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Playing in the Middle: The Value of the Arts in Middle Level Education

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Playing in the Middle: The Value of the Arts in Middle Level Education

by

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Dedication

This document is dedicated to my family and friends who have supported me through the process, and the 2013-14 Seventh Period Intermediate Theatre class at Woodview Middle School whose wisdom and openness made it all possible.

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Abstract

Playing in the Middle: The Value of the Arts in Middle Level Education

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In 2012, the Austin Independent School District implemented a ten-year Creative Learning Initiative to develop every school in the district into an arts rich school. However, research on arts richness presents varied descriptions of what an arts rich school looks like and lacks student voices. This MFA Thesis documents an applied project utilizing an arts based research process to explore student beliefs about the value of the arts and arts richness at the middle school level. In the document, I analyze student beliefs about the value of the arts through modified grounded theory from a data set including a performance, a playscript, group discussions, surveys, and my personal field notes and reflections. I find that the students share a similar understanding with published research of overall categories describing arts richness, including quantity of arts opportunities, quality of artistic and educational programs, and school climate. They deepen the perspective researchers present on school climate in arts rich schools, offering specific ways in which the arts invite a positive school climate. I conclude the document with reflections on defining arts richness, the arts based research process, and areas for further consideration as schools move toward creative learning for the 21st century.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My senior year of college, I was privileged to "student teach" in a middle school in Evanston, Illinois under the supervision and guidance of Betsy Quinn, Theatre Department Chair and an important practitioner in the field of Drama and Theatre for Youth. One particular student—I will call him Nathan—grabbed my attention each day. He received special permission to take drama all year long because it was the one class in which he showed academic and social/behavioral improvement. On the first day, he entered the room silently, took his seat, and generally followed instructions asked of him. If he did not show resistance, he did not show anything else either. He wore an expression of complacency, of a hidden need or secret he would not share.

Fast forward a few weeks: we played the climax of a story drama of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and the students learned some basic stage fighting techniques to employ in their battle scene. Along with the other students in the class, Nathan ran into the battle, loudly accompanied by the music of the same scene from the movie, and heroically played Aslan saving the day. I noticed that his smile, his physical engagement, and his affect had changed. I sat in the auditorium watching him play, and I thought *with a few more years* (he was only in sixth grade), *this child has the potential for positive transformation in his life*. A day later, he was suspended for fighting in the hall and was excluded from all arts classes for the rest of the year.

Unable to talk to Nathan about the situation, I was left with questions about his experience at school. I assumed that drama provided an outlet that engaged him in school, but was that actually true? Did he value his experience in drama class or in other arts classes? How did the inclusion of arts programming affect his experience in middle school? This thesis documents an applied theatre research project inspired by my

questions surrounding Nathan's experiences in arts programming. In this study, I explore what students believe about the value of the arts in middle school, and specifically in arts rich education programs. Additionally, I am interested in defining "arts rich" as it applies to education, as well as how student perspectives about the value of arts in schools relate to those of researchers and educators.

I have long been invested in theatre and education, and my prior experience shaped the beliefs and methods with which I approached this study. As a child, I performed professionally in theatres around my hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana. From age five, I spent as much time in theatre buildings as I did in school, though my academic education remained as important to me as my artistic education. Later in high school, I participated and held leadership positions in show choir, the theatre program, and the speech team; I organized my schedule based on the arts classes I loved. I then attended Northwestern University for college where I continued to pursue both performance and more academic subjects, majoring in theatre and psychology. In my third year at Northwestern, I took a class titled "Theatre as a Teaching Tool." I always loved the idea of working with youth and had some experience in it, and this class provided a gateway to my current interests and career in drama and theatre for youth.

Now as a graduate student in the Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities program and a K-12 theatre teacher certification candidate at the University of Texas at Austin, I find my longstanding dedication to both education and theatre informing and influencing my research and practice. I work with teachers to integrate drama into non-arts subjects and I also direct theatre for young audiences with educational objectives in mind. I believe in bringing the arts, and drama specifically, into schools for all students to learn. Throughout my current projects, I return to Nathan and the questions he inspired about the value of the arts in schools and how young people see them.

BACKGROUND , SIGNIFICANCE, & METHODS

In December of 2012, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) adopted a school improvement plan called the Any Given Child Creative Learning Initiative. Through a ten-year implementation plan, the district wanted all schools in AISD to become "arts-rich." The Annual Academic and Facilities Recommendations (AAFR) Fact Sheet describing this project argues, "arts-rich schools achieve multiple student outcomes including increased academic achievement, improved student engagement, and college and career readiness while meeting the needs of the whole student" (AAFR 4). The foundational argument for this initiative employs terms such as "arts rich" and "creative learning," as though the many stakeholders in AISD programs, such as administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members, should understand exactly what an "arts rich" school or a school that utilizes "creative learning" might look like. In other words, it calls for administrators and proposal coordinators to clearly understand definitions of these major terms that will guide the development of schools in AISD over the next ten years. However, as I discuss in more detail in the next chapter, research on arts rich schools provides a variety of definitions of these terms and often lacks the inclusion of student voices, which might prove relevant to understanding the terms fully.

Spurred by the current initiatives in AISD to create an arts rich district and my own need for clarity around what students believe about the value of the arts in middle school, I developed this study. I partnered with a theatre teacher at Woodview Middle School,[1] Leslie Hatcher, to implement a unit in her classroom exploring the value of the arts to students during the fall semester of 2013. Through this unit, I worked both as researcher and teacher/director to devise a performance with twenty middle school

[1] Names of individuals and places in this document have been changed to protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

theatre students about their experiences in, and the value of, the arts at their school. Three research questions framed my work with the students and shaped the organization of my research, data collection, and analysis: 1) What do students believe about the value of the arts in middle school? 2) How do student perspectives on the arts relate to researcher and educator perspectives on the arts in schools? 3) What can we learn from students about creating arts rich programs in schools?

Research Site

I selected Woodview Middle School as the site for this research project for several reasons. First, the school operates as a fine arts academy within AISD, offering students the opportunity to "major" in an area of the fine arts while in middle school, which include theatre, dance, vocal music (choir), orchestra, band, classical guitar, visual art, and digital arts and media. The school only recently became a fine arts school (officially offering accelerated arts curriculum in the 2012-13 school year) and has seen an increase in funding and student body size since doing so. About 50% of the students at Woodview participate in the Fine Arts Academy (FAA) program. All students are required to take classes in the arts, and the students who join the FAA take advanced courses in their focus areas. Additionally, the school offers many extracurricular arts activities, giving students multiple opportunities to experience and participate in the arts. Importantly, this school's students are familiar with language around and experiences in the arts. [2]

Beyond the school's commitment to the arts as a Fine Arts Academy, I also selected Woodview because of my prior experience both with the school and my partner

[2] At this time, I am not prepared to quantify a level of arts richness at Woodview. However, the school's reputation in the district has shifted positively over the few years since it focused on its fine arts programming.

teacher. During the 2012-13 school year, Woodview implemented a professional development program, Drama for Schools, for teachers to learn strategies for how to integrate drama into teaching their curriculum. As explained on their website, Drama for Schools is:

> an initiative of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Texas in Austin [that] creates intentional partnerships between UT and interested communities/school districts… [and] collaborates with K-12 teachers and curriculum specialists interested in exploring the potential of drama-based instruction to increase teacher efficacy and student engagement across the curriculum. (Drama for Schools)

As a graduate student at UT, I worked with Drama for Schools during the 2012-13 school year and specifically took part in facilitating the new partnership with Woodview. As a trainer in this program, I partnered with three teachers at the middle school, one of whom was Hatcher. Throughout the year, I went into these teachers' classrooms to teach and/or observe lessons that utilized arts strategies (and specifically drama) to engage students in the academic curriculum. I became familiar with the structure and routine of Woodview and was impressed by the number of teachers trying out new drama strategies in their classrooms and bringing the arts to students beyond the Fine Arts Academy. Because of the teachers and administration's commitment to implementing the arts throughout the school, as well as the students' range of experiences in the arts, Woodview proved a fruitful site for investigating how students—both those in the Fine Arts Academy and not—value the arts.

Of course, selecting a site with a developed arts program, and specifically working with an arts class at that site, poses strengths and limitations to my research. The students in the class may have preferences in favor of the arts that do not represent that of other students in middle school, as they are already participants in an active arts education (Woodview requires all students to take an arts class each year). Moreover,

half of the students in the class are theatre majors at Woodview, indicating that they auditioned to be a part of the academy and maintain specific grades in order to remain active. Thus, the sample of students I worked with are generally dedicated to the arts and may or may not represent the beliefs and understandings of the larger population of middle school students at the school or in Austin. However, because my research questions specifically relate to students' experiences in the arts and are not necessarily intended to generalize to all middle school students, the sample also proves useful in thinking beyond the surface about the arts in schools.

Arts Based Research

In my partnership with Hatcher, I created a fifteen-hour theatre curriculum to implement over ten class periods (ninety minutes each) with twenty seventh- and eighth-grade students in her Intermediate Theatre class. I designed the curriculum to explore what the students at Woodview think about the arts and how educators can create arts programs in schools that prove relevant and significant to youth. Guided by Thomas Barone and Elliot Eisner's theory of arts based research and Joe Norris's work in *Playbuilding as Qualitative Research*, I worked with students to devise an original performance that shared different perspectives on students' experiences with and perceptions of the arts. Arts based research is a qualitative research method through which I as the researcher use the arts to generate, analyze, and/or share data (Norris 22). In this project, I led students through a playbuilding process made up of scaffolded drama activities to create a written and performative text, which I then analyzed to complicate my understanding of and begin to draw conclusions about the nature of arts richness.

Unlike other forms of research that traditionally seek to clarify or make certain an idea or phenomenon, arts based research offers the unique opportunity to delve into the

gray spaces previously untouched, seeking deeper understanding of the world through the spurring of questions. Barone and Eisner argue:

> The contribution of arts based research is not that it leads to claims in propositional form about states of affairs but that it addresses complex and often subtle interactions […] [it] is a heuristic through which we deepen and make more complex our understanding of some aspect of the world. (3)

In other words, arts based research allows for developing a deeper understanding of complicated phenomena that may or may not lead to singular or factual statements. When researching a concept as potentially complex and contextual as student beliefs about the arts, I believe an approach that permits such exploration is necessary. It is in this exploration that new understandings for further research begin:

> Arts based research emphasizes the generation of forms of feeling that have something to do with understanding some person, place, or situation. It is not simply a quantitative disclosure of an array of variables. It is the conscious pursuit of expressive form in the service of understanding. (Barone and Eisner 7)

In other words, arts based research allows for a rich and complex understanding of a concept or situation. Furthermore, I believe research on the arts should consider not only content but also form. Why not *use* the arts to research the arts? By employing the artistic forms we seek to understand, perhaps we discover multiple ways of knowing or expressing them.

Methods, Data, and Analysis

I began this research process primarily wanting to learn about arts richness: what is an arts rich school? How do student perspectives relate to researcher perspectives on arts richness? As I discuss in more detail later, the focus of my work with students shifted as I struggled to engage them more personally and deeply in the research and our theatre devising process. The performance piece that I developed with the students ultimately asked students to consider and respond to the related question, "What is the value of the

arts in middle school?" Even though this question guided our creative process, I continued to collect data about student beliefs around the value of the arts in general, as well as their beliefs about and definitions of arts rich schools. In addition, several other related topics came up throughout our work together.

To gather data on my research questions, I invited participating students to fill out a written pre- and post-survey about their experiences in and beliefs about the arts at their school. I also led a focus group discussion after the devising and performance process ended. I used this focus group as a process to help students analyze and synthesize their own research and ideas on arts rich schools, as well as to reflect on what they believe about the arts. I documented these focus groups via audio recording and later transcribed them for coding and analysis around my research questions. The devising process created "a dynamic embodied practice for analysis" (Thompson 152), providing written performance texts and live performance material that I documented through rich description in a field journal. Finally, I also kept detailed field notes of our work, recording my observations of the students' work and my personal experiences with the students throughout the process.

I analyzed the generated data through a process of coding for common and repeated themes, ideas, and questions, as well as any outlying ideas. While my research questions generally guided my process of coding and analyzing the data, I remained open to the possibility of new themes and ideas emerging in the data as well. After this analysis, I looked to my review of the literature to consider what student voices might add to the conversation about arts richness and the value of the arts in schools. I then returned to my questions to organize and write up my findings in this document.

ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

In the following chapters, I offer a picture of how the youth at Woodview understand and share their experiences with the arts in middle school. I then reflect on how those understandings might impact educational practices and the implementation and inclusion of the arts in schools. Chapter Two offers a review of literature on arts rich education and positions my current project in a larger research conversation about the role of the arts in education. In Chapter Three, I share the process of implementing an arts based curriculum at Woodview, including teaching daily classes and guiding the development of a new play, as well as exploring ideas such as the value of the arts, arts richness, and access to the arts. I explain the process of collaborating with the youth to create a play, share an outline of our daily work sessions, and offer reflections on how the process impacted the data collected for my research. Within these descriptions, I share the data I collected from the students, as well as how we used the arts based data to create a theatrical performance and to share and perform our research findings with an audience.

In Chapter Four, I return to the literature review in Chapter Two about arts rich education and my questions about the value of the arts for students. Researchers discuss arts richness primarily in terms of quantity, breadth, and climate, as well as some aspects of quality. In this study, I found that students in this study also expressed their ideas about arts richness through characteristics such as quantity, quality, and climate, but not necessarily breadth. I explore students' ideas about art richness through the lenses of quantity and quality by analyzing an arts based research activity focused on defining arts richness. I discuss their views on arts rich school climate by first analyzing some of our work specifically related to defining arts rich, and then move into the major themes that arose about the value of the arts. I discuss four major themes that students raised that speak to a particular climate they see as connected to the arts and possibly arts rich

schools. Specifically, the students suggested the arts help shape the climate of a school as one that supports self-expression and engaged teaching and learning, motivates students to go to school, and includes a break from core or primarily academic classes.

Finally, in the fifth chapter I reflect on my findings and discuss some of the implications of my research for educators, students, and schools. I share three key ideas I learned from the process of researching students' perspectives on the arts. First, I explain that my research led me to a more complex picture of arts richness, and that students added some depth to particular aspects of arts rich schools as theorized by scholars. Second, I reflect on the value of developing relationships in school and how the arts may assist the development of those relationships. Third, I offer my thoughts about arts based research as a process for studying and deepening understanding of arts richness. I conclude the document with thoughts for how I, and others, might move forward given the research presented here.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

CREATIVE LEARNING & ARTS RICHNESS

As discussed in Chapter One, the Austin Independent School District (AISD) passed an agreement to implement the Any Given Child Creative Learning Initiative, a ten-year plan to create an arts rich school district at all levels in Austin. In this chapter, I explore existing research around definitions of "creative learning" and "arts rich" and how that research is in conversation with the arts rich initiatives developing in AISD. I offer this literature review in order to explain the need for my study and to contextualize the findings I present in Chapter Four about students' beliefs about the value of the arts and arts rich education.

The terms "creative learning" and "arts rich" show up fairly regularly in both research and programming about improving school-based education for youth, often referring to 21st Century Skills or government reports on the benefits of creativity (e.g., See the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities 2011, Education Commission of the States 2004, Arts Education Partnership 2011, Napoli 2011). Though they appear together without distinction in the AISD proposal, I argue these terms can—and should—be individually defined and distinguished from one another. In order to create an arts rich district through creative learning, we need to understand what these terms mean and how to implement them.

In the Introduction to *Placing Students at the Heart of Creative Learning*, editor Nick Owen defines creative learning as "teaching which allows students to use their imaginations, have ideas, generate multiple possible solutions to problems, communicate in a variety of media and in general 'think outside the box'" (*x*). Owen presents similar complexities to the definition of "creative learning" as other researchers: "The notion of

creativity may be associated with particular subjects, such as those that go under the umbrella term of the arts […] Or it may be seen as integral to science […] Or it may be connected to business" (*x*). His description of creativity indicates that the term "creative learning" extends beyond the arts and into many other realms of learning and living.

In Bob Jeffrey's study "Creative Teaching and Learning: Towards a Common Discourse and Practice," ethnographic researchers compared experiences in classrooms across nine European countries to determine common characteristics of creative learning. In the foundational explanation for the study, Jeffrey cites Peter Woods's characteristics of a creative teaching pedagogy: relevance, control, ownership, and innovation (qtd. in Jeffrey 401). That is, students working within a creative learning pedagogy find content relevant to their own lives, have some control and take ownership for their own learning, and practice innovation in the classroom. To observe and better understand creative learning, the researcher/teachers in Jeffrey's study created curricular projects that included "school environment improvements and analysis; [...] computer toy constructions for major competitions; business case studies; re-enactments of social issues and local histories…" (404). While these examples might include the use of arts based instruction, nowhere does Jeffrey tie creative learning directly to the arts. Based on these descriptions, I believe creative learning is a broader phenomenon than arts based instruction. Analyzing the descriptions collected among researchers, Jeffrey explains some key characteristics of creative learning, including intellectual enquiry, engaged productivity—meaning intense time spent specifically on developing a project—and the opportunity for students to reflect and progress on process and product in their work. He writes:

> The creative in 'creative learning' means being innovative, experimental and inventive, but the learning means that young participants engage in aspects of

> knowledge enquiry. In particular, we observed a significant amount of intellectual enquiry around possibility thinking and engagement with problems. (Jeffrey 407)

Like Owen, he includes both teaching and learning in an explanation of creative learning and situates it as a process of problem solving and thinking outside of the box. In other words, it might be an overall term for teaching and learning that includes arts education, but encompasses much more than that as well.

Though the AISD program is officially called the "Creative Learning Initiative," its implementation revolves specifically around the term "arts rich." The Annual Academic and Facilities Recommendations (AAFR) Fact Sheet about the initiative states, "The goal of the Any Given Child Initiative is to provide all AISD students with the opportunity to attend arts rich schools and to ensure every child benefits from learning in a creative classroom" (2). In other words, to achieve creative learning district-wide, the program specifically targets the development of arts rich schools, raising questions for me about what an arts rich school entails. The initiative fact sheet, published and disseminated by AISD, defines it through seven elements: 1) Campus arts needs assessment, 2) Access to fine arts instruction, 3) Professional development for teachers, 4) Stronger community arts partnerships, 5) Pathways to college, career, and community, 6) Access to out-of-school time options, 7) Leadership, operations, and sustainability support (AAFR 2). Although the proposal goes on to explain a bit about each of these terms, it situates them as strategies to *achieve* arts richness; it does not provide a method for understanding what a school that has implemented these elements actually looks like. Instead of clarifying a definition of arts rich, this list raises many questions about it. For example, in looking at the sixth characteristic, I wonder: How many out of school options exists? What options are available to youth? Of what quality are the options? Who has access to them? How are they relevant to students? Given the lack of clarity in these

descriptions, I looked to educational research to understand exactly what an "arts rich school" might look like and how schools, including teachers and students, might know if and/or when they achieve the status of being "arts rich."

RESEARCHING "ARTS RICH"

To understand what "arts rich" means, I searched through educational and arts journals, as well as more general research databases, looking for the use of the term "arts rich." My search primarily revealed articles written about arts education published in government reports and educational journals and magazines, such as the Arts Education Partnership's "What School Leaders Can Do To Increase Arts Education," the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities's "Reinvesting in Arts Education," and publications from well-known researchers James Catterall, Richard Deasy, and others. Within each document I found, I searched for definitions and clarity around the term "arts rich." While I did not find a widely accepted or standardized definition, I came across many descriptions of schools or programs identified as arts rich, from which I began to draw conclusions about the various authors' beliefs about and definitions for "arts rich." In addition to challenges around defining the term, my research revealed little information regarding the origin of the term "arts rich." I found it used once before 2000 in James Catterall's research, but most of the research I discovered was written after that date. It seems it more or less emerged without clear written intention from any particular author, and usage picked up around 2004.

DEFINING "ARTS RICH"

Based on my analysis of the studies I found, I divided researchers' definitions of arts richness into four categories, which I discuss in this section. First, researchers define arts richness in terms of quantity, or number of available arts experiences at a school.

Second, I found frequent discussion of the breadth of delivery of arts experiences, or the ways in which students experience the arts at school. Third, researchers tap into positive school climate as a sign of arts richness. Finally, I address the quality of arts experiences in arts rich schools, based on one researcher's findings about how quality impacts the potential student outcomes of an arts rich education.

Quantity of Arts Experiences

Simply stated, much of the literature seems to subscribe to the idea that more art disciplines and more arts education methods mean more arts richness. In her qualitative investigation of starting an aesthetic arts education program in school, Miriam Hirsch describes an arts rich school as having "an abundance of arts resources and replete with art enthusiasts," seemingly using quantitative standards, albeit vague ones, to measure the level of arts in the environment (218). In their study on transfer between learning in the arts and other academic areas, Burton et al. differentiate arts rich and arts poor based on "the quantity of arts programming" (234). The most specific scale of arts richness in the literature exists in Catterall's analysis summary of the twelve-year long National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS). In attempting to identify outcomes for students from arts rich versus arts poor schools, Catterall creates a scale for arts richness at a school, which includes the following factors:

> Grade 10: Graduation requirements for art and music, band/orchestra available, chorus or choir available, drama club(s) available, orchestra available
>
> Grade 12: formal art department, formal music department, number of full time art faculty (ratio to English faculty), number of full time music faculty (ratio to English faculty) (Catterall 110)

Based on these factors alone, schools were classified as arts rich or arts poor. Clearly, an issue arises when only quantitative data are used to define arts richness. Catterall explains:

> A school massively infused with a dance program (or any single-focus) program, one that had students, parents, teachers, and faculty completely absorbed and that sent its graduates to Julliard […] might easily look like an arts-poor school on our homely scale. This is because they may lack a band or orchestra and a music or arts department, and have no graduation requirements in any art. (109)

Despite the problems that arise with only paying attention to quantity, currently published research tends to give it tremendous weight. Therefore, I conclude that one important aspect of defining an arts rich school lies in the quantity of arts experiences offered for students.

Breadth: Methods for Delivering Arts Experiences

In addition to considering quantity of arts opportunities, researchers generally offer three to four categories of methods for delivering arts experiences in an arts rich program, or what I consider "breadth" of arts experiences. First, and perhaps most commonly cited, many schools focus on the arts integrated into the curriculum (Ewing 24, Napoli, Hughes 46, McCarthy 22-3, PCAH 49, Burton 234). Throughout this document, I term this "arts integration" or "arts based instruction." These programs often use one or more art disciplines to enhance teaching and learning in other curricular areas (like history or English), and may include teaching artists and professional development programming in their efforts. Second, some researchers explicitly cite extracurricular arts experiences as important to creating an arts rich environment (McCarthy 23, Catterall 110). These may include drama or dance clubs, music groups outside of school, or other arts programming available through school to all students. The third tool I found in arts rich programs is direct arts instruction during school in one or more arts disciplines

(PCAH 49, Hughes 46, McCarthy 22-3, Burton 234, Catterall 110). The amount of direct arts instruction may depend on the number of faculty or departments in an area or the number of disciplines offered. Finally, the employment of teaching artists, professional or organizational partnerships, and professional development may work in tandem with any of the categories of arts integration, extracurricular arts experiences, and direct arts instruction (Ewing 24, PCAH 2, Napoli, Hughes 46, Burton 234).

As noted above, I found most of the focus in the literature on quantity and breadth in arts rich education. Based on this research, I believe an arts rich school provides a variety of arts classes and extracurricular experiences for students to take, but also implements the arts throughout the school, including in non-arts classes. It also may establish professional partnerships with local arts organizations to bring more arts experiences into the school for students. However, some researchers discuss arts richness beyond just the quantitative, defining it instead as an overall climate of the school.

School Climate

In the *Encyclopedia of School Psychology,* Camillia Lehr explains that school climate is a complex construct consisting of multiple elements, including the:

- Quality of interpersonal relations between students and teachers
- Extent to which the school is perceived as a safe and caring place
- Degree to which students, parents, and staff are involved in collaborative decision making
- Degree to which there are high expectations for student learning (471)

Like Lehr, Stephen Brand emphasizes the complexity of school climate in *Psychology of Classroom Learning: An Encyclopedia*: "no single dimension encompasses the entire domain of school climate. Rather, numerous studies suggest that a comprehensive assessment of school climate should encompass multiple dimensions" (767). These researchers both note the complexity of defining and assessing school

climate, but overall paint an image of a school in which students and teachers develop positive, supportive relationships, individuals involved care about their school and work together to make school-related decisions, and people who work and learn there perceive it as a good place to be.

According to some researchers in arts education, a particular school climate may indicate an arts rich educational environment. Catterall summarizes other researchers' investigations of arts richness with a focus on school climate: "one way to put what researchers here wonder is whether arts rich schools become truly special places where all students are more likely to have good learning experiences and to develop strong interpersonal relationships, social bonds, and values" (107). He describes "arts rich" not as a number or a value (though he utilizes both in his research later), but as an overall feeling of the environment, a larger school identity. Offering further support for his description, Catterall cites Lauren Stevenson and Richard Deasy's study titled *Third Space: When Learning Matters*. According to Stevenson and Deasy, "arts rich" serves as "a metaphor that describes the positive and supportive relationships that develop among students, teachers and the school community when they are involved in creating, performing or responding to works of art. It is the place where connections get made" (qtd. in Catterall 108). In other words, arts rich schools develop a positive, supportive school climate in which individuals make connections with one another. Burton et al. also investigate school climate in an arts rich environment (based on quantity of arts programming) and find positive correlations between in-school arts and affiliation, student support, professional interest, innovativeness, and resource adequacy, which are important dimensions of school climate (242). These researchers present arguments for specifically considering how school climate factors into a definition of arts richness.

Other authors tap into school climate indirectly in the inherent values they focus on when describing arts rich schools. They focus on two primary values when describing an arts rich program or school that reflect school climate: students and teachers. The PCAH report *Reinvesting in Arts Education* states:

> The PCAH's goal is to support a climate in American schools where all students are engaged, where they come to school and to class eager to learn, where they speak and write and solve problems with self-confidence and discipline, and where their innate gifts of creativity and innovation are nurtured and encouraged [...] We want to create schools where every student feels he or she is good at something and where all teachers feel they have the tools they need to reach their students. (55)

The students themselves live at the center of this goal, which the PCAH directly connects to creating more arts rich schools across America. Kristine Hughes cites similar hopes for students, describing programs and schools that strive for positive student outcomes like self-expression, critical thinking, and applying learning to real-world situations (45).

However, I found students are not the sole focus of individuals building and researching arts rich schools. To provide such opportunities for students, programs need educated and trained teachers. The Thriving Minds program managed by Big Thought in Dallas provided over 800 teachers in the arts based summer school program with professional development to ensure teachers could provide positive arts learning experiences for their youth (Hughes 49). The PCAH similarly strives for "teachers [to] develop new ways of working with students and collaborating with their colleagues" (55). The outcomes that Catterall describes also locate teacher morale and student-teacher relationships as important focal points of arts rich education (123). These elements play an important role in creating a positive school climate, thus leading me to believe that an arts rich school includes a positive and supportive school climate in addition to a high

quantity of arts experiences and wide breadth of arts experiences throughout the educational process.

A Question of Quality

There remains one other territory largely unexplored as it relates to a definition of "arts rich:" the *quality* of arts education. Though quantity of arts classes, breadth of delivery of arts experiences, and school climate may all characterize an arts rich school, none of these factors guarantees the quality of arts programming. However, little research actually considers the quality of programming when it addresses ideas around arts rich schools. In a summary of Anne Bamford's 2006 research on 45 case studies of arts education, Robyn Ewing notes several key findings:

- Quality arts education has distinct benefits for children's health and socio-cultural well-being.
- Quality arts education programming tends to be characterised by a strong partnership between the schools and outside arts and community organizations
- *Benefits of arts rich programs are only tangible within high quality programs*. [emphasis added] (adapted from Ewing 12)

In my findings, Bamford stands alone in addressing quality in her research on the relationship between quality arts programming and arts richness, but it seems to be an important factor that cannot be ignored any longer. Quality, then, is an important variable for further investigation in the exploration of a definition of arts richness and its implications at the middle school level.

Synthesizing a Definition

My analysis of the current literature on arts rich schools reveals important factors for consideration in defining "arts rich," such as the quantity and quality of opportunities

within and between disciplines, the breadth of arts experiences across the school, and a supportive school climate. Based on these elements, I create a working definition of "arts rich" to contextualize my own research: a school or program that utilizes multiple and varied methods—including integrated, extracurricular, and direct instruction—within multiple arts disciplines—including visual art, dance, music, and theatre—for constructing high-quality arts learning experiences for youth, creating a positive, productive school climate. While this definition does not provide a specific checklist of quantities or a scale of climate, it does offer a starting point for understanding the essential elements that characterize an arts rich school.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

Though this definition seems to describe an arts rich school, my findings raise questions about youth perspectives and representation. The research on arts rich education most often represents the point of view of external researchers and of educators themselves, but rarely considers that of students. Though data used in the studies I found include student information, the research lacks actual student voices. Questions arise for me around their lack of inclusion in the research: What do students think about the arts in schools? How do they see the value of arts rich programming? What could youth voices add to the picture of arts rich education presented in this chapter? In this study, I hope to add student voices to the conversation about arts rich programming in middle level education in order to better understand how to make arts programming in schools more relevant to and productive for young people.

This literature review both sets up the need for this study and frames my analysis of the data I collected. I began this research looking for a clearly articulated definition of "arts rich" in order to better understand the AISD initiative language, and in the process discovered a gap in the perspectives represented in the literature on arts richness. In the next chapter, I discuss the project I designed and implemented in order to help fill this gap. I also return to the research in this literature review and my synthesized definition of arts rich to frame my analysis and understanding of students' beliefs about the value of the arts and arts richness in Chapter Four.

Chapter 3: Process & Product

Chapters One and Two addressed the background and purpose of this study, the literature underlying this study, and an overview of the research methods utilized. In this chapter, I present a detailed description of the curriculum I implemented in the classroom throughout the course of the project, as well as a description of the final performance that the youth shared for an invited audience. As discussed in chapter 1, arts based research leads to a data set that, in this study, offers multiple and varied interpretations of definitions of arts richness and the value of the arts. In order to contextualize the data, therefore, I offer a basic overview of the arts based devising process in which the students engaged. Additionally, my own biases and interests as a researcher guided the curricular development of our practical theatre and performance work; of hundreds of topics we could cover or activities we could do, I selected a particular subset of them in an attempt to develop understandings of and responses to my research questions about arts rich schools. Therefore, in the interest of transparency as a researcher and the potential for others to pursue the findings from this study further, I present a picture of the overall process here.

My Values and Pedagogy at Play

I entered the process with a certain set of beliefs and values that informed the choices I made throughout our work. As a teacher, I first and foremost dedicate myself to creating a positive and healthy classroom environment in which students feel safe to take risks and share their own beliefs. I believe this goal not only allows students to make bold choices in the context of a theatre classroom, but also helps me to establish a constructivist learning environment. Constructivism did not emerge as the product of one theorist or teacher, but as the sum of many. Jeffrey Wilhelm explains that "all knowledge

is socially and culturally constructed […] Culture provides us with ways of perceiving and knowing, and with tools or procedures for doing things" (26). In other words, students and teacher construct knowledge and meaning based on their cultural and social contexts; thus, I as the teacher also inform the way students learn in the particular tools or procedures I choose to implement in the learning and teaching process. I also subscribe to Lev Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as a framework for allowing students to grow increasingly knowledgeable and independent in their learning. The ZPD is that zone of learning just beyond what the learner is capable of doing him or herself but can do with assistance (Wilhelm 26). By scaffolding lessons and learning activities with sequentially more challenging learning opportunities, the learner builds on his or her prior experience to grow in knowledge and ability.

Additionally, I teach based on the pedagogical theories Paulo Freire puts forth in his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He too taps into ideas of constructivism, refuting the "banking method" of education in which a teacher deposits knowledge into students to be recalled upon request (53). Instead, he proposes, "Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (53). They are co-learners together in the classroom. Freire also argues for critical consciousness, a process in which "learners develop a deeper understanding of the forces operating to shape their lives and their capacity to act in ways to change that reality" (Smyth 140). In teaching and learning for critical consciousness, students become aware of the larger context of their lives and the particular circumstances that shape their knowledge and perception of the world around them. All of these theories directly inform the pedagogy and practice I brought into this project that I strive to make visible in this chapter.

CURRICULAR STRUCTURE

Playbuilding

As I mentioned in Chapter One, I specifically pursued playbuilding in this project, a form of arts based research. In his book *Playbuilding as Qualitative Research*, Joe Norris explains that

> In Playbuilding, as in a focus group […] a team of actors/researchers/teachers are assembled to discuss a topic of mutual concern […] However, unlike most focus groups in which the participants consider themselves solely as data sources, with Playbuilding, they are collaborators who play an active role in the writing and the performing of the data. (22)

In other words, playbuilding invites the research participants into the entire process, including them in the generation, analysis, and dissemination of the data. Like Eisner and Barone argue about arts based research, Norris suggests that "Although participant voices are sought, they are neither affirmed nor denied. Rather, the discussions move into a quest for greater understanding […] it is a collective lived-experience of meaning-making in flux" (34). I believe that playbuilding thus proves a research method well suited for constructivist pedagogy.

No single method for playbuilding exists, but instead an artist/teacher may develop a process based on many different strategies and drama-based activities. Norris goes on to present a number of methods for actively engaging participants and research in all three of these stages of the playbuilding/research process, drama activities that I used frequently in my own research. The result of such work is typically a performance or scene that invites dialogue with an audience. My particular choices in this project combined my own prior experience in playbuilding activities with those that artist/scholars like Joe Norris and Will Weigler, author of *Strategies for Playbuilding,*

utilize in their own work, like improvised scenes, guided imagery, frozen images, and teacher-in-role.

The theatre unit in our classroom included ten ninety-minute class periods leading up to the final performance date (session eleven) and a reflection period (session twelve), as outlined in Table 1. Following a standard lesson planning format (see Appendix A for examples), I developed six sessions for exploration and development of ideas, followed by four sessions to rehearse the devised piece before the public performance. The sessions each focused on specific questions related to students' experiences with the arts and used drama-based activities, such as tableaux, teacher-in-role, guided imagery, and scene development, to explore those questions. Here I break down the exploratory sections of our unit in detail. In each section of this chapter, I first contextualize the guiding questions or research goals for the lesson, followed by an explanation of the activities of the day and concluding with the type of data collected and how it relates to the present study.

	Topic	**Guiding Questions**	**Learning & Research Activities**
1	Ensemble, Personal Story, Defining the arts	• What experiences do we have in the arts? • What do the arts look like where we come from? What are the arts?	• Group Juggle (name game) • The Truth About Me (ensemble building) • Pre-Survey Admin • Project Intro • Brainstorm around "Arts" • Share personal story connected to brainstorm

Table 1: Outline of the curriculum plan.

2	Arts rich vs. arts poor	• What do the words "rich" and "poor" mean? • What do "arts rich" and "arts poor" mean? How do these terms relate—or not—to being rich or poor? • What does it take to get from poor to rich?	• Statues of words "rich" and "poor." Record big ideas on board. • Discuss arts rich and arts poor • Tableaux of arts rich and arts poor • Real and ideal image structure to move from arts poor tableaux to arts rich tableaux- but how to get there with dialogue
3	Value from the arts	• What value do we get from the arts? • What is a day like without the arts?	• Brainstorm ways we interact with the arts at school • Guided imagery- Imagine if all of those things were gone. • Write scenes of a day without the arts at middle school • Share scenes
4	Defining the arts and their stakeholders	• What would equity of the arts look like between schools? • How do we push for equity in arts access in an inequitable system?	• Introduce "equity" • Create a list of all the people at Woodview who might have a stake in a school and create characters based on those • Town hall meeting to debate how to increase equity of arts access in town between two schools (imaginary) • Letter to the editor • Committee proposals for improvement
5	Big Ideas So Far, Preparing Interviews	• What have we created so far, and what does it say about the arts? • What do we want to tell others about the arts? • What do we want to know from other students about our research?	• Artistic Inventory & Major Themes • Prepare interviews • Rehearse interviews

Table 1: Outline of the curriculum plan.

6	Student interviews	• What are other Woodview students' experiences of the arts? • What are current trends and attitudes in school systems toward arts programming? • How do we advocate for the arts given those current trends?	• Interview other students about how they see the arts at Woodview • Read recent news articles about the arts, write headlines for them • Ritual: extra, extra (to share headlines) • Stories & headlines
7	Reading script, Assessing our work so far, filling in holes	• What are we saying about the arts? What are we not saying? What do we want to add to our piece that we want others to know?	• Read through script • Review group pieces and write out complete texts for each
8	Putting it all together	• Develop and rehearse the performance of our research	• Rehearse the pieces in the performance in groups
9	Putting it all together	• Develop and rehearse the performance of our research	• Rehearse performance in groups, create any props/costumes/additions needed
10	Final rehearsal	• Rehearse the performance of our research	• Final dress rehearsal
11	Performance	• Share performance • Reflect with the audience on the performance	• Warm up • Perform • Guided reflection with audience
12	Reflection	• Reflect on the process of research and creating a performance • Explore and discuss the big ideas we learned about the value of the arts at Woodview	• Final survey administration and group discussion

Table 1: Outline of the curriculum plan.

Session 1: Defining the Arts

The primary research question that directed the development of the early sessions was, "What do students believe about the value of the arts in middle school?" Guiding questions for this first session specifically included: What experiences do we have in the arts? What do the arts look like where we come from? During this first session, I spent time leading ensemble-building activities in order to garner trust and a collaborative spirit with and within the group of students. Ms. Hatcher, their regular classroom teacher, did the same at the beginning of the year, and I found the students generally open, enthusiastic, and participatory (though of course, a few students proved exceptions to this generalization). We played several activities that invited students' personal experiences into the room and allowed us to get to know each other better. Norris explains the importance of this stage of the process: "Trust is vital in any process of co-creation, and, since all participants are stakeholders, a respect for one another's position is vital. As director/researcher, one of my duties is to set the tone of our work" (23). Thus, I dedicated my first work with the students to establishing an initial level of trust and respect on which we could build throughout our process.

In the second part of the lesson, I introduced the idea of devising theatre to the students and led some brainstorming and storytelling activities to flesh out an understanding of how the students defined the arts. The students wrote words they associated with the term "Arts" on small sticky notes and stuck them to the board. Interestingly, students' individual word associations with "Arts" primarily focused on naming specific types or categories of art—i.e. visual art, drama, choir, graphic design, band, dance, culinary arts, etc. They then divided into groups and each group selected one word from the class brainstorm and told personal stories related to that word. They shared their stories first with their small groups and then each group chose one story to share

with the class. For example, one student told a story related to the term "theatre" about participating in a drama activity to understand a historical time period in a history class.

The activities performed in this session did not directly translate into the script, though similar activities that we repeated later in the process did. However, the data collected provided an important foundation for understanding students' definitions of the arts and priming them to talk more deeply about complex concepts related to the value of the arts. The students impressed me with the range of types of art they named, especially considering their age. (I worked with several high school students in a very different context just a few weeks prior to this process who, when asked about what the "arts" mean to them, suggested only visual art.) I structured the next few sessions to explore some deeper questions about the value of the arts.

Session 2: Arts Rich vs. Arts Poor

As discussed in prior chapters, the terms "arts rich" and "arts poor" appear frequently in the literature about arts programming in schools. Because one of my goals in this study included adding student voices to the conversation on arts richness, I introduced the terms "arts rich" and "arts poor" to the students to gather their thoughts on the words and their implied meanings. Guiding questions for this session included: What do the words "rich" and "poor" mean? What do "arts rich" and "arts poor" mean? How do these terms relate—or not—to being rich or poor? What does it take to get from arts poor to arts rich? These questions primarily worked to understand how students view the value of the arts in relationship to researchers and educators, responding to both the first and second research questions in this study.

During this second session, we first explored the meanings of "rich" and "poor" by making statues (individual frozen images students make with their bodies) to represent

those words and reflected on the images we saw in others' statues. We then expanded those terms to "arts rich" and "arts poor" and created statues in a similar manner. Students responded to all of these statues by sharing words and phrases the statues inspired. After discussing some of the complexities of these ideas, we broke into groups and each group created a series of tableaux (group frozen images made with the body), creating image sequences to represent how a school might move from arts poor to arts rich. We concluded with a group discussion about the image sequences they created and other ideas they had for how a school might transition from arts poor to arts rich.

Interestingly, the phrases the students shared in response to the images and our discussion afterward focused both on quality of the arts, or how good they were, and on quantity, or how many programs a school has. Another important through line of the research emerged on this day as well: the importance of money to arts programs in schools. When I asked how students suggest schools could move from arts poor to arts rich, many of them named funding as a tool for making such a transition, either by buying more materials for arts programs or hiring staff who could develop such programs in schools. This conversation about the value of money to school programs continued throughout the rest of the project and became a theme of the performance as well.

Session 3: A Day Without the Arts

By this point in the process, I realized the students had a much more developed understanding of the arts than I had originally expected and seemed quite positive about their experiences. They did not tap into the potential conflicts that might arise in conversation about the arts in schools in our first sessions; I needed to introduce more potential for conflict in our discussions. We were, after all, developing a drama for performance. Additionally, I wondered how much perspective the students had on their

own experience, as well as the experiences of other youth at Woodview or at other schools without access to the arts. Did they realize how much exposure they had to the arts compared to many other students at other schools? I structured this session in response to my questions about conflict and perspective, inviting students to imagine a day in which they had no arts. Guiding questions for this session included: What value do we get from the arts? What is a day like without the arts?

I first invited the students to brainstorm all of the ways in which they notice or interact with the arts during the school day, writing a list of their ideas on the board. I then led them through a guided visualization to imagine that all of the things on their list had disappeared. I asked them to close their eyes and to imagine that they showed up to school and the arts were gone. Based on this visualization, they worked in small groups to develop scenes about a day without the arts in middle school. Two groups created newscasts in which reporters covered the disappearance of the arts at school and the tearing down of the fine arts buildings at Woodview. The other two groups developed scenes either with or without a narrator. One of the scenes showed a boy who arrived to school to discover no arts, so he left and went to the grocery store across the street. The school officer found him there and called his mother to take him home, where he was punished. The students ended the scene explaining that it all could have been prevented if the school had fine arts. The other scene depicted a student asking a teacher for projects in class instead of worksheets. The teacher sent him to the principal's office for giving him attitude, and when the student's parent arrived, she questioned the principal about why the school has no arts.

Each of the scenes developed in this session transferred directly into the final performance script and provided a key source of arts based data as I sought to gain understanding around my research questions. A number of core ideas for the script

emerged from this session, including the need for money to support arts programs and how the arts help motivate students to attend school. Several of the scenes featured students who either left school or caused problems in the classroom because they were bored without the arts. I noticed throughout the creative process that the students infrequently talked about the integration of the arts into core classes, but these particular scenes featured it in a student's request for projects. The two newscast groups interviewed students, parents, and teachers within their scenes and presented ideas that the arts were a fun "break from the core classes" that kept students engaged and interested in school.

Session 4: Equity of Arts Access

Even with the various dramatic conflicts presented in the scenes from session three, the students did not discuss or raise one of the major challenges that inevitably relates to arts rich schools: equity of arts access. Equity was a particularly apropos topic given that the Kennedy Center's Any Given Child initiative completed an arts equity study of Austin shortly before the city adopted the ten year Creative Learning Initiative currently underway (Austin ISD, "Kennedy Center Audit"). Particularly given the students' interest in funding, in this session, I brought up the issue of equity to the students in order to explore how they perceived students' access to arts programs, as well as opportunities to address inequitable experiences and access among students. Guiding questions for this session included: What would equitable access to the arts look like between schools and among youth in the same school? How do we push for equity in arts access in an inequitable system?

In this session, I created an imaginary town, Smithville, which supported two schools, one of which had many arts programs and one of which had few. We imagined

all the stakeholders who might have an interest in the two schools in Smithville, and the students developed characters based on those stakeholders. In role as the mayor of the town, I gathered them together to discuss how we might create more equitable access to the arts for the students of all the schools. As mayor, I proposed taking some of the arts from one school to support more arts at the other. We discussed a number of the pros and cons of such a plan. Many of the students, in role, disagreed with the plan regardless of which school they chose to support, claiming that everyone should have as many arts as possible. Following further discussion about the issue, the students switched roles and became members of educational consulting firms. I challenged the students to develop a plan to increase arts equity in Smithville at large. They presented their plans in groups, and several of the proposals transferred directly into the script for their final performance.

I shifted the activities during this session slightly away from the original research questions surrounding the value of the arts to middle school students. I moved to issues that invited more conflicting points of view, like how to give all students access to the arts. Students developed a number of ideas during this session for "saving Smithville schools," as they put it, some of which might apply to an actual district context better than others. As the mayor of the town, I worked to steer the group away from seemingly simple or "magic" solutions to the problem. As they suggested the need more for funding to achieve equity, I claimed the government was broke and proposed that we needed more creative solutions on the table or ideas for earning the funds. The students' solutions primarily focused on fundraisers, including bake sales, arts festivals, carnivals, and the like. One group in particular, however, thought more broadly. They proposed training teachers school-wide in arts techniques (though they did not clarify how these would be used) and inviting teachers from the arts rich school to "help" teachers from the arts poor school. With this proposed solution, they again sought new resources while

positioning arts rich schools and teachers in a position of power—to share resources, teach the less fortunate, and make change.

In reflecting on this particular session, I realized some interesting assumptions that the students and I made regarding the power and systems at play, especially in this particular proposal. As I stated above, most of the proposals focused on raising funds through methods the students may be familiar with from personal experience at school, like bake sales and carnivals. However, in this last group's positioning of the arts-rich school above the arts-poor school, they give tremendous power and status to those teachers at the arts-rich school because of their access to the arts. This privileging of the arts may represent the students' own privileged experience with having many arts in school. While facilitating the lesson, I was excited to see a group thinking beyond fundraising, and did not necessarily consider the representations of power illustrated in this performance. However, in reflection, their work also raises questions for me about the ways in which they understand equity and how power and privilege affect those understandings.

Session 5: Synthesizing Our Work

By session five, the students developed a large array of artistic work, and thus research data. I worked with the students during this session to synthesize the big ideas we discovered throughout the process, to understand exactly what they wanted to share with an invited audience of adults, and to prepare questions for interviewing other students at the school. Guiding questions for this session included: What have we created so far, and what does it say about the arts? What do we want to tell students, teachers, and administrators at our school about the arts? What do we want to know from other students about our research?

We began the day by developing a list of the dramatic pieces and written texts we created in the first four sessions, as well as their major themes or messages. I also asked the students what they wanted an audience to know about the arts in middle school that had not come up in our work so far. We posed these lists side by side to compare what students wanted an audience to know or understand and the messages our work delivered thus far (see Table 2). These lists provided a foundation for developing interview questions in the second part of the session, and I also used the list of messages students hoped to share in creating the first draft of the script to make sure I represented the students' interests and beliefs as closely as possible.

Messages Students Want to Share	**Messages of Work from Sessions 1-4**
We enjoy the arts	We can't live without the arts
Arts can help teach arts and non-arts	All schools should have the arts
Arts classes are our time to express ourselves and share ideas	When you have arts, you don't want to share them or can't share them
The arts can help us choose a career • More jobs are open (i.e. architecture, designers- you know about more options) • Skills translate (i.e. projection and enunciation important beyond theatre)	Arts are a time to express ourselves
Schools need money for more than just arts	The classroom teacher brought up money, the issue of needing money to fund arts programs
Kids want to come to school with the arts	
School is boring without the arts, Arts make school less depressing	

Table 2: Messages of our work as of Session 5.

In the hopes of including more voices beyond the arts classroom at Woodview, I worked with Ms. Hatcher to find another classroom outside the arts program whose

students might participate in some way in the project and/or performance. Ultimately, the theatre students interviewed other students at Woodview during session six, so we spent the remainder of this session preparing interview questions to use the next class. Considering the inventory of important messages in our work, we discussed what questions we might ask other students at the school about their experiences in the arts. I asked students what they wanted to know from other students, and we created a list of interview questions to ask in order to gain further perspective on the topics we addressed like arts richness and the value of the arts (see Appendix B for Interview Questionnaire). They practiced interviewing each other and refined the questions they asked in the process. Before the next session, I created an interview question sheet for my students to use as a guide and record when interviewing the other class.

Session 6: Seeking New Voices

In addition to including other voices within the school, I continued to search for ways to introduce more "drama" or tension into our developing script. I decided to challenge students' perspectives on the value of the arts by presenting them with alternative beliefs from current events and news outlets. This choice served to provide further conflict in our work, but also tapped into Freire's theory of critical consciousness. By presenting the students with articles from current events, I worked to historicize their own understanding of the arts within the greater context of their world. I also pushed them into their zone of proximal development by challenging them to think more deeply about their perspectives on the arts in a larger context than their own school. Guiding questions for this session included: What are other Woodview students' experiences of the arts? What are current trends and attitudes in school systems toward arts programming? How do we advocate for the arts given those current trends?

As indicated above, I divided this session into two parts. During the first half of class, the students in the theatre class conducted interviews about the value of the arts with the students in a science class at Woodview. The student interviewers used the interview form I created based on session five to collect data from the science students about their experiences in and beliefs about the arts at Woodview. Their questions focused largely on how the interviewees viewed the value of the arts and their own personal experiences in the arts. Though our intentions were good and many of the interviewers tried to get answers from their interviewees, the data collected during this activity proved slim for two primary reasons. First, some of the interviewees did not provide details—or sometimes any response at all—to the interviewers' questions. Second, and perhaps more importantly, many of the theatre students did not take particularly detailed notes during the interview despite our conversation beforehand about doing so. Though they wrote down some key ideas, they did not record the conversation thoroughly enough for an outside reader to understand the content. Because I packed this session with several other activities, we did not spend a great deal of time processing or creating work based on the interviews. I relied on myself instead to incorporate the interviews into the script. Therefore, little of the interview data proved usable for the performance or for my analysis in the thesis writing process.

In the second part of the session, I introduced the students to five different articles from recent news that addressed the arts in schools. Each of the articles presented various arguments against or critiques of arts programming.[3] For example, one news article explained that increasing arts programs in schools caused higher taxes for local residents, while another reviewed legislation that did not pass, which would have allowed for

[3] For purposes of time and readability during the session, I cut several of the articles slightly to one page in length, trying to remain true to the main idea of each article. The articles are listed in References. See Bridgman, Evans, Loveland, Roza, and Weldon.

building more fine arts facilities in Austin school districts. The students analyzed the articles through reading them and writing down their main ideas, then wrote headlines for them in their own words. These headlines became text for the performance and the students positioned each headline as an argument against the arts.

Sessions 7-10: Rehearsal

A school break took place between sessions 6 and 7, and during this time I used the list of ideas that students wanted an audience to understand to put together a draft of the script for performance. When we returned to school, the students read through the script and offered their feedback, all of which was positive. We dedicated the next four sessions to crafting the performance and rehearsing the pieces developed in prior classes. I primarily directed the development of the performance with some assistance from Ms. Hatcher. We first returned to each performance piece from earlier sessions that I included through general description in the script (e.g. "News Report on a Day Without the Arts"), and the students wrote structured, specific scripts for each one. Students worked in their scene groups on their pieces and Ms. Hatcher and I helped refine their performances, working on artistic skills like projection, character, and expression. Two guest directors, graduate students at the University of Texas, came into class to assist as well, offering an outside eye to look at the performance and new voices for the students to hear.

CULMINATING PERFORMANCE

On the eleventh day of the unit, we shared the performance for an audience of about thirty-five guests. The audience members included a number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Texas, Woodview administrators, and parents of the students in the class. Before the audience arrived, I set up an engagement activity outside the classroom in which guests were invited to draw or write about a memory they

had of a positive experience in the arts. Before the performance began, each student asked an audience member for his or her paper and hung it up on the board in the classroom. Though I initially hoped to include these stories somehow in the performance, we did not have time during our process to work out how we might incorporate them. Therefore, we did not return to these stories or moments directly during the performance, but they provided a starting place for the audience to begin engaging in the content of our work.

The students performed with ease and energy. They entered the stage with a strong presence, standing tall and focusing on the audience. They delivered their lines clearly and loud enough for the audience to hear, while remaining attentive to their action within the script. The script and the performance included various elements of our work together. We pieced together scenes, frozen images, headlines, and written responses to prompts about the arts into a collaged theatre piece (see Appendix C for the complete script). The performance opened with students sharing single lines of stories with the audience about personal experiences they had in the arts. Their mini-monologues were suddenly interrupted by reporters yelling headlines about challenges to the arts in schools (like funding or a need to focus on testing). The audience then saw a news report about the disappearance of the arts at Woodview Middle School. Within the context of the news report, the students presented two of their scenes about a day without the arts. Next, the students presented a movement and word collage exploring the words "poor," "rich," "arts poor," and "arts rich." An actor said "poor," and the other actors on stage moved into a statue of the word. They repeated the same actions with the other words mentioned above. The performance then shifted to an exploration of equity issues, and the audience viewed a portion of the Smithville town meeting, followed by two advocacy groups' presentations of ideas for improving equity in access to the arts. Finally, the piece

concluded with a choral poem in which students fill in the phrases "the arts are…" and "the arts because…" with responses like "the arts are a place to be free, an important thing to us, fun" and "the arts because they help us learn, they let us be us, they influence us deeply" (*The Arts at Woodview)*. At the end of the poem, one student began telling a story to another and then other students joined in, sharing their personal stories with each other as they left the stage.

After the performance, the students and the audience engaged in a short discussion about the process and product. I asked the audience for memorable moments or ideas that stuck out to them from the performance and then offered an opportunity for audience questions for the students. I explore this conversation in more detail in the analysis in Chapter Four.

Chapter 4: Findings

Methods for Analysis

As discussed in the first chapter, I approached data analysis through modified grounded theory. In his book *Research Design*, John Creswell explains that grounded theory "is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants" (13). He later explains the process of analyzing data in grounded theory research as a series of steps, which include identifying categories of information from the data, selecting one category and positioning it within a theoretical model, and then developing an understanding of relationships between the categories of data (184). In my process, I analyzed my data by considering my research questions and also remaining open to codes or categories that might arise beyond my specific research questions.

The data set that I analyzed included the script for the performance, pre- and post-surveys the students filled out asking about their experiences in the arts and beliefs about the importance of the arts in school, the transcript of the post-show discussion with audience members, my detailed field notes from throughout the process of working with the students, and a transcript of a group discussion with students after the creative process ended. To analyze the data set, I followed the guidelines Johnny Saldaña offers in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. He classifies coding methods into two cycles:

> First Cycle methods are those processes that happen during the initial coding of data […] Second Cycle methods are a bit more challenging because they require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building. (58)

As he explains them, Saldaña's coding cycles more or less mirror Creswell's explanation of the grounded theory process of analysis, and I followed them in order to organize and analyze the data I collected in this project.

With the entire data set at hand, I analyzed each document with eclectic coding, a process of analyzing the data which "employs a select and compatible combination of two or more First Cycle coding methods" (Saldaña 188). In this case, I primarily utilized a combination of Structural Coding, Holistic Coding, and Descriptive Coding. Saldaña explains that Structural Coding is a method of applying a "content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question…" (84). In other words, I assigned a term or phrase to a section of data in order to categorize the content, based on my research questions. I followed a similar procedure in Holistic Coding except that my assigned codes did not necessarily follow a specific research question; instead I responded to the data on the page without necessarily considering the questions guiding my study. Finally, using Descriptive Coding, I assigned a word or short phrase to a section of data but based the code on the *topic* of the data, such as "arts poor," as opposed to its content or meaning (Saldaña 88). After developing and applying these codes from and to the data, I moved into second cycle coding and analysis by exploring possible categories and themes related to the codes and of the analytic memos written with them. This stage of the process led me to the analysis I present in this chapter, addressing the first two of my research questions: 1) What do students believe about the value of the arts in middle school? 2) How do student perspectives on the arts relate to researcher and educator perspectives on the arts in schools?

A Return to the Literature

In Chapter Two, I researched definitions of arts richness and found that researchers characterize arts rich schools by quantity of arts experiences offered, the breadth of delivery of arts experiences, the school climate, and the quality of the arts programming. Based on these findings, I developed a working definition of arts rich that reads:

> A school or program that utilizes multiple and varied methods—including integration, extracurricular, and direct instruction—within multiple arts disciplines—including visual art, dance, music, and theatre—for constructing high-quality arts learning experiences for youth, creating a positive, productive school climate.

In my analysis of the data in my study, I found the students' beliefs generally in agreement with this definition. Students and researchers both tap into quantity, quality, and school climate when discussing arts rich schools and the value of the arts. The students primarily shared a number of ideas in relation to school climate and the arts, ideas that might offer different perspective or more depth to the current literature. However, the students I worked with did not discuss breadth of programs in the same way as researchers did in the literature. Though students recognized the arts implemented in other areas of the school, I categorized this data under school climate due to the ways students talked about their teaching and learning experiences (discussed in more detail later in the chapter). In the following sections, I address each of the three primary attributes of arts rich schools that students name and what youth voices might add to the conversation in research about arts rich education.

Quantity

Students and researchers speak about quantity in similar ways when discussing arts richness and the value of the arts. That is, the youth in my study shared that the

number and variety of arts classes offered at school matters to them. One of the sessions I conducted made this theme particularly clear. The students and I spent a class developing some performance work about defining arts rich and arts poor, and how a school might move from arts poor to arts rich. Most of this work took place during the second and third sessions as described in Chapter Three. On that day, the students and I first discussed the words "poor" and "rich" and students created statues with their bodies to illustrate those words. We then repeated the process for "arts poor" and "arts rich." I asked the audience of other students in the class to describe what they saw or what they thought of in response to each set of statues. In describing "arts poor," students responded with phrases like "school has no arts programs," "very few options," and "not very big." One of the responses to the arts rich statues was "many options for classes" (Hearn). Using language like "no," "few," and "not big," these phrases focus on the number of arts opportunities students have at school.

Students shared these types of descriptions in discussion and performance throughout the project. For example, later during that class, I asked the students to share with me what they thought an "arts rich school" was. I reflected on one student's response in my field notes: "One student who really engaged in the idea of ['arts rich'] being a description of schools said ['arts rich'] probably refer[s] to schools with lots of arts programs and schools without—again tapping into quantity […]" (Hearn). Illustrating their belief in the importance of having a variety of options, students also infused multiple art forms into their performances throughout our work together. When we created frozen images or when I asked students to write about a personal experience in the arts, they often created artistic work representing varied art forms, including dance, theatre, visual art, and music. Though we primarily worked through drama, the students

included other art forms in the work they developed, demonstrating to me that they have interest in experiencing and creating in a variety of arts.

This theme again became particularly clear to me in one of the post-performance discussions I had with the students. I asked them what advice they would offer a principal or administrator who wanted to develop better arts programming at his or her school. Several students suggested offering a lot of class options from which students might choose. I believe this advice reflects the students' valuing of quantity of arts opportunities available to them in school. The students' focus on quantity and a variety of arts experiences reflects researchers' perspectives on quantity. Both discuss this subject in terms of the number of opportunities within and between art forms available for students at school. The youth I worked with do not necessarily offer new ideas here, but their perspectives seem to reinforce and provide further support for the use of quantitative measures in understanding arts richness.

QUALITY

In Chapter Two, I discussed one reference to quality I found in the research on arts richness. In a 2006 study, Anne Bamford found that the potential effects of attending an arts rich school only occur within high-quality arts programs. I found few other scholars who contribute to this conversation about quality in arts rich programs. However, some scholars do address quality in arts education in general, such as Steve Seidel et al. in the 2009 publication *The Qualities of Quality*. Seidel et al. found that quality arts education looks different across contexts, but often serves multiple purposes within the classroom to provide "rich and complex learning experiences" (IV). Additionally, their research suggests that practitioners in the United States view quality through four different lenses, including learning, pedagogy, community dynamics, and

environment (IV). While their research does not specifically address arts rich programming, I share their findings here to help frame my own research in the context of current scholarship. In my study, the students suggested the importance of quality in understanding the value of the arts and a picture of arts richness. Similar to Seidel et al., the students discussed quality through lenses of learning, pedagogy, and artistry.

Many students focused on learning and pedagogy as elements of quality in arts education. In the same activity I discussed above in the section on quantity, students discussed arts rich schools using language like "good program," "really good at it," and "great classes, great school" (Hearn). In this lesson I did not pursue clarification on what exactly they meant when they said "good" or "great," but this language suggests that they think about quality in their educational programming. Similarly, throughout our process, whether part of a specific activity or in conversation before or after class, I found that students regularly talked about good and bad teachers or good and bad classes. Words like "good" and "bad" are qualitative in nature; in making these comments, students demonstrate perception of the quality, or how good or bad their educational experiences are. One more specific example arose during the session on equity of arts access. In one team's proposal for increasing equity of access to the arts in Smithville, they recommended training teachers in how to use the arts in school across the curriculum. They suggested experienced teachers who understand teaching in the arts share their knowledge with those who do not. I believe this example demonstrates that students see trained teachers as a marker of quality; they do not suggest that teachers just teach with the arts, but that they *learn* how to do so well.

The students also created artistic work that illustrated their beliefs about what a high-quality arts rich education looks like. In one of the scenes on a day without the arts, a teacher began a history lesson telling students they would now work on worksheets; he

spoke in a monotone voice with a bored expression on his face. A student raised his hand to ask to do projects, but the teacher said no because the school had no arts. The student argued back eagerly with the teacher, at which point the teacher angrily took him to the principal's office for punishment. I believe this scene illustrates students' belief that project-based learning is a part of high quality educational experiences. When the student requested the project, he looked eager to try something new by leaning forward with his body and engaging the teacher directly. He *wanted* to do a project in class to learn about the material they covered instead of a worksheet, which he treated with a tone of annoyance. The students here valued project-based learning over the worksheet. Interestingly, this scene developed in response to the question, "what does a day look like without the arts?" Later in the scene, the principal explains that they cannot do projects because the school has no arts. The students may therefore associate the arts with project-based learning, an element of the larger umbrella of creative learning as discussed in Chapter Two. This scene represents several other works the students developed that illustrated engaged, active learning and teaching in the classroom. Thus, I conclude that students believe one aspect of high quality arts rich programs is active and/or project-based learning in the classroom.

In addition to quality of the educational experiences, students also thought about the quality of the artwork or artistry produced in an arts rich environment. One example comes from a series of frozen images a group of students created to illustrate moving from "arts poor" to "arts rich." The series of images illustrated two artists first lying on the floor with people surrounding them telling them how bad their art was or ignoring them entirely. As the images transitioned, the group around the artists began to pay attention to their work and then gave them a lot of money. In the final image, the artists stood tall, showing off their work while the surrounding people complimented them. The

students did not indicate whether the artists in the image series were students in school or not. However, their images made me think about how quality in an arts rich program may tie not only to the teaching and education the program provides, but to the artistry produced by teachers and/or students. When the surrounding people turned toward the artists and gave them their attention, the expressions on their faces changed from disgust or boredom to interest and kindness. They smiled at the artists and directed their bodies toward them, offering money and praise in response to their work. The artists stood tall by the end of the piece and displayed their artwork in their arms, looking at the people surrounding them. This image demonstrated pride in their own work and others giving rewards for it. Interestingly, this image sequence illustrates external rewards and/or recognition as a maker of quality in arts rich programs, a dimension largely untouched in the research on arts richness. This perspective on quality of artistry, particularly as it relates to external reward, provides a different perspective for consideration in the literature on arts richness.

In the larger context of my study, the students focused more on other topics, like school climate, than on quality. In this respect, the students somewhat resemble researchers who also focus on other aspects of arts richness more so than quality. However, the youth offered some perspective to understanding what quality might mean in an arts rich educational program that in some ways looks similar to the way Seidel et al. theorize quality in arts education in general. The students discussed quality of learning and pedagogy, illustrating trained teachers and project-based learning as two markers of quality. They also brought up the receipt of external recognition or reward for artistry as a marker of quality of arts rich programs. Though defining quality more specifically moves beyond the reach of my study, this finding raises questions about defining quality in the arts and the difference in quality in an arts rich school versus a non-arts rich school.

Further questions to explore include: How does quality differ in an arts rich context from a non-arts rich context? What dimensions of quality define an arts rich program?

SCHOOL CLIMATE

The students in my study focused largely on dimensions of school climate when describing their beliefs about arts richness or the general value of arts. In the literature review in Chapter Two, I found that researchers such as Catterall, Burton et al., and Stevenson and Deasy talk about school climate in arts rich schools by discussing an overall "feeling" of a school. They also address specific elements of climate, including interpersonal relationships, good learning experiences, and community/school identity. I found that youth in this study not only reinforced this part of the scholarly conversation, but deepened my understanding of school climate and arts richness by discussing other elements for consideration in thinking about school climate and arts rich schools.

Throughout our work together, I noted ways that this project and the arts in general related to a particular classroom culture or school spirit. In the final performance, the students ended the piece performing a choral poem as a group: "The arts because… we love them […] because they influence us deeply. We need them. We need them" (*The Arts at Woodview)*. Several students then began telling personal stories of experiences in the arts to their peers on stage, concluding the piece with an overlapping collage of stories and voices. In this moment, I saw the students connect on a personal level with the audience and with each other about and through the arts. They stood tall and faced the audience, sharing their personal stories for a room of strangers. They made eye contact with one another and smiled. They walked across the stage eagerly in small groups, expressing positive feelings about their experiences. In these images, I, as an audience member, witnessed a group of students caring for one another and taking pride in their

stories, their theatre group, and their school. This piece of the performance reflected a positive classroom and/or school climate in which students support and care for one another. This moment of the performance also reflects my general experience in the classroom during the process. For the most part, students shared ideas and listened to others, actively participated in the creative process of developing a performance with me, and demonstrated respect toward each other and me each day. These elements all contributed to a positive classroom climate.

In this vein, student surveys also noted ways in which the arts correlate to a positive and productive climate at Woodview. Responding to "Do you think the arts play an important role at Woodview as a whole school?" students wrote: "Yes because it is one of the many reasons why Woodview is such a special and individual school and makes us who we are," and "Yes, because it can give kids a time to do what they really love to do and not just what you have to. It makes our school different" (Surveys). For several students in this group, the arts not only have personal value, but they help develop a culture in which students see themselves and their school as special and unique. These comments point to an important way the arts may help engage students individually and collectively in a school setting. I want to note that while these connections are correlations, however, they do not necessarily indicate causality. In other words, the arts may in fact help develop a positive school climate, but the reverse is also possible. Perhaps schools need a particular pre-established positive school climate in order to develop an arts rich program. My research does not support one pathway over the other, but instead proposes the possibility that school climate and arts rich programs interrelate.

Beyond these general accounts of positive school climate, I found that the students discussed the value of the arts in specific ways that add to the research and deepen my own understanding of school climate in an arts rich environment. Students

offered four elements for consideration in thinking about school climate, including having opportunities for self-expression, fun and engaged teaching and learning, motivation to attend and engagement in school, and having a break from "core classes." In the rest of the chapter, I discuss these elements of the project and how they may contribute to our understanding of an arts rich school climate.

Self-Expression

Students value the arts because they offer the opportunity for self-expression and allow students to make themselves visible to others. The students named this need for self-expression throughout the project. For example, during the post-show discussion, one audience member asked if the students performed what they created or performed each others' work and "how it feels to perform your classmates' work or say your own words." One student responded, "To perform our words, it feels really good because it feels, a lot of times you don't really get to say what you're feeling, being a kid. And when you get to perform it, it's even better than saying it" (*Post-Show Discussion*). The student sees performance as a tool for sharing her feelings in a way in which others will listen. Another student shared, "Arts are […] really important to me. And when we were writing this, I really thought a lot about what it would be like if I didn't get to express myself during the day, [if] I didn't get to participate in [the arts], and it would really suck. So I'm really glad for the arts" (*Post-Show Discussion)*. In these quotes and others, which represent the sentiments of many of the students in the project, the students claim the importance of feeling visible to others, both peers and teachers/adults. They tie the opportunity to do so to their experiences in the arts in school. As another student said in a post-survey, the arts are important in the lives of middle schoolers because "it helps kids express what they think when no parent or teacher will listen to them" (Surveys). These

students' comments represent a number of similar moments in the process in which students shared the importance of having opportunities for self-expression in school.

I also saw students' desire to self-express in our work together, and believe our arts based process invited them to do so. On the first day of the project, I wrote in my journal, "They really resonated when I talked to them about whether people ask them what they think. I think the more I can hook into their own stories being valuable, the better off we'll be" (Hearn). In this reflection, I noted the importance of engaging students' personal experiences in order to create an environment for developing artistic work with their active participation. As the project moved on, I noticed the students became more active in our process and more willing to share their ideas, especially when I tapped into their own personal experiences rather than asking them to think about ideas like "arts rich" or the "value of the arts" in the abstract. Several students who the classroom teacher said would be hesitant to participate and/or have difficulty working with others became increasingly engaged in the process. One of these students in particular came into class frequently with a smile, asking me what we were going to do that day. During one of our classes, she even led a small group in creating a spoken word poem with a collage of words about arts richness. She engaged more deeply in the process each day, and particularly in moments when she shared her own experiences and ideas.

I believe this evidence demonstrates the potential for the arts to allow student self-expression and also invites consideration of the benefits of using an arts based research process. The process we implemented allowed for creative exploration of student ideas and experiences and invited them to express them verbally, visually, and kinesthetically. Just a discussion or survey administration might not offer the same opportunity. I argue that this process invited students to express themselves, deepening the research/data

collected and therefore also my understanding of the phenomenon I studied. Additionally, my work with the students invites consideration of how an arts rich educational environment may offer opportunities for self-expression, and/or how self-expression characterizes arts richness. The scholars I read do not discuss this element of an arts rich education, but I believe it adds to our understanding of school climate and arts richness. The students in my study wanted to feel visible to others around them and believed the arts offer them that opportunity. Based on their comments and my observations, I believe that their experiences in the arts lend to a more positive school experience, an element of school climate.

Teaching and Learning

The students and their theatre work also addressed the value of the arts for creating fun and engaged teaching and learning across the curriculum. I found that they addressed engaged teaching and learning in three areas: arts based instruction in non-arts classes, learning in arts classes, and socio-emotional learning through the arts.

Arts based Instruction in Non-Arts Classes

Several students discussed the value of arts based instruction in content areas outside of the arts, sharing that the arts make the learning and teaching process more engaging. For example, in one of the scripted scenes for "a day without the arts," the students performed a teacher who finishes a lecture on World War II and explains that the class will now begin moving through worksheets. A student asks to do a project instead, but the teacher says no and the student protests. Later in the principal's office, the following conversation ensues:

TEACHER: Jose was giving me attitude in class about projects.

PRINICPAL: Even though he knows we don't do projects […]

MOTHER: What do you mean you don't do projects?

PRINCIPAL: Our school has no arts. We don't have enough money for projects. (*The Arts at Woodview)*

In the scene, the student looks bored and disengaged during the lecture, but then his face brightens when he asks to do projects. He and his mother look and sound upset in the conversation with the principal. This scene demonstrates that the students have an interest in project-based learning, whereas they view worksheets as boring or irrelevant. Given the instruction to create a scene that depicts "a day without the arts," the students may also connect their engagement in project-based learning to arts learning experiences.

One other example of arts based instruction in non-arts classes provides a similar student perspective on arts integration. In the beginning of the performance piece, students share personal stories about their memories of specific experiences in the arts. One of the students tells a story about how her fifth grade unit on Greek Mythology, which involved performance and art-making, kept her highly engaged in the content (*The Arts at Woodview)*. As in the scene illustrated above, this student names the importance of arts outside of arts classes in creating fun and interesting learning opportunities. However, she was one student of twenty and only a few others talked about the arts outside of arts classes in similar ways when exploring the value of the arts and arts richness.

James Catterall explains that scholars include "good learning experiences" as one element of arts rich school climates. I believe the students' examples of engaging arts based learning experiences in non-arts classes fall into this category, providing further support for scholars' conceptions of arts rich schools. However, the students' reflections lead me to questions about the students' beliefs about the value of the arts. First, though I typically refer to "arts classes" and "non-arts classes" in discussing the courses offered at

the school, throughout my time with them, the students used the language "arts classes" and "core classes," seemingly positioning them as distinctly different from one another. In other words, the students suggest that the arts are not included as one of the core content areas they learn in school. In one of the group discussions following our unit, I directly asked the students whether the arts are considered a part of the "core classes." One responded: "Well, in some ways it is part of the arts because you do activities in core classes and those types of things you do that involve the arts, to help you better understand the thing you're learning about…" (*Group Discussion*). In this case, the student mentions the inclusion of arts activities into core classes, but does not name arts classes as part of the "core." The administration at the school similarly uses language around "core" and "arts" to indicate two distinct areas of coursework. While the students name the arts as highly valuable to them both directly and indirectly throughout the project, they—like their administration—seem to marginalize the value of the arts in their language, placing the arts distinctly outside of the "core," or center of the school's values. The marginalization of the arts through language arises again in other parts of the data and I will continue to explore it throughout this chapter.

The second question I have around this data relates to the relatively few examples of arts integration named by the students in this study, despite their experiences with the Drama for Schools programming the year prior. When asked about the value of the arts, many of the students focused almost exclusively on the arts classes and did not discuss arts based learning in other classes. Though it came up in a few ways during performance and our preparatory work, I question how prevalent the arts are outside of the arts classroom at the school. How frequently do teachers of non-arts courses utilize arts based instruction, and is it named at all, either as arts experiences or as creative learning? How

does the school as a whole value the arts? How does this information inform our understanding of arts rich?

Artistic Skill in Arts Classes

Students generally believed, at least after the process, that arts instruction provides specific learning opportunities in the arts classroom. During the post-show discussion, in responding to a question about what the students learned about the value of the arts, a student said, "Actually, the arts, it's kind of a good thing for us to have here, because we actually learn from the arts. Some people don't realize that. Like it teaches us *and* lets us have fun in school" (*Post-Show Discussion)*. This student articulated the ideas that several others shared in our work about the importance of learning in their arts classes, a realization some of them had during our time together. Another student responded, "Well, the arts, like before I thought it was just time to pass and not have to do my core classes, but now I know that it is pretty much my core classes. They're like everywhere no matter where, and so everything is arts now" (*Post-Show Discussion)*. By comparing arts classes to core classes, this student seems to claim that just like in math or science, students learn important content area skills in arts classes. Importantly, though it represents some other students' opinions and comments that the arts teach skills in and of themselves, this student's particular comparison of the arts to the core is an outlier in the data. She was the only student who directly named the arts as a core class, complicating my general observation above of the marginalization of the arts.

While the examples above share general explanations that the arts "teach," one student specifically focused on skills he learned through arts classes. Explaining whether the arts are important to him in school, the student wrote on a survey: "Yes because they help me in core and the arts (duh) because I can speak louder and enunciate" (Surveys).

He reiterates ideas that many other students articulate that the arts teach, but does so offering specific skills that he learns in arts classes and applies to other settings. I observed students learning specific skills in our work together as well. Both in the early exploration of our ideas and in the rehearsal of the final script, we worked on skills in drama like creating specific characters, projection, physical and vocal expression, and crafting scenes with structure. Though we did not only focus our work on developing artistic skill, the students improved in these performance skills throughout the process as we returned to these skills regularly. As they suggest about non-arts courses, arts instruction in arts courses seems to provide engaging learning opportunities where students learn skills that apply both within the art form and beyond. Their experiences in arts courses expand our understanding of engaged teaching and learning in an arts rich school environment, inviting us to think about the arts both in arts courses and across the curriculum as markers of arts richness.

Socio-emotional Learning

The arts also provide the opportunity for students to develop important socio-emotional skills in school. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning—an organization that works to integrate evidence-based socio-emotional (SEL) instruction into education for all ages—socio-emotional learning:

> involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. ("What is Social Emotional Learning?")

In other words, teaching students in SEL works toward developing their ability to interact positively and productively with others in their environment. The most poignant example

of this type of teaching and learning in the arts came from a parent sharing a comment during our post-show discussion. She said:

> Initially, although I've always valued the arts [I] thought, 'Oh no, my kid is missing out on learning four periods a day, or four periods out of the eight, by doing the arts.' And this play actually really let me see that it creates so much friendship, fellowship, and love of school, which makes them want to come and learn. So I've really changed a lot. (*Post-Show Discussion)*

The parent shares that she saw, through the performance, how the arts help students to develop skills and relationships important to their personal and social development. Like the student above who said the arts *are* the core, this parent also began to shift her understanding of how the arts teach students in addition to non-arts classes. I saw evidence of the positive relationships the parent discusses in our work together as well. Students often entered the classroom talking to one another with smiles on their faces. They collaborated well in groups—i.e. shared ideas and listened to others—even when I paired them with a variety of students in the class. They treated each other and me with respect. These types of relationships may have existed prior to my work with the students, but they point to a potential relationship between arts experiences and positive social relationships, an element of SEL.

In addition to developing positive social relationships, the idea of taking on and exploring others' perspectives arose at the very end of the process. I found that in some ways, the arts based research process expanded students' perspectives on middle schoolers' experiences of the arts in school. The students spoke about their developing perspectives during the final post-show discussion and the student focus group discussion. An audience member asked the students how it feels to perform their own work or say others' words. One student shared, "We did this exercise […] so basically a day without the arts. So that kind of made me think what Woodview would be like

without the arts and then I kind of realized other schools don't have arts, and kids like arts, so it wouldn't make sense to not have them…" (*Post-Show Discussion)*. This student suggests a broadening of her viewpoint and a new perspective on her own experience, as well as her perspective of other middle school students outside of her school. Another student explained, "most of the time I did get to say what I wanted. But also since I was working with other people, I got to know what they thought too, and think about what they thought" (*Post-Show Discussion*). In this comment, she suggests that she learned and practiced viewing issues from others' perspectives through the artistic process.

I saw this thinking in process, for example, in our town hall meeting. The students all developed a character that had an opinion about the arts in schools in a fictional town I created. I led the town hall meeting in role as the mayor's assistant, and students came to the meeting, in character, to share their opinions about how to improve arts access in the town. Each individual character presented a particular viewpoint to the group, but also had to listen and respond to what others shared, felt, and believed. A few characters adjusted their positions on the issue based on the other characters' testimony, illustrating a willingness to consider multiple perspectives and to allow those new viewpoints to shape their own.

The shifting perspectives students demonstrated in this town hall meeting led me to believe that one value of the arts lies in the opportunity for students to develop socio-emotional skills important to their personal development. Through their participation in this arts activity, they took on points of view and perspectives possibly different from their own. The parent cited above similarly demonstrated a shift in understanding based on her experience in the arts. She saw the students engaging with each other and sharing their positive relationships with the audience, allowing her to shift her perspective on the importance of the arts in school. These examples also suggest a positive relationship

between arts rich schools and students' SEL, or that, as scholars claim, a positive arts rich school climate includes evidence of students' productive interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

Considering all the aforementioned areas of engaged teaching and learning (arts based instruction in non-arts classes, arts instruction in arts classes, and socio-emotional learning), my research with the students seems to add depth to scholars' current conceptions of "good learning experiences" in arts rich schools. Students identify three specific ways in which the arts provide interesting learning opportunities, including using arts based instruction to engage learning in non-arts classes, teaching skills applicable to the art and to life in arts classes, and developing positive interpersonal relationships and perspective through arts experiences.

"A Break"

Another major theme that arose in my research was a tension between students' valuing the arts because they provide a "break" from other classes and their realization of the hard work and rigor required in creating art. The students named this idea of the "the arts as a break" throughout our work, but particularly at the beginning of the process. For example, in the pre-survey, one student explained that the arts are important to her in school because "it's a big break from all the core classes, it helps us get out energy…" Another student wrote that the arts play an important role at Woodview as a whole school because "arts classes give us a break from core classes" (Surveys). These examples, reflective of numerous other written and verbal responses from students, demonstrate a few of the ways that students see arts classes as opportunities outside of and compliments to core classes.

By the end of the process, however, some students shifted the way they discussed the value of the arts in school beyond the notion of a break. In the post-show discussion, an audience member asked students what they learned about the value of the arts. One student started her comment by saying "Well the arts… before I thought it was just time to pass and not have to do my core classes…" Another student explained, "I used to think that the arts, like she said was just all fun and games and time to pass by. Now I realize that it's still really fun, only it's more, it has hard work in it" (*Post-Show Discussion)*. Both students say that before this process, they believed arts classes provided free time, a "break," language that I translate to mean time to relax and not worry about academic work. Through the process, they developed a more nuanced understanding of the work and skill the arts require. These comments reflect some of the other students' beliefs at the end of the process, but not all. A number of students continued to use the language of a "break" in the post-survey comments to describe the importance of the arts in school, saying the arts are important because "I get bored in core classes and it's good to get a break," and "having [arts] classes give us a break from core classes" (Surveys).

The perspective students offer regarding the arts as a break from their other academic spaces brings up a question for consideration in discussion about arts rich schools. It suggests that offering a variety of opportunities in school that access different modes of learning matters to students; they value the dynamics or range of experiences that arts classes provide. I believe this dynamic may relate to school climate because it allows students the opportunity to unwind from their more academic spaces during the day. In developing arts rich educational programs, then, it seems important to consider how and when students have different types of learning experiences, including arts *and* non-arts courses, worksheets and projects, and perhaps more spaces that offer opportunities for self-expression and "fun" learning experiences, as some students put it.

Because some of the students' perspectives on the value of their arts courses shifted over our time together, my research also suggests that engaging in this type of an arts based process allows an opportunity for students to explore and name their learning in the arts.

Student Engagement and Motivation

Finally, students in this study indicate that the value of the arts lies in making school interesting, and helping motivate students to go to school. Though scholars Lehr and Brand do not explicitly name motivation to attend school as an element of school climate, I argue it may correlate to elements of school climate like those they do mention, including the quality of interpersonal relations, the extent to which school is perceived as safe and caring, and the degree to which there are high expectations for students. Students frequently discussed and performed the power of the arts to keep them excited to go to school. One representative example of the students' viewpoint occurred in the final performance. Early in their performance piece, students presented a news report on the disappearance of the arts at Woodview, which led into scenes about a day without the fine arts. In the report, a reporter interviewed students and teachers of Woodview as the fine arts buildings were being knocked down. A student explained "I kind of think it sucks because it's my only fun subject." A parent in the scene said, "I'm unhappy with [the demolition of the fine arts buildings]. My child is not looking forward to going to school in the morning" (*The Arts at Woodview)*. In this example, students suggest that the arts provide extrinsic motivation for attending school that would no longer exist without the fine arts (and the buildings in which they are taught).

In later scenes about a day without the fine arts, one group performed a scenario in which a student arrives to school, only to realize the arts have disappeared. He leaves and goes to a grocery store across the street (which the students at Woodview frequent).

The school officer follows him and on questioning him, the student says "There were no arts at school today, and I got bored." Later in the scene, the officer calls his mother to report the incident and she says, "My little Bobby would never do that! He loves going to school!" (*The Arts at Woodview)*. Again, the student and the parent in this scene represent the role of the arts in helping to motivate students to go to school. I echoed similar thoughts in my field notes from the day on which we prepared these scenes. I noted that the scenes about a day without the arts highlighted students "who were bored, disengaged, upset, or frustrated with school. They all delivered a message about the arts offering interesting classes, student engagement, attendance, etc." (Hearn).

In addition to performing how the arts motivate youth to attend school, the students wrote about and discussed this theme based on their own school experiences. The pre- and post-surveys provide several examples. In response to the question "are the arts important to you in school?" some students wrote: "Yes, because without them I would not be motivated to go to school," "Yes, because it makes school fun," and "yes, because all my other classes are at least somewhat boring." Similarly, when asked if the arts could be important in the lives of middle school students, one student responded: "Yes because they (like me) could be enjoying school only because of the arts (I don't like the other classes at all)" (Surveys). While some of the students here specifically identify the arts as the only class they like, they each assign the arts some responsibility for engaging them in school. These responses represent a number of others that students shared throughout our work together.

The students' perspectives offer two big ideas about motivation to attend school in relation to scholars' conversations in the literature on arts richness. First, the students in my study often said they liked going to school because of the arts. In other words, they associate the arts with a reason to go to school. Second, I believe that the values of the

arts I discuss above, including their use for providing engaged teaching and learning, the opportunity for self-expression and visibility, and a variety of experiences throughout the school day, may also play a part in students' motivation to attend school.

ARTS RICH AND THE VALUE OF THE ARTS

My data analysis revealed that overall, students and researchers discuss similar themes when thinking about arts richness and the value of the arts in schools. They name one dimension of arts richness, quantity, in the same ways, discussing number of arts opportunities at school within and between multiple art forms. Students also identified quality as an important element of an arts rich school and shared ideas about it on multiple dimensions, including both the quality of educational experiences (e.g. quality of teaching or learning experiences) and quality of the artistry (e.g. quality of artistic ability or artistic product). Finally, students offer several ideas to the research by deepening perspectives on school climate, namely thinking about a particular school climate with certain elements as illustrative of arts richness. They described an arts rich school as a place in which "kids respect teachers" and "teachers respect kids" (*The Arts at Woodview)*. Moreover, they named specific values of the arts that may relate to positive school climate. For this group of students, the arts provide motivation to go to school and offer engaging and fun teaching and learning experiences across the curriculum. They give students a sense of a break from their other coursework and allow them to make themselves visible through self-expression. However, they also invite the students to deepen their understanding of the rigor and hard work involved in making art. I believe that these elements contribute to a positive educational experience both in and outside of the arts, or to the school climate that scholars explain as "arts rich." In the next chapter, I share final reflections about this analysis, addressing my third research question, "what

can we learn from students about the value of the arts and developing arts rich programs in schools?"

Chapter 5: What Can We Learn?

In Chapter Four I addressed my first two research questions: 1) What do students believe about the value of the arts in middle school?, and 2) How do student perspectives on the arts relate to researcher and educator perspectives on the arts in schools? In this chapter, I offer reflections on my third research question: What can we learn from students about creating arts rich programs in schools? As might be expected from an arts based research process, I have ended the process with more questions for exploration than the study answered. However, in this chapter, I reflect on three big ideas I learned from my research and related questions. I conclude the chapter with additional reflections on moving forward in developing understandings of arts richness and the field of arts education.

On Arts Richness

Complexity

I began this process seeking a clear definition of arts rich, a way to look at a school and understand where it lies on the spectrum of arts richness. I hoped to provide educators and researchers with a deeper understanding of what an arts rich school looks like, particularly from the student perspective. What I have learned from this process is that arts richness is a complex concept with many elements, making it difficult to define and/or assess. Scholars currently discuss arts richness on four dimensions: quantity of arts experiences, breadth of delivery of arts experiences, quality of arts experiences, and a school climate associated with arts richness. Students in this study talked about it on three of those four, including quantity, quality, and climate. They affirmed the inclusion of these three aspects as potential markers of arts richness. In particular, students offered

depth to the dimensions of quality and climate as elements of arts richness. My analysis of the data suggests that we might assess quality in arts richness on multiple levels, including on the educational level as well as the artistic level. This suggestion may have interesting implications for developing arts rich programs. For example, if integrating the arts into a non-arts class, I might consider the quality of the educational aspects of the class (i.e. the pedagogy and learning activities) as well as the artistic quality of the work produced. Additionally, questions arise for me about how to assess quality in arts richness, and educators and administrators may need to consider how quality in an arts rich environment compares to quality in a non-arts rich environment in order to understand a fuller picture of what arts richness actually looks like in schools.

Much of the students' work focused on values of the arts that seem to fall into the area of school climate. Based on my work with the students, I understand an arts rich school as a school that takes on a spirit/climate that includes positive peer and student-teacher relationships, as well as high student engagement. Students in this study also offered evidence around specific values of the arts related to school climate. They cite important outcomes of having school experiences in the arts like the opportunity for self-expression, socio-emotional growth, and motivation to go to and enjoy school. This finding leads me to wonder how school climate and an arts rich environment may feed each other; the development of the arts could lead to a positive school climate, or perhaps a particular climate is necessary for a school to develop an arts rich program.

Though the definition of arts richness remains muddy for me, I can now point to elements of the bigger picture of arts richness based on my experience with the youth, like those mentioned above. I conclude that according to these students, an arts rich school offers multiple and varied opportunities for learning in and through the arts, that the arts cannot be pinpointed in a specific class or moments of time but permeate the

learning culture. An arts rich school includes a positive, productive climate in which students *want* to come to school, and students, teachers, and others relate to each other with respect and interest. The students in my study provided support for combining the many ideas of scholars into a holistic definition of what arts richness looks like in school. Additionally, during our work together, the students shifted and deepened their understanding of experiences in the arts and began to name their learning. I wonder how students' ability to name and explain their learning in the arts matters in an arts rich program, and/or if it should be considered as another element of arts richness.

Limitations

Though the students' perspectives help clarify my understanding of arts richness, I have to reiterate some of the limitations of working with this particular group of students that undoubtedly shape my conclusions. The students I worked with are enrolled in an intermediate theatre class; they have in some way invested themselves in theatre and in the arts, whether they are in the Fine Arts Academy at Woodview or not. In some ways, this sample of students is a strength of the study. I hoped to learn about how students value the arts and their beliefs about arts richness, and a group of students who take arts classes in a school strong in the arts proves useful for doing so. However, this group may not represent the student population of the school as a whole, but instead a specialized group of students already personally invested in the arts. During the class session in which our class interviewed students in a science class, I especially questioned my research design. When coding the data, I wrote an analytic memo expressing this concern: "A question arises about how representative my class's opinions are of the rest of the school. The interviews of Ms. Rally's class demonstrated some lack of interest by her students, though the cause is of course unknown" (Hearn). Though I did not hope to

generalize on a large scale, in my future work, I would like to consider expanding my sample of students to include those not necessarily in the arts.

Through this study, I developed a better understanding of arts richness, or at least of the value of the arts to students, based on youth's beliefs as they shared them at Woodview. I found their responses generally in line with that of other researchers. However, I might achieve a different understanding of arts richness and the value of the arts by working with a different group of students. Students' beliefs rely on context, and the field needs a variety of contexts and voices on these topics in order to better understand what makes arts rich contexts truly unique from other environments.

Additionally, I entered this process with a particular set of identities and values that certainly impacted the way that I structured and facilitated my research and probably created some blind spots in my work. I wanted to understand definitions of arts richness, and crafted each lesson plan to focus on elements of arts richness in which students might have interest or experience. However, looking back at our work, we did not discuss some of the major contextual elements that likely impact students' perceptions of arts richness, like race, class, power and privilege. In my future work, I hope to incorporate these identity markers into our work in order to better understand how we perceive and experience the arts based on our context.

ON SCHOOL, RELATIONSHIPS, AND RELEVANCE

I started this study with the intention of discovering student perspectives on arts richness and including their voices in the research about developing arts rich educational programs. As we worked, I began to shift my focus to the value of the arts to middle schoolers in order to make our work together more relevant to students' own lives. I found that the more I asked them about what they thought and what they wanted to share,

the more responsive and engaged they were in the process. In other words, the more personally the students could relate to the material and to me, the more positive and productive our work became. I realized through this process the importance of working from students' lived experiences, making our learning process relevant to them each step of the way. Additionally, these observations point to the value of developing relationships with students in school and the potential for the arts to facilitate that development.

When first reflecting on the data and analysis that arose from this project, I questioned how arts richness and the value of the arts connect to each other and to the larger educational system. Though I do believe they connect, my analysis revealed that where these ideas particularly come together is in the way they illustrate the affective (which I earlier tie to the elements of school climate). Students name engagement, respect, and positive relationships when talking about arts richness; these aspects all represent positive potential outcomes of an arts program. Moreover, however, they represent what I believe is a positive school climate in which relationships between students and teachers thrive. My study suggests that the arts provide one potential pathway for developing such relationships in schools, but there may also be other paths to achieve such relationships and/or climate at school. These findings lead me to wonder about the development and outcomes of positive relationships in schools. How do arts richness and school climate relate each other and/or to relationship development? What other methods might lead to such positive school climate and student outcomes?

ON ARTS BASED RESEARCH

The Process

In my study, I hoped to use arts based research to guide an in-depth exploration of the concept of arts richness. I learned that the process of arts based research provided me

with varied perspectives on each topic we addressed in our unit. For example, students rarely discussed arts based instruction in non-arts classes in our group discussions or the surveys. They did, however, perform it when asked to create a scene about the arts or to share a personal story about a memorable experience in the arts. Their performances both brought up the topic and led to clarity in how the arts engage teaching and learning not only in arts classes, but in other classes as well. Without the arts activities we pursued, I may not have discovered this theme with the students.

This research method also offered me the opportunity to observe the ideas the students shared in action. They told me they appreciated the arts because they allowed for self-expression, and I observed that appreciation in the scenes and stories they shared in the classroom. They wrote that the arts are fun for them, and I observed their smiles and laughter in the room during the process. Theatre activities specifically allowed the students to take on other roles and create new ideas and/or perspectives, which students reflected on at the end of the process as well. Because we explored the arts by creating art, I gathered a broader and deeper understanding of the ideas they discussed. Additionally, I believe participating in an arts process while discussing the value of the arts mattered. It allowed students to think about their actual experiences in the room, in the moment, as well as prior experiences, providing them more personal experience to draw on in our work together.

Challenging My Assumptions

The arts based research process also brought up issues and perspectives that challenged me to consider my own previously held assumptions about both the content we discussed and the research process itself. For example, students challenged my understanding of what "break" means through our arts activities. As an educator, I want

students to understand the knowledge and skills acquired in arts classes. In retrospect, my interest in locating the arts as a core subject or foregrounding the rigor of the arts may have resulted in some biases about the value of taking "a break." I thought a break reflected disrespect, disengagement, or a lack of caring. During a final group discussion with the students, I asked them to respond to the statement "More money should go to arts than other programs in schools" by moving toward one side of the room for "yes" and another for "no" (a drama activity called "Vote With Your Feet"). A student standing toward the yes side of the spectrum reflected, "I just think that kids like to have arts because it's a break from core classes and they're just important" (*Group Discussion)*. This student suggests that arts programs should receive more money than other programs because they are different from core classes and offer something different from their academic spaces, that is, a "break." This response helped me to question my own assumptions about taking a break, and about the value of the arts in general. I realized that perhaps a "break," the way students conceive it, is an important and positive part of the school day. Just as the students opened themselves to new perspectives in the process, I may not have considered alternatives to my own understandings had we not engaged in arts based activity.

I also shifted my understanding of the arts based research process itself. Prior to this project, though I had a great deal of theatre experience, my research experience primarily focused on quantitative or mixed methods studies. Particularly during the analysis stage of my study, I found that I made assumptions about what is important and relevant in my research during my time working with the students. I focused a great deal on what students said verbally or wrote on surveys or in stories, but I did not record the artistic work they developed as thoroughly as I could have. With more extensive recording of the artistic work, I could analyze more deeply the complexities of the ideas

students share through their creative work. My understanding of this particular research process shifted over the course of this study to better appreciate both the value and logistics of doing arts based research. In the future, I hope to seek more of the nuances in the art form that I began to discover during this project.

MOVING FORWARD

Through the playbuilding process, the youth named their learning in the arts in a way they said they had not previously considered. It allowed students to think deeply about their experiences in school in a personal and relevant way. It also helped to deepen my understanding of arts richness in the context of current scholarship and practical work. As I reflect on my research and what I have learned in the process, I also see questions about arts richness and student experiences in the arts that invite further investigation. One area for continued research is in how to assess arts richness. In the context of the Creative Learning Initiative within the Austin Independent School District, how will administrators know when they achieve the status of "arts rich"?[4] Or is the goal of creating an arts rich school actually a means to a different end? For example, is arts richness achieved when a school has the elements discussed here *and* the hoped for outcomes are also achieved? I do not intend to devalue the importance of arts richness or of arts experiences in school, but I am curious about how school administrators and district leaders perceive "arts rich" in the context of their larger educational goals. At the least, the assessment of arts richness warrants further consideration. Additionally, due to the limitations discussed above, I also wonder how other students with fewer arts

[4] At the time of my writing, there is a team in Austin working toward creating a rubric of arts richness, and other organizations may have similar structures that utilize different language than that I pursued in my study.

experiences perceive the arts. What might students with different or no experiences in the arts offer to our understanding of arts richness?

As I finish my final year of graduate school and move into the educational system as a theatre teacher, I take with me a deeper understanding of how students experience the arts in schools. I understand that students value the arts for providing engaging learning opportunities, but also appreciate the "break" they feel in arts courses from their more academic courses. I know students perceive the quality of their educational and artistic experiences and value the arts as an opportunity for affective, academic, and artistic learning. I understand the importance of developing relationships with students through the arts and embracing their perspectives on their educational experiences, as they want to express themselves and share their ideas with teachers, other students, parents and administrators. I carry this knowledge with me in the hopes that I may continue to use arts experiences and arts based research to connect with and understand my students, but also to challenge myself and others to consider new voices and perspectives in our work.

Appendix A: Sample Lesson Plans

LESSON PLAN SESSION 1

Date: 11/12/13 **Subject**: What are the arts? **Grade**: 7/8 (TH 2)

Guiding Questions:

- What experiences do we have in the arts?
- What do the arts look like where we come from? What are the arts?

Objectives:

TSW…

- Complete the initial survey, thinking about their beliefs about the arts
- Collaboratively create a definition of the arts
- Critically consider their experiences in the arts
- Tell personal stories related to the arts

TEKS:

(2) Creative expression: performance. The student interprets characters using the voice and body expressively and creates dramatizations. The student is expected to:

(A) demonstrate safe use of the voice and body;

(D) create stories collaboratively and individually that have dramatic structure;

Materials:

- Surveys
- Writing utensils
- Bean bags
- Big paper (2 sheets- one with word "arts" written, and one blank)
- Markers
- Sticky notes (75-100)
- Computer with projector hookup (for videos)

Preset:

- Set up computer/projector and prepare videos
- Have tape on posters, ready to hang up

Lesson Plan

Name game: Group Juggle (15 min)

Invite the group to stand in a circle. *I have a beanbag. We're going to toss the beanbag across the circle to one another until everyone has had a chance to catch it once. Our goal is to establish a pattern of tosses/names, so remember who you toss it to.* Have students hold their

hands up in front of them until they receive the beanbag. After tossing the beanbag, hands go behind their backs. Establish the pattern.

Practice the first pattern with one beanbag a few times. Add another beanbag to go in the same direction. Now tell the group the third beanbag goes in reverse name order. Practice just that order a few times. Once that order is established, play with all three beanbags.

Side Coaching:

- *Our goal is to get the beanbag around the circle and maintain focus*
- *It's okay to drop it- just pick it up and keep going*
- *Listen to each other's names!*

Processing:

- What did we just do? What was hard or easy?
- What did you notice about yourself during that game? About the group?
- What strategies helped us succeed at tossing the beanbags? How do those relate to guidelines for participating in a class together?

TRANSITION: *Now that we've heard each other's names and begun to establish a group rhythm, we're going to play another game to get to know each other better.*

Ensemble game- the truth about me (10 min)

Ask students to stand in a circle in the middle of the room. *This game invites us to take risks and share something about ourselves. Whoever is in the middle begins by saying "the truth about me is…" and then completes the sentence with a true statement about him/herself. When the statement is made, all those with that characteristic must change places. At the same time the person in the middle is also trying to get a spot. Whoever does not get a spot goes to the center and the game begins again. If the same person ends up in the middle a lot of times, he or she can choose someone else to come into the middle instead.*

Ask students how we will keep ourselves safe in the space during the game. Then play!

Processing:

- What was hard/easy?
- What did you notice about yourself during that game? The group?
- What did we have most in common? What were some unique characteristics for individuals?

Project Intro & Survey Administration (20 min)

SURVEYS
Hand out surveys to the class. Ask them to fill them out as completely as possible and to raise their hand when done. They have 10-15 minutes to fill them out.

PROJECT INTRO
Introduce the project:

- My name, who I am, what I do (grad student, teacher, DTYC)
- Research project: I want to know what students in middle school think about the arts.
- We're going to work together to create an original theatre piece about Woodview students' experiences in the arts. Some administration, students, teachers, and other community members will come see our performance.
- An example of devised theatre: show video example of devised work

VIDEO
Clip from Home Land by APTP http://www.aptpchicago.org/production-archive/home-land/
Clip from PJP: (start at 0:21) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7iOugSQeyS4

Processing each video:

- What did you notice in that video? What types of performance did the students share?
- What was the message they were sharing? How did they get that message across?

General Processing:

- What excites you about this process? What makes you nervous?

TRANSITION: *Now we're going to think specifically about our own experiences in the arts.*

Personal Story (40 min)

WORD BRAINSTORM (10 min)
Put up the word "Arts" on a large piece of paper/the board. Hand out sticky notes to the students. Ask students to write on their sticky note what the word "Arts" makes them think of. They can write multiple ideas- but one idea per sticky note. Have students put the sticky notes up around the word. Read out some of the words from the brainstorm.

STORIES (15 min)
Divide students into small groups of about 4 people. Ask each group to pick a word from the board that is exciting to them. Each group member then has 2 minutes to think of a story from their own lives related to that word.

SHARING (15 min)
Ask each group to choose one story to share with the class. Each group shares the story with the class. After each story, process:

- What big words or ideas do you remember from the story? What others does it make you think of?
- How does this story help us understand what the arts are?

As we process, add the words they share to the brainstorm.

Word Whip/Poem (5 min)

We're going to close today by doing a word whip. That means I'll give you a prompt and each student will fill in the blank with one word. At the end, our word whip will create a spoken word poem we can use in our performance.

Fill in the blank: "the arts are…" or "the arts…"

Contingencies

More Time: write up poem

Less Time: shorten processing of stories

LESSON SESSION 4

Date: 11/20/13 **Subject**: equity of arts access **Grade**: 6-8

Materials:

- Writing utensils
- Character worksheets
- Teacher in Role prop (glasses)
- Big paper for plans

Guiding Questions:

- What would equity of the arts look like between schools?
- How do we push for equity in arts access in an inequitable system?

Objectives:

TSW…

- Define "equity" and explain what inequitable and equitable arts access looks like in a school district
- Create characters with voice and body representing different stakeholders in a school district
- Generate plans for improving access to the arts among an entire district

TEKS:

(1) Foundations: inquiry and understanding. The student develops concepts about self, human relationships, and the environment using elements of drama and conventions of theatre. The student is expected to:

(F) analyze and evaluate the structure and form of dramatic literature.

(2) Creative expression: performance. The student interprets characters using the voice and body expressively and creates dramatizations. The student is expected to:

(C) select movements and dialogue to portray a character appropriately;

(D) create stories collaboratively and individually that have dramatic structure;

(5) Critical evaluation and response. The student responds to and evaluates theatre and theatrical performances. The student is expected to:

(A) understand and demonstrate appropriate audience etiquette at various types of performances;

Preset:

- Set chairs up in two sides with an aisle in the middle

Lesson Plan

Introducing Equity (10 min)

We've been talking about the arts in middle school, and specifically at Woodview, for about three classes now. Who can remind us what we've specifically talked about? (Arts rich, arts poor,

a day without the arts, value of the arts, what the arts mean to us) *It seems like most of us agree that the arts are in some way important in school, and that Lamar has a lot of arts opportunities. What I keep thinking about, then, is why doesn't every student have as much access to the arts in school as we do here? Do you have friends at other schools? How are their school experiences similar to and different from yours?*

Write EQUITY on the board. Ask class if anyone knows what this word means. *Equity means fairness, justice, or balance. So what might equity have to do with what we're talking about?*

TRANSITION: *Great ideas, everyone. Today we'll be thinking about equity of arts access by exploring a fictional town and two fictional schools.*

Stakeholders/Creating Characters (15 min)

Tell students about a small town called Smithville that has two middle schools on the opposite sides of town. The two schools serve all the middle schoolers in the town. Draw a picture of Smithville with the Red and Blue schools on the opposite sides. Ask students to suggest all the people in the community who might care about what happens at the school. List stakeholders around the town drawn on the board.

In a moment, we're going to go into role as some of these community members to discuss an issue in the town. The Mayor has officially announced in today's paper that in order to make sure students have equal access to the arts, Red School is going to lose some of its arts programming and funding so that Blue School can have more.

You now get to decide who you want to play in our town hall meeting. You may choose any community member from the board- or another idea- that would care about the schools, and you should also choose which school you care about most. Pass out character biography worksheet for students to create characters.

TRANSITION: *Now that you've thought through your character, you may put your character sheet under your seat to refer to as needed. We're going to make our characters come to life.*

Town Hall Meeting (15-20 min)

In a moment I'm going to have you go into character. I'm going to do that to. You'll know I'm playing a character when I put on these glasses. I'll say "Going into role in 3-2-1" and we'll all be in character. When it's time to stop the drama or if we need to pause in the middle, I'll say "freeze." That's your cue that you can go out of character. Are there any questions?

Have students close their eyes and think about how their character might seat, speak, etc. Give them a moment to actually physically embody their character. *In a moment I'm going to take us all into role. When I do, you may open your eyes and we'll start the drama. Going into role in 3-2-1.* (put on glasses)

Introduce myself as Lacy Jones, assistant to the mayor of Smithville. *I'm so sorry Mayor Cruz isn't able to be here today- an emergency has come up with her family, so she asked me to fill in. Anyway, I'm so glad to be here to talk with you about this new announcement. We are very excited that we will be giving more arts programming to Blue School next school year! Of course, that means Red School will have less programming but everyone will be equal. Now, I'm supposed to ask for questions or comments but I'm sure everyone agrees wholeheartedly that this is the best option, right? You don't? Oh dear. I suppose we should hear your thoughts then, but let's keep it quick. We'll share by raise of hands. Make sure to tell the community who you are before you share something. Who would like to say something?*

Have debate with students about the pros and cons of taking arts from Red to give to Blue. *Freeze.*

Monologue/Letter to the Editor (15 min)

After the town hall meeting, you leave frustrated because you have no idea if your school will get what you want it to have or not. You decide to get together with another person you met at the town hall meeting to write a letter to the editor of the newspaper so the townspeople will understand your point of view. Have students pair up with a partner who supported their side in the town hall meeting. Give them 10 minutes to co-write a letter to the editor of the Smithville Gazette about their position.

Once students are done, have them underline one sentence they want to share with the rest of the group. Gather students in a circle (move chairs as needed) and have each group share the sentence one at a time. Collect letters from students. (ASSESSMENT)

TRANSITION: *Thank you for sharing. Have a seat in our circle and I'll tell you what happened after the Mayor and the town read your letters.*

Committee Planning (20 min)

So after the townspeople submitted all of the letters to the editor, the Smithville Gazette ran a front page story on the conflict in the town. Mayor Cruz decided she could not move forward with the plan she had, but was still concerned- along with many of the townspeople- about how the middle school students in town would all have access to the arts. She decided to bring in some outside education experts to form an Arts Access Consulting Committee (AACC). They were to develop a plan that all of Smithville could agree upon to increase arts access in the community. The catch? The government could provide no money for the program.

Explain that the students will form three committees to develop plans for Smithville. Their plans should include a name, explained goals, and a list of action steps for how to achieve them. Once they determine the plan, they will draw it up on a big piece of paper to present to the town.

Divide groups. Give each group a big piece of paper to present their final plan on. The paper should include the three aspects above and a picture representing the plan (put model on board).

If time, invite students to share their plans with each other. If not, share them on Friday.

Reflection (10 min)

- What have we discussed so far? What artistic work have we created?
- What's most exciting to you about what we've been talking about?
- What do you think we need to do next? What do you want to say in our piece?

Contingencies

More Time: begin creating machines to represent committee plans- what does an equity of arts access machine look like?

Your real name: _____ Date: _____

Smithville Character Biography

Character name: _____ Age: _____

Job or role in Smithville:_____

_____

_____

I support _____ (Red or Blue) School because _____

_____

_____

_____

At the town hall meeting with the Mayor, I want to make sure everyone hears that:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B: Interview Questionnaire for Science Class

Interview Questions

Interviewer Name: _____ Date: _____

How do you define “the arts”?

What art classes do you take at Lamar? Where else do you notice the arts in your day at school?

What do you think about going to a school with many arts opportunities? Why?

What do you want to be when you grow up? How do you think the arts tie into that?

What do you like about the arts programming (e.g. classes, clubs) at Lamar right now? Why?

How could the arts programming at Lamar be better? What would you add or take away? Why?

What do you think middle school would be like without the arts?

Story of the first time you had an arts experience:

Specific moment when the arts positively impacted your life:

Appendix C: Script

THE ARTS at WOODVIEW

<Personal Stories>

All but 6 actors stand or sit in various places on stage. One by one, each begins to tell a personal story about an experience in the arts. Some finish each other's stories, pick up in the middle of them to continue the telling, etc. These are based on the interviews of students in the science class and actors' own experiences. As stories end, actors walk off.

S1: When I was in fourth grade
S2: When I was in seventh grade
S3: When I was nine
S4: When I was nine
S5: When I was in fifth grade
S6: When I was in fourth grade
S7: I was at Woodview
S8: I was at Woodview
S9: A kids' acting summer camp
S10: Pinewood Elementary
S11: the talent show
S12: Pinewood
S13: Woodview

S1: I was doing choir
S2: I was in theater class
S3: I auditioned for a play
S4: I was taking a music test
S5: I was learning about Greek mythology
S6: I had done improv at the Hideout and was switching to Cold Towne
S7: We were doing this thing about truths and lies
S8: The auditioning went pretty well
S9: I auditioned for the part
S10: My teacher said that we would write and perform plays
S11: I had played piano since preschool
S12: I finally memorized my lines
S13: I was terrible at art so I expected to do terrible

S1: we were doing warm-ups
S2: I went to get up on stage
S3: I got the part

S4: I had to memorize the tune of the music
S5: My teacher had decided that we would be performing Greek myths for other classes
S6: When I got there I felt really awkward
S7: People didn't guess my lie so I didn't have to die
S8: I got in the fine arts academy
S9: I got the part
S10: We performed the play for our parents
S11: I finished my music piece
S12: I performed my first skit
S13: I got a 100 on my project

S1: It made me feel proud of myself.
S2: Special
S3: Excited
S4: Great
S5: Like laughing
S6: Like with the arts I'd be able to find my place
S7: It made me feel alive
S8: Happy
S9: Confident
S10: Excited
S11: Talented
S12: Happy
S13: Good

S1: I remember this…

In the middle of a story, six news reporters with headlines in hand run on stage and yell:

REPORTERS: Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

Throughout the next two or three lines, actors walk off as they realize they can't get a word in about their own stories.

REPORTERS**:** Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

REPORTER 1: Austin Votes Down Athletics and the Arts
REPORTER 2: Academics deserve our time and effort!
REPORTER 3: Education. Is it less than it used to be?
REPORTER 4: Imagine Going to a School Where the Art Supplies are collecting dust!
REPORTER 5: Don't Support the $upported
REPORTER 6: We're doing the best we can!

ALL: Extra! Extra! Read all about it.

REPORTER 1: Arts Shouldn't Cost Money!
REPORTER 2: More Arts = More Taxe$
REPORTER 3: Half of the Teachers at the Middle School are gone today due to cuts
REPORTER 4: Austin Declines Proposition 4
REPORTER 5: Education. Are we learning from it?
REPORTER 6: The Arts are in the Margins and are Staying there

ALL: Extra! Extra! Read all about it.

REPORTERS exit stage. Sound effect introducing a news report.

<Day Without the Arts >

NEWS REPORT

ANCHOR: We interrupt this program with breaking news! The 600 and 700 buildings have been knocked over by a wrecking ball at Woodview Middle School. Most of the arts have already disappeared. Now let's go to Stephanie, who is on site at Woodview.

REPORTER 2: Thanks Joseph. I'm here at Woodview Middle School with the Principal, a student, a teacher, and a parent. I have one quick question for each of you about the arts. Matthew, what grade are you in?

STUDENT: Sixth.

REPORTER 2: What do you think about the arts not being in school?

STUDENT: I kind of think it sucks because it's my only fun subject.

REPORTER 2: Your name, miss.

PARENT: Mallory.

REPORTER 2: Mallory, you're a parent here at Woodview. How do you feel about the fine arts buildings being demolished?

PARENT: I'm unhappy with it. My child is not looking forward to going to school in the morning.

REPORTER 2: Ms. Nelson, you're a reading teacher here at Woodview. How will this event affect you?

TEACHER: I think there will be a lot of distractions with the wreckage, and my students won't be able to focus on school. They're going to worry about the disappearance of the arts.

REPORTER 2: Ms. Cortez, as the principal of Woodview, did you make this decision and why?

PRINCIPAL: The arts were very expensive and we ran out of funds to support the programs and facilities.

REPORTER 2: Thank you all for being here during these hard times. A tragic report indeed. Back to you Joseph.

ANCHOR: Thank you, Stephanie. As part of our special news report today, we bring you a series of stories. We asked middle school students around town, what would a day be like without the arts? The next two stories give a glimpse of what they shared with us. Let's take a look at the first one.

ANCHOR steps to the side, watching the story as it unfolds.

DAY WITHOUT ARTS SCENE 1

NARRATOR: A Day Without Fine Arts. Once, there was a boy named Bob. It was first period, and he was heading to his art class. But when he looked around the hallways, he saw there was no hanging art anymore. And when he arrived at art class, he discovered the doors were boarded up. The fine arts programs no longer existed! Little Bob was sad. He decided that if school no longer had fine arts, he didn't want to be there. So, he headed to HEB. But while heading there, Officer Johnson spied him, and followed him all the way to HEB. When she got there, she went up to Bob and said:

OFFICER JOHNSON: What do you think you're doing out of school, punk?!

BOB: There were no arts at school today, and I got bored.

OFFICER JOHNSON: You're coming with me!

NARRATOR: So, Officer Thompson took little Bob back to school, and called his mother.

OFFICER JOHNSON: I would like to inform you that your son skipped school today.

MOTHER: Excuse me?!

OFFICER JOHNSON: That's right! He skipped and went right over to HEB!

MOTHER: My little Bobby would never do that. He loves going to school!

OFFICER JOHNSON: Well, he did! And I suggest that you come pick him up right now!

MOTHER: I'm on my way Officer Thompson.

NARRATOR: So, Bob's mother came up to the school…gave him a stern look…and took him home. When they arrived at home, Bob's mother looked at him and said:

MOTHER: You're grounded! Now go to your room!

NARRATOR: Little Bobby went to his room, and was sad for the rest of the week. All of this could have been prevented, had the school kept the fine arts.

ANCHOR enters as actors exit. Scene 2 actors set up during this time.

ANCHOR: Wow. Thank you. And now a look at the second story of a day without fine arts.

DAY WITHOUT THE ARTS SCENE 2

STUDNET: Hey Mr. Duffy, can we make projects?

TEACHER: No, we're going to be doing worksheets on WWII.

STUDENT: Why not?!

TEACHER: Don't give me attitude, go to the principal's office.

(*STUDENT and TEACHER go in to the principal's office. After a moment of intimidation, STUDENT'S MOTHER enters the office.)*

MOTHER: What seems to be the problem, Mr. Krueger?

TEACHER: Patrick was giving me attitude in class about projects.

PRINCIPAL: Even though he knows we don't do projects. All students are required to do what the teacher says, without attitude.

MOTHER: What do you mean you don't do projects?

PRINCIPAL: Our school has no arts. We don't have enough money for projects.

MOTHER: That's not fair! You should have arts!

STUDENT: Yeah, you should!

PRINCIPAL: We need funding. Where will it come from?

School bell rings. Underscore with instrumental music. Passing period. Actors cross the stage to places for the next piece. Second school bell rings to cue scene.

<Arts Poor/Arts Rich>

One actor stands DSR, another DSL, facing into each other and the group. The other actors spread out behind them.

ACTOR 7: Poor.

Actor 7 claps and actors freeze in statue of "poor."

STATUE 1: Sad and depressed.
STATUE 2: Hands out.
STATUE 3: Begging.
STATUE 4: Trying to get people's attention.

ACTOR 8: Rich.

Actor 8 claps and actors freeze in statue of "rich."

STATUE 5: Raining money.
STATUE 6: First Class. Fancy.
STATUE 7: Greedy.
STATUE 8: Some people who are mean and some people who are nice. Do you want us to generalize?

ACTOR 7: Arts poor.

Actor 7 claps and actors freeze in statue of "arts poor."

STATUE 9: School has no arts programs.
STATUE 10: Bad classes.
STATUE 11: Cheap materials.

STATUE 12: You want to be an artist but don't have the skill.

ACTOR 8: Arts rich.

Actor 8 claps and actors freeze in statue of "arts rich."

STATUE 13: Good materials.
STATUE 14: Sellable art.
STATUE 15: Kids respect teachers.
STATUE 16: Teachers respect kids.
STATUE 17: Woodview.

Actor 9 walks forward through the statues to DC.

ACTOR 9: But how do schools become arts rich? And how do we make sure every student has access to the arts?

School bell rings. Passing period. Underscore with instrumental music. Second bell rings.

<Equity>

SPEAKER stands in the middle of a group of about 5 people seated. The people are townspeople of Smithville gathered at the community meeting to contest the MAYOR's proposal for arts equity.

SPEAKER: Good people of Smithville, thank you for gathering at this meeting today. As you know, recent studies of the schools in Smithville have declared the Blue School arts poor and the Red School arts rich. In order to increase equity to access for the arts for all students in Smithville, the Mayor has proposed taking some of the arts from the Red School to give some arts programming to the Blue School.

BLUE STUDENT: *(interrupting)* Thank goodness! School is so boring and we need the arts!

RED PARENT: Excuse me! The Red School parents and teachers have worked quite hard to get us where we are. It's not fair to just take our programs away.

RED STUDENT: I agree, but it doesn't seem fair to the Blue School to not get anything at all either. I don't mind sharing a bit with them if I can still have some arts classes.

ADMINISTRATOR: Clearly both schools have needs that need to be met.

TOWNSPERSON: There has to be a better way!

SPEAKER: *(finally getting a word in)* We are aware of your concerns. In response, we have brought in several education consulting firms to propose alternate options. We will hear their proposals today and vote next week.

EQUITY SCENE 1: Bluequity

RED STUDENTS: We're the students from the Red School and you can't take our arts!

BLUE STUDENTS: But we need arts too!

RED STUDENTS: Then get them yourself! We did it. It's not that hard! Gosh.

BLUE STUDENTS: We don't have any money! Zero! NADA!

ANNOUNCER: Bluequity can help! With fundraisers, volunteers, donations, budget adjustments, and teacher training sessions we can give blue school the arts they deserve!

RED TEACHERS: Hey teachers from Blue School, I'm here to help ya'll!

BLUE TEACHERS: Thank you Red School teachers! You're the best!

RED TEACHERS: We know!

ALL: YAAAYYY!! (*All dance around celebrating.)*

School bell rings. Students exit and next group enters into places.

EQUITY SCENE 2: Purple Project
Karaoke version of "Call Me Maybe" by Carly Rae Jepson plays.

The blue school is poor
And we can't provide much more
We can still help them
By raising money for the arts

So come, come and help us
We cannot do it alone
We'll have food and fun
So just come and help us maybe

The purple project:

create equality
For the arts in schools
In Smithville

We will achieve this
With a community festival
Having to do with
Arts in schools.

So help us maybe!

School bell rings. Passing period. Underscore with instrumental music. Second bell rings.

<Advocacy>

All actors return to the stage in same positions from opening. The six reporters also join.

ALL: The arts are…

ACTOR 1: Where we can express ourselves.
ACTOR 2: A place to be free.
ACTOR 3: An important thing to us.
ACTOR 4: I like to come to school 'cuz arts are the best.
ACTOR 5: Awesome.
ACTOR 6: Majestic.
ACTOR 7: The reason why I'm happy.
ACTOR 8: How to show that I'm unique.
ACTOR 9: Fun.
ACTOR 10: Swagalicious.

ALL: The arts because…

ACTOR 11: They are fun.
ACTOR 12: They help us learn.
ACTOR 13: They let us be us.
ACTOR 14: They are everywhere.
ACTOR 15: They keep us interested in school.
ACTOR 16: They help us improve our talents.
ACTOR 17: We love them.
ACTOR 18: They help us choose our future jobs.
ACTOR 19: They influence us deeply.
ACTOR 20: We need them.

ALL: We need them.

Passing period. Two actors begin to tell personal stories to each other as they walk across the stage to class. Two more actors break out and do the same. More actors begin to tell stories to each other as they cross the stage.

S1: When I was in elementary school
S2: seventh grade
S3: in sixth grade
S4: sixth grade
S5: in fourth grade

S1: I was at school and we had to do a talent show and I was extremely nervous, but I got through it…

S2: [begins telling story]

S3: [begins telling story]

S4: [begins telling story]

S5: [begins telling story]

All students exit. Second bell rings.

END OF PLAY

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Vita

Lindsay Hearn is a theatre educator and director originally from Indianapolis, Indiana. As a teacher and director, Lindsay has worked with students of all ages at Imagination Stage, Northwestern University, The University of Texas at Austin, Young Audiences Indiana, Evanston School District 65, the SEED School in Washington D.C., Paramount Theatre, the Austin Independent School District, and the Pflugerville Independent School District. Her teaching and artistic experience includes directing scripted and devised youth theatre, acting, improvisation, and integrating arts into the curriculum. As a graduate student in the Drama and Theatre for Youth and Communities program at UT, Lindsay's work centers on teaching and directing middle school and high school students to promote positive youth development.

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