth which are of this age and a parent noted that she felt drama was a good ego boost for kids. Many other parents and guardians wrote that they felt the project was wonderful and that their children really enjoyed the play. The responses gave a chance for an outside source to see the student's individual improvement if there was any.

The results were very positive. Dutton (2001) stated, "By having to work as a group, the decisions they made had to be worked out by all the members. The growth the group leader saw was immense. Much of this ability to make decisions together, also grew from the strength of the group which grew through their group identity" (p. 51).

The students were positively encouraged to work together and thus forced a strong bond and ability to work as a group. They occasionally had to help one another to enter on time or prompt a member who missed a cue. The strong sense of group support led to their ability to be proud of what they were doing as a group not simply just as an individual. (p.51) There wasn't concern about the quality of the production but the outcome of the process. There was a positive impact on student development and outcome for dealing with certain social and community building situations for the future.



## **The Transformation Process and Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

The transformation process study was located in the United States and Europe. Many involved students from kindergarten all the way up to high school and took place over two school semesters. According to Flemming, Merrell and Tymms (2004), the title of the project transformation was chosen because transformation of some kind is a central ingredient in drama. There were four schools involved in the project for four years total. In that time the students in the transformation group were put together to enhance student's confidence and improve literacy and oral skills. The individuals involved in the study were, leaders of the workshops were undergraduate drama students, classroom teachers and the students. (p.74) Many of the students spoke more than just the English language as well. Flemming, Merrell and Tymms (2004) began the study going into the notion of that successful education was not just about designing a syllabus or inventing a strategy but is arguably more about creating a culture. According to Flemming, Merrell and Tymms (2004), the workshop leaders worked at a primary grade level they did this with a series of tasks that included, warm up exercise at grade level. For example, having all group members say their names in a circle. Play theatrical grade level appropriate games, sharing short stories, writing exercises and using the writing to act out theatrical scenes. Also in the project, the students were taken to see many professional plays. Some of them included: *The Ugly Duckling*, *My Fair Lady* and *South Pacific*. At the end of the semester, the workshop was celebrated by having an end of the semester performance to showcase the work and then students were able to give feedback on the student performance. (p. 92)

The Transformation had a positive effect on creating student culture. Once the performance was over, the students gained much more confidence, they felt sense of

community. In playing warm up games, students build core group skill and felt like they had express themselves through performance, which was something that was a hesitation in the classroom. Upon being able to go see professional plays, they gain firsthand knowledge and experience being able to watch professionals in the community perform and were encouraged to work harder and meet higher expectations in theater.

The process of the study of *Student Teachers and Pedagogical Content Knowledge* took three academic school years. All teachers in the program were studying to become drama teachers for students aged 11-19. They also were trained a course at Goldsmiths University in the United Kingdom. According to Pitfield (2012), the course consisted of seminars:

There were influential drama theorists/practitioners past and present; subject-specific curriculum and lesson planning; subject assignments requiring critical engagement with the relevant literature; interactions with peers, course tutors and teachers in schools; interactions with pupils; and classroom practice, both observed and enacted. (p.429)

After the study, the student-teachers were interviewed on, subject knowledge as a motivational force; the role of prior experience in the struggle for pedagogical content knowledge in drama; the growth of pedagogical content knowledge through the student-teachers' engagement with the community of practice in schools.

In Pitfields' (2012) study the main question that was focused on the research was, "How do prior subject knowledge and work-related experience interact with on-course experiences, particularly during periods of school-based teaching practice, to develop pedagogical content knowledge and transform personal constructs of the subject" (p.429)? According to Pitfield (2012), this study offered an exploration of the ways in which student-teachers of drama in one

University in the UK construct their pedagogical content knowledge, and identified the significance to their development as drama teachers of a complex interplay between prior knowledge and on-course experiences related to their subject. (p. 452) The student-teachers were also surveyed with these two questions as followed from Pitfield (2012). In doing so the student-teachers, were then surveyed with questions during their process. Pitfield (2012) examined that:

The effect on the transformation process of an interaction between prior knowledge, work related experience and on course experiences; the elements of the PGCE course that they had so far found most helpful in transforming subject knowledge into pedagogical content knowledge, and the aspects of learning to teach drama they considered to be the most challenging. (p.430)

There were two very pivotal questions that dictated the results of the survey. It was concluded that even though the teachers had different methods on teaching in their classrooms, they found that teaching drama was the most difficult to scaffold and have students comprehend. Each teacher had different background knowledge on what school had meant to them, and how they could incorporate it from a pedagogical standpoint.

### **The Impact Theater Has on Youth Development**

The Study of the Impact Theater has on youth development was another important component how students' grew and their personal development throughout their academic career. The study took place in England. According to Hughes & Wilson (2004), "The study explored the impact of taking part in youth theatre on young people's personal and social development" (p.57). The study consisted of qualitative and qualitative research with twelve peer researchers from four different youth theaters trained to become theater teachers. The study

contained 250 students aged 12-30 years old who participated during the course of the study. At the end of the study, 23 students were interviewed. They used questionnaires, interviews and workshops to conduct their research. The focus was based on *youth theatre* and its impact on social and personal development. There are 25 different types of *youth theatre*, including: dance, experimental, theatre building based, and theatre in education, musical and issue-based. Hughes & Wilson (2004) stated that:

The research had three important foci: to identify models of effective practice in youth theatre; to generate and analyze evidence of the impact of youth theatre on young people's development; and to explore the theoretical constructs used by those participating and working within you theatre. (p.58)

As for the qualitative portion of the study, Hughes & Wilson (2004) stated, "The primary qualitative nature of the study meant that we were trying to identify and explain the impact of youth theatre, rather than assess the existence of the impact on an overall population of young people" (p.61). There were four models of practice being used in the study; theater/arts, community, youth arts and applied theater. Bungay & Vella-Burrows (2013) concluded "The relative lack of methodological rigor in the arts and health field is partly because the complex nature of the interventions presents many challenges to researchers particularly in terms of collecting data and in the selection of appropriate outcome measures to assess effectiveness" (p. 51).

Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan (2003) found that there needed to be more sensitive measurements made to detect if creative drama method made a positive impact on student's

emotional or problem behavior. They found that students with poor social skills or high problem behaviors would be a better subject for a following research to narrow the results. In addition to sensitive measurements they also found that, “These results suggest that the effects of creative drama activities do not differ by gender” (p.135). Freeman, Fulton, Sullivan (2003) The impact of gender is something that relates to my study, in that there was no difference in gender to see how drama activities makes a positive impact on student behavior. Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan (2003), determined that creative drama did not improve any problem behavior or social skills on 3rd and 4th graders, due to the lack of research and information:

The findings of this study suggest that creative drama will not significantly improve self- concept, problem behavior, or social skills of third and fourth grade children. The specific variables to be measured, potential for skewed distributions on pretest measures, length of studies, and consistency between intended outcomes and assessments are factors to be considered in studies with creative drama as a the treatment. (p.137)

Even though the results of Freeman, Fulton and Sullivan (2003), did not fully support that creative drama was not an effective treatment for 3rd and 4th grade problem behavior, they did show that it had somewhat of a positive impact on students as far as interest in the subject matter.

### **Conclusions**

Gingell (2000) stated, “There is little doubt that the place of the arts in our schools is patchy. Literature is well entrenched but, for instance, the study of painting and music, if it exists at all, exists in ways which do a disservice to these great art forms” (p.72). Gingell (2000) also

stated there is no right or wrong way to experience art forms and that who is to say what makes art, art and music, music. “Not only does this type of theory lend itself to grotesque misjudgments concerning both art forms and particular works of art, but it also makes mysterious our normal behavior with regard to art.”(Gingell (2000), p.73)

Gingell (2000) made an interesting point about how the arts are conceptualized. The question that Gingell asked was, are we necessarily condemned to seeing the arts as a relaxation from the serious business of life? This depends crucially upon what we take to be the serious business of life. But in discussing this we are entering areas of discussion which are both extremely difficult and in which it is all too easy to give offence to other participants within the discussion. The matter at hand that was suggested was what constitutes a worthwhile life, and any description of this is likely to cause grave offence to anyone to whom the description does not apply. (p.74)

It also comes down to the idea of what others value. If students value sports then that is something they value, but is that justified if someone else likes music better? Gingell (2000) argued:

There are things that some people actually do value which most of us would simply not see as valuable. Archetypal misers, for instance, value the acquisition of money for its own sake. Most of us, I hope, whilst agreeing that money is often necessary to get some of the good things of life, would think that to elevate its role from that of means to that of end in itself, is somehow a perversion of human motivation and imagination.(p.74)

This argument leaves so many unanswered questions to define what is valued and why is it justified. The answer may not ever be known. Gingell (2000) responded, “Just as we understand

the artists who live their lives for their art, we also understand others who, whilst unable to produce art of their own, make art the point of their lives” (p.74)

### Data Analysis

**Table 1: Background Information**

		<i>N</i>	Percentage
Gender	M	1	6.7%
	F	14	93.3%
Ethnicity	African American	2	13.3%
	Asian	2	13.3%
	White	9	60%
	Other	2	13.3%
Age	25-34	4	26.7%
	35-44	6	40%
	45-54	4	26.7%
	65+	1	6.7%
Marital Status	Single	2	13.3%
	Married	11	73.3%
	Widowed	1	6.7%
	Divorced	1	6.7%
Education	Less than high school	1	6.7%
	High School graduate	2	13.3%
	Some college	1	6.7%
	Associate’s degree	2	13.3%
	Bachelor’s degree	4	26.7%
	Ph.D	2	13.3%
	Graduate degree	3	20%
Work	For profit	3	20%
	Non-profit	3	20%
	Government	1	6.7%
	Health care	3	20%
	Education	1	6.7%
	Other	4	26.7%
Hours worked per week	35+	9	60%
	Less than 35	4	26.7%
	Not currently employed	2	13.3 %

## Background Information

Table 1 shows that of the 15 responses, 1 (6.7%) were male and 14 ( 93.3%) were female. There were also 2 (13.3%) African Americans, 2 (13.3%) Asians, 9 (60%) whites and 2 (13.3%) other ethnicities. 4 ( 26.7%) of participants were between the ages 25 to 34, 6 ( 40%) between 35 to 44, 4 ( 26.7%) between 45 to 54, and 1 ( 6.7%) was 65 or older. Also there were 2 (13.3%) single, 11 ( 7.3%) married, 1 (6.7%) widowed and 1 (6.7%) divorced . The highest level of education completed was as followed, 1 (6.7%) less than high school, 2 (13.3%) high school graduate (includes equivalency), 1 (6.7%) some college, no degree, 2 (13.3%) Associate's degree, 4 (26.7%) Bachelor's degree , 2 ( 13.3%) Ph.D, and 3 (20%) Graduate or professional degree. 3 (20%) worked as for profit, 3 (20%) Non-profit (religious, arts, social assistance, etc.), 1 (6.7%) worked in Government, 3 (20%) in health care, 1 (6.7%) in Education and 4 (26.7%) reported "other". 9 ( 60%) worked 35 hours a week or more , 4 (26.7%) worked less than 35 hours a week and 13. 3%) were not currently employed.



**Table 2: About the Child**

		<i>N</i>	Percentage
First time participant	Y	5	33.3%
	N	10	66.7%
Grade level	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	1	6.7%
	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	14	93.3%
Gender	M	6	40%
	F	9	60%
Child's main interests (choose 3 per participant)	Sports	10	66.7%
	Video Games	3	20%
	Theater	8	53.3%
	Arts and Crafts	4	26.7%
	Cooking	4	26.7%
	Reading	10	66.7%
	Other	4	26.7%
Parent assisted child practicing	Y	2	13.3%
	N	5	33.3%
	Somewhat	8	53.3%
Child expressed interest in practicing	Y	13	86.7%
	N	1	6.7%
	Somewhat	1	6.7%
Child made new friends	Y	11	73%
	N	1	6.7%
	Somewhat	3	20%
Child showed interest in performing	Y	14	93.3%
	N	1	6.7%
Child more focused on homework	Y	8	53.3%
	N	3	20%
	Somewhat	4	26.7%
Child is happier	Y	13	86.7%
	N	1	6.7%
	Somewhat	1	6.7%

**About the Child**

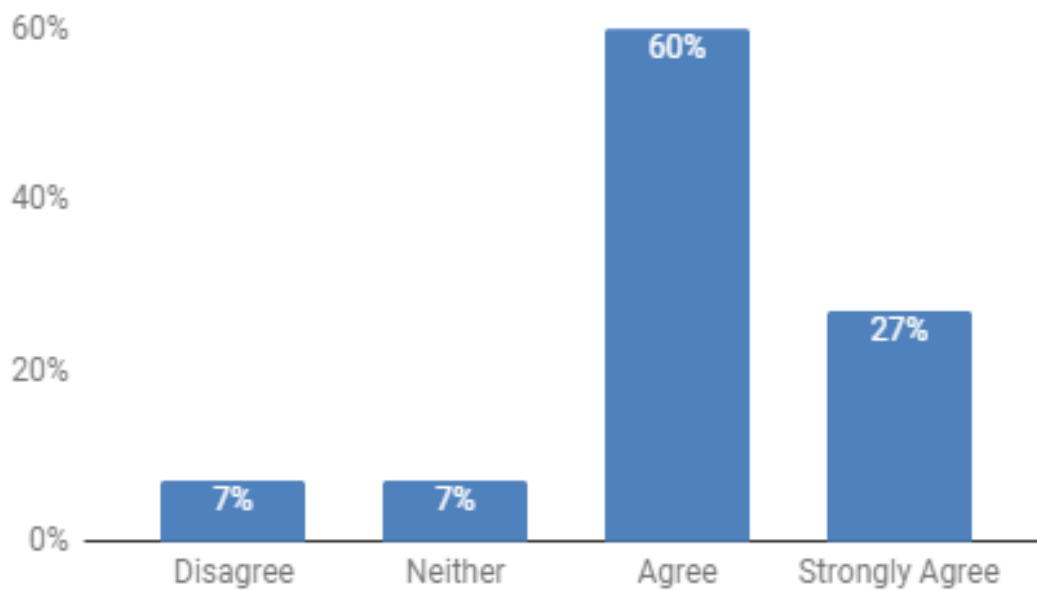
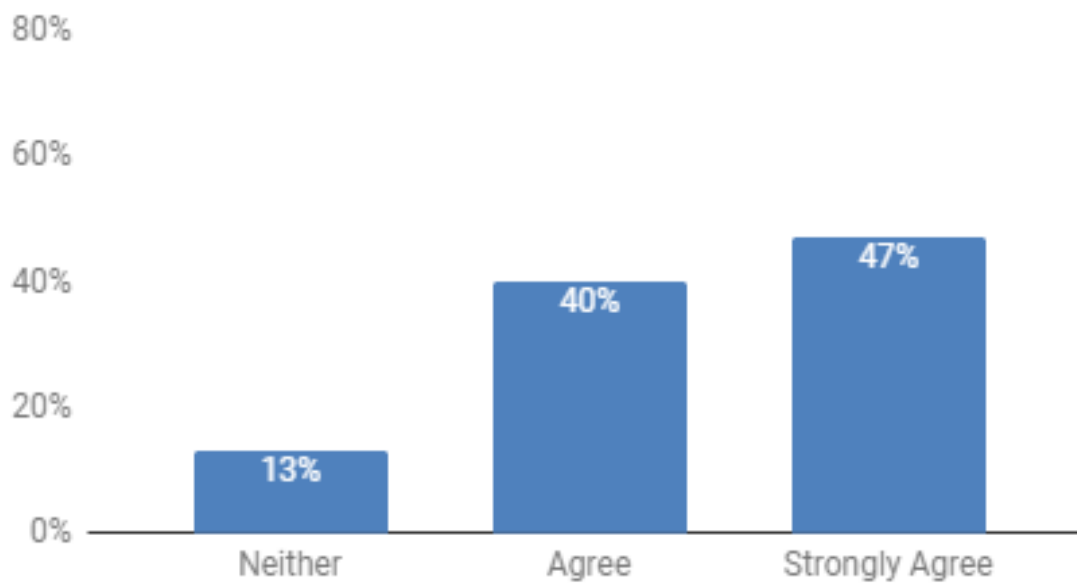
Out of 15 participants, 5 (33.3%) said this was their child's first time participating in Musical Theater Club and 10 ( 66.7%) said it was not. 1 (6.7% ) was in Grade 4 and 14 ( 93.3%) were in grade 5. 6 ( 40%) were male and 9 (60%) were female. Of the 15 children in the study, choosing 3 hobbies each, 10 liked sports, 3 liked video games, 8 liked theater, 4 liked arts and crafts, 4 liked cooking, 10 liked reading and 4 selected "other".

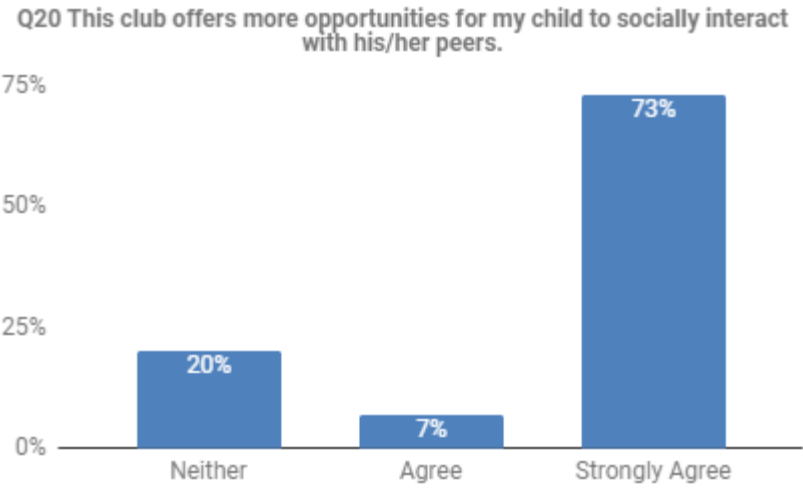
**During Musical Theater Club:**

Table 2 shows that during Musical Theater Club: 2 (13.3%) helped/assisted their child to learn lines or practice music or dance, 5 ( 33.3%) did not, 8 ( 53.3%) somewhat assisted. 13 (86.7%) children expressed interest in practicing for the performance, 1 (6.7%) did not and 1 (6.7%) somewhat expressed interest in practicing. 11 ( 73.%) of parents reported that their child made new friends, 1 (6.7%) did not and 3 (20%) somewhat made new friends.

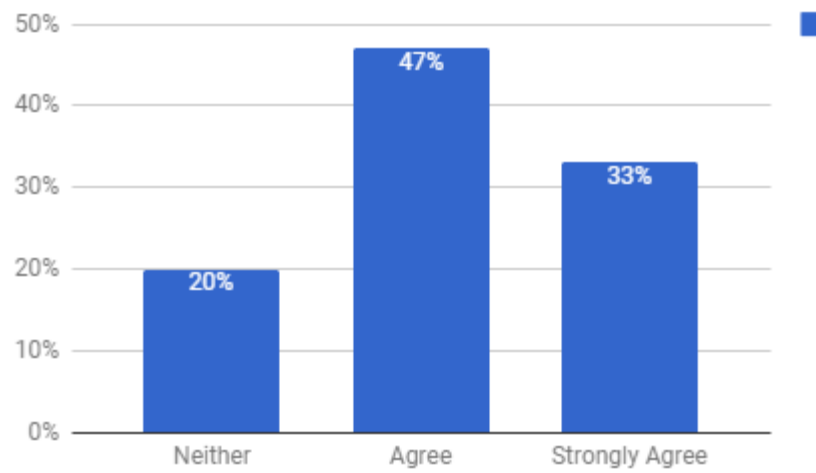
**Post Participation in Musical Theater Club:**

14 ( 93.3%) parents reported that their children showed interest in performance or presenting ideas to others after participating in Musical Theater Club, 1 ( 6.7%) somewhat did. 8 (53.3%) participants reported that their child seemed to act more focused while working on homework after participating in Musical Theater Club, 3 (20%) said no, 4 (26.7%) said somewhat. 13 ( 86.7%) participants reported that their child seemed happier after participating in Musical Theater Club, 1 ( 6.7%) said no and 1 ( 6.7%) somewhat agreed their child was happier.

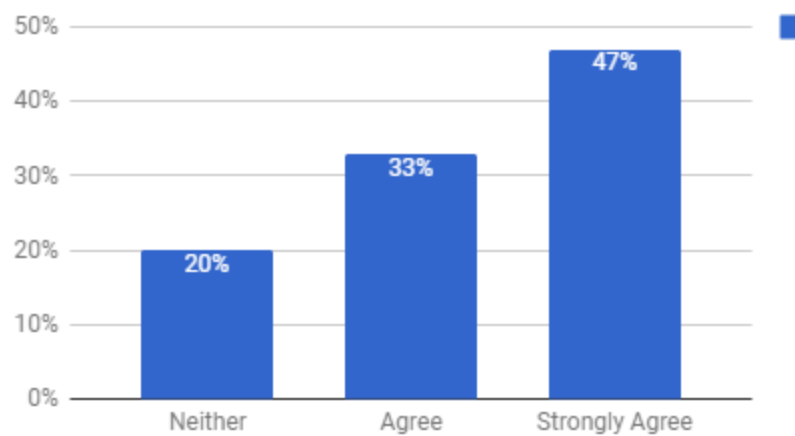
**Q18 My child talks more about his/her school friends****Q19 I feel this club improved opportunities for my child to have a social interaction with his/her peers**



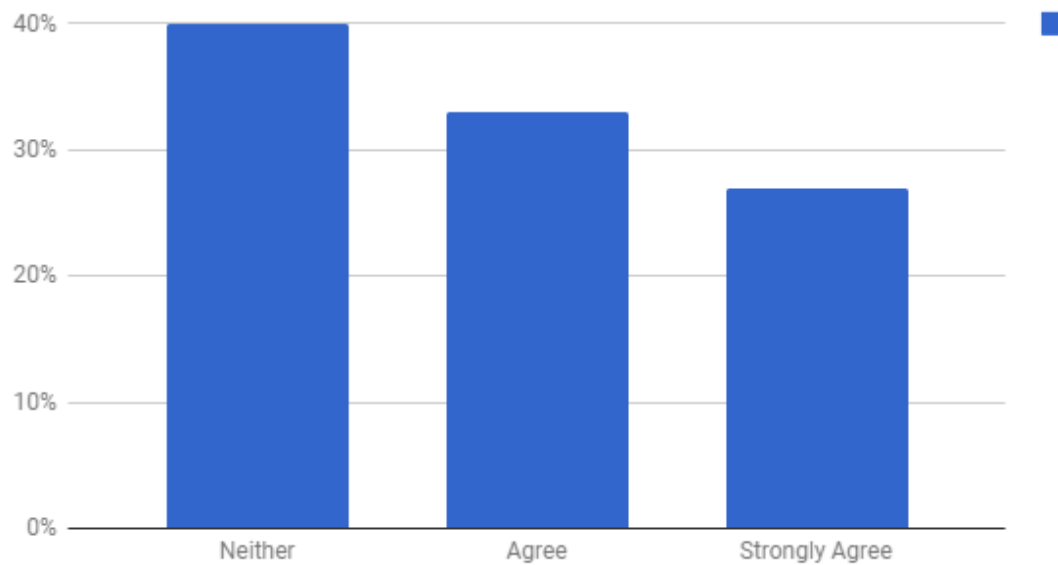
Q22 I feel this club helps my child in sharing his/her school experience with us.



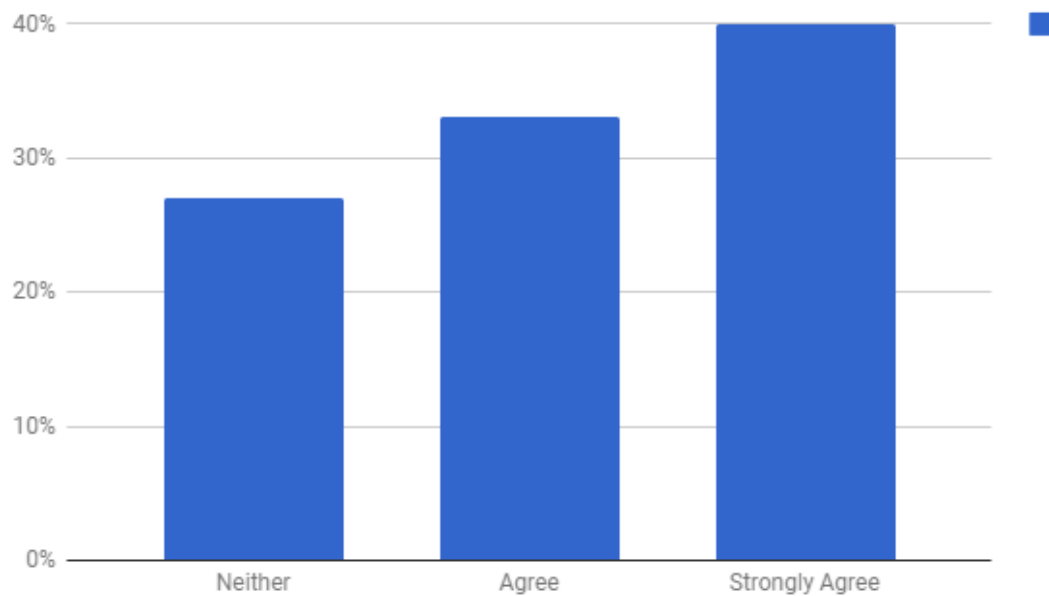
Q21 I feel this club has improved my child's confidence in presenting her/himself to others in home or at school.



Q23 I feel like my child is more open to sharing his/ her experiences with me.



Q24 I feel like my child has more confidence in talking to others



### **Post Participation in Musical Theater Club:**

The graph shows that 87% of the parents reported that their child talks more about his/her school friends, 87% of the parents feel that their that the club improved opportunities for their children to have a social interaction with his/her peers, 80% of the parents feel that the club offers more opportunities for child to socially interact with his/her peers. 73% of the parents said that the club has improved their child's confidence in presenting themselves to others in public or at home and 60% of the parents said they felt like this club helped their child in sharing his/her school experience with them. 60% of parents said they felt the club help their child become more open to sharing experiences with them and 73% of parents agreed that their child has more confidence in talking to others.

Of the returned 15 surveys 7 had open ended responses. Here are some voices from the parents. "My child has always been outgoing and very social.If anything Musical Theater offers a personal opportunity to interact with other students. It served as a break from the electronic forms of socialization." "(My child has a)greater love for singing/acting". " I love Musical Theater. My child has made friends across the school with students and teachers having one the play because the school segregates the classes amongst the grades so there's not a lot of interaction even at lunch." "His (my son's) confidence has soared!" "My son is very beautiful person. Musical theater made him even more open." " (My son) being Aladdin definitely helped his confidence and made him proud to show off his dancing skills". "My child is showing more confidence and interests in the Arts! "Made my child feel belongingness and shared memories/experiences."

## Methods

My methods included: observation, distribution of surveys, journal articles, books and observational journal entries. The most important attribute to my method was a survey that was carefully thought out and created with the demographics of the students in their families in mind. The survey included 18 multiple choice questions, seven statements to rate and an optional written response. This survey was designed to better assist in determining if the 4th and 5th grade students benefited from musical theater club. The survey included many different types of questions. Some were based on the background information of the parent/guardian. Then, it included information about their child or children who participated in musical theater club. The next set of questions was about determining their perception of their child's experience during and post musical theater club. The next portion of the survey included seven statements in which were rated on a scale of: *strongly disagree, disagree, neither disagree nor agree, agree and strongly agree*. These statements were later made into bar graphs to determine the results and common themes of their child's post experience in musical theater club. At the end of the survey there was an optional written response to have parents/guardians explain what they observed or noticed since their child began musical theater club.

The participants of this study consisted of the parents of the 80 students. There were 80 questionnaires distributed to the parents/ guardians of the 80 students. Out of the 80 questionnaires, 15 were returned back. Of the returned 15 surveys, 7 had written responses. These written responses were crucial to the outcome of the survey responses and their outcome to determine the importance of elementary theater programs and benefits to child wellbeing and academic success.



## Results

This study showed that students gained a positive experience in participation of musical theater club. Through careful student and teacher observation, I not only saw firsthand the difference in the student's overall well-being and noticed an improvement in their confidence, social skills, building friendships, discovering personal talents and communication in front of an audience and fellow peers. In the parent contributed surveys, I noticed that out of the 14 surveys, the participants either agreed or strongly agreed when it came down to the statements about their child's experience in musical theater club.

The only statement that had the highest percentage of "neither disagree nor agree" was the statement, "I feel like my child is more open to sharing his/ her experiences with me." The statement about their children being more open to sharing experiences with his or her parent or guardian had 40% neither disagree nor agree. This struck me as odd, as one parent mentions, "My son is very beautiful person. Musical theater made him even more open." Perhaps maybe if more surveys came back the results could have been somewhat different.

Out of the 15 parents, 40% agreed that their child in participation with musical theater club improved opportunities to have a social interaction with their peers. 47% strongly agreed with this statement and in a written response one parent wrote, "I love Musical Theater. My child has made friends across the school with students and teachers having one the play because the school segregates the classes amongst the grades so there's not a lot of interaction even at lunch." 73% of parents and guardians strongly agreed that musical theater club offered more opportunities for their child to socially interact with his/her peers. Another parent wrote, "My child has always been outgoing and very social. If anything Musical Theater offers a personal

opportunity to interact with other students. It served as a break from the electronic forms of socialization.”

Out of 15 parents, 40% strongly agreed that their child had more confidence in talking with others having participated in the club. One parent stated, "His confidence has soared!" 47% of parents strongly agreed that musical theater club improved their child's confidence in presenting themselves to others in public or at home. Another parent whose child had on of the leading roles answers, "Being Aladdin definitely helped his confidence and made him proud to show off his dancing skills." Another parent said, “My child is showing more confidence and interests in the Arts! Made my child feel belongingness and shared memories/experiences.” In addition to confidence, socialization and sharing memories, parents and guardians strongly agreed that their children gained a greater love for the arts and a new appreciation for it. One parent said, “(My child has a) greater love for singing/acting.”

### **Discussion**

Out of the observations I made during musical theater club and through the distribution and collection of the surveys, I discovered that musical theater club was indeed a positive outcome for all students. Out of the 15 surveys received, each one had positive feedback. In each survey, parents/guardians noticed grown confidence, more social interaction with peers and/or the ability for their child to be able to gain a new skill for a theatrical passion.

Upon receiving and going through the survey data, the first thing I noticed in parent demographics was that 93.3% of parents/guardians that participated were female and only 6.7% were male. This means that out of 15 parents/guardians, 14 were women and 1 was a man. I would have like to have seen more variety, if more surveys had been returned. Of parental demographics, 13.3%

of adults were African American, 6.7% were Asian, 6.7% were Hispanic, 60% were white and 13.3% were of another ethnicity.

Through the outcome of the surveys, I noticed the parallel between student success and student willingness to participate outside of musical theater club to rehearse for the musical theater club performance. Out of 15 students, 86.7% showed interest in practicing for the performance outside of the club. I also noticed that after musical theater club 86.7% of parents felt that their child felt happier once the show was over and noticed an overall change in their moral when it came to after school activities. Post musical theater club, 11 out the 15 student's parents or guardians stated that their child made new friends.

What I had hoped to see in my survey results was more response from the parents of 4th graders. In the surveys turned in, only 1 out of the 15 students were in 4th grade. The rest were in 5th. However, what surprised me was that 33.3% of students were participating in musical theater club for the first time. 66.6% of students had already participated in musical theater club when it was offered for the first time in 2015.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout the course of my 2 year study, I found that the importance of an afterschool activity that is based in the arts, such as theater is crucial for not only child well-being and academic success, but as a gateway to other positive future endeavors for students. Social interaction, communication, public speaking, group work and greater confidence with peers and within one's self, is not only something that can be achieved through elementary theater programs, but is something that can give lifelong skills to students around the world through the arts.

The results of this study are important and positive, not just from the survey results, but from my careful observations and multitudes of notes, assistance and building student/teacher relationships in musical theater club at the elementary school in Amherst, New York. I saw first hand how theater affects student behavior in a positive manner, the students building up confidence and courage through their rehearsal process. In the short few months of the duration of musical theater club, I saw students working as a team, and created a bond together that was not only group work, but the formation of a “family-like community”.

It was a rewarding experience to see students positively grow with guidance from their teachers, who became mentor like. Each teacher who was a part of the musical theater club, had similar like in the transformation process. They all came from different backgrounds, and had different thoughts and methods to teaching theater, but they formed a melting pot of student and teacher collaboration to connect and show their students the importance of helping them to grow and learn. This positive environment created a safe place for students to come after school and just express themselves in a way they might not be able to during the school day. This type of art, is so valuable in a society that continues to push away arts and music and focus more on academic success. However, through extensive research, it is shown that the positive group work, is something very similar to a classroom setting, it is just figuring out another way of building confidence, relationships, communication and positive social outcomes that can be successful in and out of the classroom.

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*Appendix A: Survey Part 1*

## Background Information:

1. What is your gender?

☐ Male☐ Female

2. What is your ethnicity?

☐ African American☐ Asian☐ Hispanic☐ Asian☐ Pacific Islander☐ White☐ Other

3. What is your age?

☐ 18 to 24☐ 25 to 34☐ 35 to 44☐ 45 to 54☐ 55 to 64☐ Age 65 or older

4. What is your marital status?

☐ Single☐ Married☐ Separated☐ Widowed☐ Divorced

5. What is the highest degree or level of

education you have completed?

☐ Less than high school☐ High School graduate (includes equivalency)☐ Some college, no degree☐ Associate's degree☐ Bachelor's degree☐ Ph.D.☐ Graduate or professional degree

6. What best describes the type of organization you work for?

☐ For profit☐ Non-profit (religious, arts, social assistance, etc.)☐ Government☐ Health care☐ Education☐ Other

7. How many hours per week do you USUALLY work at your job?

☐ 35 hours a week or more☐ Less than 35 hours a week☐ I am not currently employed

1. Did you help/assist your child to learn lines or practice music or dance?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

About your Child:

1. Is this your child's first time participating in Musical Theater Club?

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. What grade is your child currently in?

☐ 4<sup>th</sup> Grade

☐ 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

3. What is your child's gender?

☐ Male

☐ Female

4. What are your child's main interests?  
(Choose 3)

☐ Sports

☐ Video games

☐ Theater

☐ Arts and crafts

☐ Cooking

☐ Reading

☐ Other

During Musical Theater Club:

2. Did your child express interest in practicing for the performance?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

3. Did your child make new friends?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

Post Participation in Musical Theater Club:

1. Does your child show interest in performance or presenting ideas to others?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

2. Does your child seem to act more focused while working on homework?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

3. Do you feel your child is happier?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

*Appendix B: Survey Part 2*

Please rate the statements below using the scale at the right.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. My child talks more about his/her school friends.					
2. I feel that this club improved opportunities for my child to have a social interaction with his/her peers.					
3. This club offers more opportunities for child to socially interact with his/her peers.					
4. I feel this club has improved my child's confidence in presenting herself to others in public or at home					
5. I feel like this club helps my child in sharing his/her school experience with us.					
6. I feel like my child is more open to sharing his/her experiences with me					
7. I feel like my child has more confidence in talking to others.					

Below, please write anything you have observed or noticed since your child started taking Musical Theater Club:

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*Appendix C: Survey Coded for data*The Effects Musical Theater has on Grades 4th and 5thBackground Information:

Q1. What is your gender?

- 1. ☐ Male
- 2. ☐ Female

Q2. What is your ethnicity?

- 1. ☐ African American
- 2. ☐ Asian
- 3. ☐ Hispanic
- 4. ☐ Asian
- 5. ☐ Pacific Islander
- 6. ☐ White
- 7. ☐ Other

Q3. What is your age?

- 1. ☐ 18 to 24
- 2. ☐ 25 to 34
- 3. ☐ 35 to 44
- 4. ☐ 45 to 54
- 5. ☐ 55 to 64
- 6. ☐ Age 65 or older

Q4. What is your marital status?

- 1. ☐ Single
- 2. ☐ Married
- 3. ☐ Separated
- 4. ☐ Widowed
- 5. ☐ Divorced

Q5. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?

- 1. ☐ Less than high school
- 2. ☐ High School graduate (includes equivalency)
- 3. ☐ Some college, no degree
- 4. ☐ Associate's degree
- 5. ☐ Bachelor's degree
- 6. ☐ Ph.D.
- 7. ☐ Graduate or professional degree

Q6. What best describes the type of organization you work for?

- 1. ☐ For profit
- 2. ☐ Non-profit (religious, arts, social

assistance, etc.)

3. ☐ Government

4. ☐ Health care

5. ☐ Education

6. ☐ Other

Q7. How many hours per week do you  
USUALLY work at your job?

1. ☐ 35 hours a week or more

2. ☐ Less than 35 hours a week

3. ☐ I am not currently employed

About your Child:

Q8. Is this your child's first time participating in Musical Theater Club?

- 1. ☐ Yes
- 2. ☐ No

Q9. What grade is your child currently in?

- 1. ☐ 4<sup>th</sup> Grade
- 2. ☐ 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

Q10. What is your child's gender?

- 1. ☐ Male
- 2. ☐ Female

Q11. What are your child's main interests?  
(Choose 3)

- Q11.a. ☐ Sports
- Q11 b. ☐ Video games
- Q11 c. ☐ Theater
- Q11 d. ☐ Arts and crafts
- Q11 e. ☐ Cooking
- Q11 f. ☐ Reading
- Q11 g. ☐ Other

During Musical Theater Club:

Q12. Did you help/assist your child to learn lines or practice music or dance?

- 1. ☐ Yes
- 2. ☐ No
- 3. ☐ Somewhat

Q13. Did your child express interest in practicing for the performance?

- 1. ☐ Yes
- 2. ☐ No
- 3. ☐ Somewhat

Q14. Did your child make new friends?

- 1. ☐ Yes
- 2. ☐ No
- 3. ☐ Somewhat

Post Participation in Musical Theater Club:

Q15. Does your child show interest in performance or presenting ideas to others?

- 1. ☐ Yes
- 2. ☐ No
- 3. ☐ Somewhat

Q16. Does your child seem to act more focused while working on homework?

- 1. ☐ Yes
- 2. ☐ No
- 3. ☐ Somewhat

Q17. Do you feel your child is happier?

- 1. ☐ Yes
- 2. ☐ No
- 3. ☐ Somewhat

Please rate the statements below using the scale at the right.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q18. My child talks more about his/her school friends.	1	2	3	4	5
Q19.. I feel that this club improved opportunities for my child to have a social interaction with his/her peers.	1	2	3	4	5
Q20.. This club offers more opportunities for child to socially interact with his/her peers.	1	2	3	4	5
Q21. I feel this club has improved my child's confidence in presenting herself to others in public or at home	1	2	3	4	5
Q22. I feel like this club helps my child in sharing his/her school experience with us.	1	2	3	4	5
Q23. I feel like my child is more open to sharing his/her experiences with me	1	2	3	4	5
Q24. I feel like my child has more confidence in talking to others.	1	2	3	4	5

Q25.

Below, please write anything you have observed or noticed since your child started taking Musical Theater Club:

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