The Roles of Extracurricular Activities in the Lives of Children in Theater:

A School-Based Contextual Analysis

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Abstract

Previous research has demonstrated that participation in extracurricular activities, such as sports and music, frequently predicts "healthy" academic and social outcomes among children. The present study examines the lives of elementary school children who participate in acting both as an extracurricular activity and as a profession, by considering a wide variety of theoretical frameworks to illustrate their developmental characteristics. This presents an interesting addition to the existing body of research on extracurricular activities, as acting differs greatly from most other "traditional" extracurricular activities in nature and it has frequently been stereotyped to lead to unhealthy developmental outcomes—usually based on anecdotal evidence. Two case studies revealed that participation in acting per se, even as a profession, may not necessarily be predictive of children's academic and social characteristics. Instead, children's as well parents' attitudes and beliefs concerning acting as it fits into children's lives may relate to such characteristics. Implications for educators and other concerned adults are discussed.

Key words: social development; family support; extracurricular activities; middle childhood

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Extracurricular activities have captured much attention in the previous years as potential resources to enhance children's learning and developmental experiences (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Landers & Landers, 1978). Eccles and her colleagues (also see Eccles & Roeser, 1999) have been in the frontlines of the cluster of research suggesting the protective utility of extracurricular activities against delinquency and risky behaviors among adolescents, primarily because they provide the structure and focus which may steer children's time and energy away from activities that are usually considered unproductive.

One such extracurricular activity is sports. Damon (1997; also Damon & Gregory, 2004) notes that participation in sports can greatly enhance the developmental outcomes among youths. Damon contends that the benefit of participation in sports reaches beyond physical fitness and skill development; sports, if organized properly, provide the contexts whereby certain proactive values (e.g., diligence, teamwork, motivation, etc.) and the establishment and maintenance of healthy interpersonal relationships are promoted. Schellenberg (2004) has shown an association between participation in music training and optimized academic performances among children, and the idea that participation in the arts strengthens children's school performances has been promoted by other works citing the benefits of aesthetic education (hooks, 1995). Thus, consideration of participation in extracurricular activities in and of itself is not a novelty in educational and psychological research.

Can one, then, assume similarly positive developmental outcomes associated with participation in other extracurricular activities—such as acting? While this is a plausible possibility, there are some reasons to be skeptical of the view that all extracurricular activities

enhance children's developmental experiences. Damon (1997), for one, notes that participation in extracurricular activities can actually corrupt the potentially positive outcomes, if the participation occurs in contexts that focus on values that are *inconsistent* with what are typically thought to be positive (e.g., winning at all costs; "winning is everything") or if it does not provide sufficient structures for healthy interpersonal relationships (e.g., when coaches, parents and peers focus frantically on the "wrong" values above; when participation causes children to be deprived of opportunities to interact with other children; see Rapport & Maleen, 1998).

The current study will address a type of extracurricular activity that has not previously been explored systematically. Namely, elementary-school children who are professionally working in show business will be examined, in order to help us understand the nature of their lives—particularly in terms of how acting relates to the demands and characteristics of other contexts within their lives, such as school, family, and peers.

While acting per se may be considered "another extracurricular activity," there are some crucial differences from other types of activities, such as traditional music lessons and sports, and it deserves a separate line of inquiry. While empirical research has been scarce to nonexistent on the topic, children in the acting profession are typically stereotyped to be maladjusted (Rapport & Maleen, 1998). Rapport and Maleen further state that such children are typically depicted in the media as troubled or underachieving, usually based on anecdotal evidence without empirical data supporting or refuting these images of child actors. It should also be noted that, in other widely publicized cases, child actors have thrived academically and attended Ivy League universities (e.g., Brooke Shields and Jodie Foster). However, such cases have admittedly been extremely rare and far in between. The psychosocial and academic

consequences of participating in acting as children per se, therefore, are unclear, and participation in acting alone clearly cannot explain the developmental outcomes among children.

Still, there also are some logistical and conceptual issues that might differentiate acting from other types of activities and warrants an in-depth analysis of its consequences. First, children who are professionally acting face schedules that are often incompatible with their routines as children. Performances, rehearsals, and lessons often take up much of these children's free time, which may prevent them from participating in the social (e.g., playing) and academic (e.g., completing homework) activities with their peers—sometimes for extended periods of time. Children in theater may frequently miss school or neglect school-related responsibilities, and they are often surrounded by older adolescents and adults who may not always share the values and practices generally thought to be healthy for children (see earlier discussion on Damon, 1997; also see Rapport & Maleen, 1998). Previous research has revealed that such a socialization pattern may be predictive of adverse developmental outcomes, such as delinquency, risk-taking behavior, and declines in academic achievement (Stattin & Magnusson, 1990). Other extracurricular activities might, depending on the extremity of the magnitude and nature of a child's involvement, entail similar circumstances that are usually thought to be undesirable (e.g., athletes missing school to compete). However, such activities generally involve similar-age peers, and they are—as a rule—usually scheduled around children's school-related responsibilities. It is therefore not surprising that, although official statistics are not available, children on stage are sometimes home schooled or tutored, instead of placed in regular schools (Rapport & Maleen).

Second, based on Damon's (1997) reasoning, the values being promoted in acting may not be consistent with those valued in the rest of a child's life—such as the classroom. Such

virtues as diligence, knowledge and skill acquisition for its own end, and cooperation are often valued and encouraged in education, and they theoretically have a great deal to do with the development of skills and aptitudes that may be useful toward children's current and future success in show business. By contrast, as reflected in such expressions as "being discovered" and "catching a break" to refer to career triumphs, success in show business are frequently defined instead in a more incidental and non-incremental fashion—such as luck. In other words, children might be extremely talented and skilled at various aspects of acting, yet that alone is usually thought to be unlikely to lead to successful careers as actors (Rapport & Maleen, 1998). If luck is indeed perceived to outweigh skills as a predictor of successful careers on stage, individuals on stage may feel helpless about developing a successful career in acting. This conceptualization of success may also be reflected in the enormous popularity of "reality shows" on television whereby amateurs—who are often ostensibly without presentable attributes or skills—voluntarily appear on television to audition, ostensibly in an attempt to be "discovered" and enter the entertainment business.

These aspects of participation in show business may relate closely to the distinction between task-orientation (or a similar concept of learning goals; e.g., an explicit focus on the incremental acquisition of the acting-related skills) versus orientations that focus on the tangential aspects of task participation, such as ego-orientations (e.g., "I act because it makes me feel special"; Nicholls, 1984) and outcome goals (e.g., "I act so I can become rich and famous"; e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Therefore, participation in acting in and of itself would inherently be valued in the task-orientation and learning goal frameworks; on the other hand, according to the "tangential orientation" standpoint, acting is merely a utilitarian means to an end. Task orientations and learning goals have generally been linked to more positive learning and

developmental outcomes, while the "tangential" orientations have been linked to less optimal motivational and performance outcomes (Ames, 1992). Hence, values that have been shown to lead to less than optimal developmental outcomes seems prevalent in the world of acting, and an investigation the *motive* for participating in acting may prove to be informative in discerning the developmental impact of participation in acting.

Also, the elementary school curricula and activities decidedly emphasize cooperation among children, both in academic and social realms. Thus, teachers typically urge children to help each other and collaborate, and individual failures in the classroom are typically dealt with discretely (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1986). Acting, by contrast, is primarily an individual effort, where there usually is only a handful that succeeds as actors/actresses. In addition, failure in acting (e.g., forgetting a line; not passing an audition) is clearly defined and publicly acknowledged. This "dog-eat-dog" view of the world appears to be at odds with what is promoted in the school (Rapport & Meleen, 1998).

What is the relevance of these considerations in understanding the lives of children in show business? Applying the ecological framework often attributed to Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the goodness-of-fit model by Thomas and Chess (1977), Akiba and Garcia Coll (2003) argue that, while children are usually able to navigate multiple worlds adeptly, the relative consistencies in the demands and characteristics across various contexts in a child's life are often predictive of smoother psychosocial developmental experiences.[1] Based on this notion, one can deduce that when the values, norms and expectations in extracurricular activities are incompatible with those promoted in other contexts (e.g., family, schools and the larger society), the benefits of participation in extracurricular activities may diminish—or this incompatibility

[1] While their argument referred specifically to children of color and children from immigrant families, their conceptual considerations apply to all children.

may even lead to adverse outcomes. Furthermore, individual cases clearly differ in terms of such dimensions as children's own characteristics and family characteristics (e.g., a parent making a conscious attempt to bridge the inconsistencies across multiple contexts).

With these considerations in mind, the current study introduces two case studies as an exploratory look at the lives of elementary school children working in show business, attending a regular classroom in a public school in a large urban city. Particular foci will be placed on the routine activities and the values being promoted across various aspects of these children's worlds, as they relate to these children's academic and social characteristics.

Method

Study Design

Given the exploratory nature of the study, two case studies were conducted. Stake (1978; 1994), a proponent of case-study as a social inquiry method, articulates that a better understanding of a phenomenon and/or a population is achieved when multiple cases are jointly considered. While the generality of the observations drawn from this type of study may be limited, it is our perspective that the current study will contribute significantly to the research communities, given the rarity of the studies targeting the population under investigation: children in show business.

Participants

Two girls (age = 6 and 7) in a combined 1^{st}-2^{nd} grade classroom in an urban public elementary school in a large northeastern city voluntarily participated in this study. Both are European Americans who are native English speakers, and neither has been diagnosed with learning or health-related disabilities. Both participants had been pursuing careers as actresses since they were in pre-kindergarten. While the girls do not always train together, they have

taken the same theater workshop series in the past and they have occasionally appeared in the same theater productions. They are both represented by agents who actively seek potential roles for them. The characteristics of these participants were largely normative at the school, aside from their participation in acting. Detailed descriptions of these children are as follows.

Child one: Abby. Abby is a seven-year-old girl, who is the only child of divorced parents in their mid-thirties who have joint custody. Thus, Abby splits her time equally between two middle-class households. Abby's parents both hold college degrees and work as medical personnel. Since Abby was four, she has been participating in a wide variety of acting-related activities including singing lessons, dance classes, and some notable on-stage performances. While she did not have a regular theater role at the time of the study, she had occasional on-stage and photo appearances.

Child two: Zoey. Zoey is a six-year-old girl, who is also an only child of divorced parents. The mother, who is in her early thirties, has the sole custody of Zoey, and she only occasionally sees her father on weekends. Zoey's household is characterized as middle class, and she has been involved in acting since she was almost five years old. Zoey's mother is a dance teacher, who once aspired to be an actress but never gained fame or regular roles. Like Abby, Zoey takes acting-related lessons after school and on weekends. These lessons include dancing, singing, and theater workshops—which entails a range of activities such as pantomiming and voice lessons. At the time of the study, Zoey had been featured in a small theater production where she held a small role for almost six months.

The teacher. Abby and Zoey are in the classroom together with Ms. Swan, a White female in her mid thirties, with a Master's Degree in Education. She has been teaching at this school for seven years, and she has taught 1st through 4th grade classes.

Recruitment

The third author, a 24-year-old European-American female graduate student, served as a student teacher in Ms. Swan's classroom. According to school personnel, Abby and Zoey are the only children known to be actively participating in show business at the school; thus, the current sample is neither randomly selected nor representative of the student characteristics of the school where this study was conducted.

Upon securing permission from the principal and the teacher to conduct the study, the participants' custodial parents were approached to sign consent forms to have their children participate in this qualitative investigation. Furthermore, consent forms were secured from the teacher and the parents, agreeing to interviews concerning the participants on a voluntary basis.

Instruments

The children's interview was designed to be semi-structured interviews. That is, while a list of target issues on their attitudes and beliefs about various issues in acting and school had been identified (Appendix A), the interviewer (i.e., the third author) was asked to allow children to express their thoughts and feelings beyond this list. The interviewer was also directed to refocus the flow of their conversation when children's responses did not correspond to the questions being asked. The same list of topics was also used as a guide in interviewing the teacher and the parents.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection processes for each participant were multilayered, following the research design utilized by Hwa-Froelich and Westby (2003). The first layer surrounded the two children, utilizing a semi-structured interview (two sessions of about 15 minutes each) and observations of them in class (for five hours a day, twice a week, for a period of three weeks).

The second layer dealt with the teacher. Based on the children's interview responses, the authors constructed a set of questions to probe further into how these children were at school, such as academic performances, social characteristics, and so on. This was done to facilitate understanding of the general characteristics of the participant children. The third layer involved the custodial parents of the participants, both mothers, concerning such domains as the realities of these children's daily routines as "student-actresses," and about the parental vision for these children's futures, in personal, academic and professional domains. In addition, field notes were collected based on these interviews and observations, in order to complement the interview-based data (Spradley, 1979).

As noted by Hwa-Froelich and Westby (2003), the triangulation of data sources (i.e., children, teacher, and parents), methods (i.e., interviews and observations), and analyses (i.e., multiple data reviewers, consultations with the teacher and parents) allows us to assume reasonable "trustworthiness" of the data we have gathered.

Results and Interpretation

Analytical Strategy

In the following sections, the main foci of the current study (i.e., scheduling/time commitment as a result of multitasking and value priorities across contexts) will be discussed separately, although they are by no means mutually exclusive. The transcripts of the interviews with the children, the teacher, and the parents were shared between two data reviewers, and the responses in their answers that explicitly or implicitly dealt with the current thematic foci (identified above) were highlighted and analyzed. While the data reviewers were decidedly consistent in this thematic identification process, there were a few differences stemming from oversights rather than discrepancies in interpretation. These differences were subsequently

reconciled, resulting in a 100% consensus between the two data reviewers. In the following sections, the results will be interpreted within the context of the academic and social characteristics of the participating children in the classroom and at home.

Multitasking school and acting: Abby. Abby, who participates in acting-related activities three times a week after school and on most weekends, is adamant about maintaining the balance between her responsibility as a student and her acting-related activities. For example, when asked whether she felt like acting sometimes got in the way of school—or school got in the way of acting—Abby responded:

> No. Like last year, I wanted to go to [i.e., participate in] Street Theater[2]. Mom and dad thought it was too big of a commitment. But I wanted to go, so I told them how I felt and I took care of my homework before I went.

Clearly, Abby actively seeks opportunities to participate in acting-related activities, and her parents, while supportive of her acting career, have conversations about prioritizing her responsibilities as a student—even if Abby was to miss school. Furthermore, Abby articulates that she was able to take an initiative to complete her school-related tasks so that she could focus on theater-related activities, which include singing, violin, modern dancing, ballet, acting/theater workshops, choreography, and occasional mime lessons. In fact, Abby further added, "I always do my homework. I can't come to school if I didn't do my homework!" In fact, Abby's mother notes:

> Sometimes, she [Abby] has dancing, acting, and singing lessons back to back until pretty late [in the evening]. When that happens, I ask her if she wants to do the homework between lessons or wait until she gets home, in which case she has to stay up really late to finish her work. She knows not doing the homework isn't an option. She always finishes her homework before she gets home from lessons.

The teacher, Ms. Swan, indicated that Abby is rarely tardy and had only missed a few days of school that year. Also, Abby's mother stated that Abby's role as a student, as a rule, preceded

[2] This particular activity interfered with the school schedule, and Abby had to miss school on a regular basis in June.

her role as an actress. Abby's mother added that she found it less-than-ideal yet acceptable when Abby has to miss school for acting-related responsibilities—as long as Abby completes her school work. Needless to say, Ms. Swan agrees that Abby always comes to school with her homework meticulously completed.

As this picture would suggest, Abby is characterized by both her teacher and her mother as a "good student" who receives mostly "excellents" and some "satisfactories" (on a three-point grading scale, ranging from unsatisfactory, satisfactory, to excellent). When asked about Abby's social characteristics, Ms. Swan pointed out that Abby was "very popular" at the school, where she was typically surrounded by other children, mostly girls, throughout a day. The third author has observed a concrete example of her popularity; during the study, Abby performed an original song with a sixth-grader at the school's "multicultural night," where their performance was met with a standing ovation by their peers, teachers, and parents. The singing lessons she had been taking, thus, contributed to her successful performance that night. In addition, Ms. Swan characterized Abby as a "caring peer," who follows the rules and is considerate of her classmates. Abby's mother wants her to be a child who is "self-assured but unassuming about who she is and what she accomplishes" and to be respectful of other children and their skills. Abby's behavior in school certainly reflects this wish her mother has for her. While Abby was not holding a regular role in a theater production during the study, her mother states that Abby has decidedly been more successful than most of her counterparts in the auditions in which she has participated.

Ms. Swan, when probed whether she had any concerns about Abby, stated that although Abby was never unruly, sitting down quietly in class was not one of Abby's strengths. Ms. Swan added:

> Sometimes, it's like Abby is in a play. When she's supposed to be working on her own on, say, a math problem, she is giving us commentaries on how she is feeling and what she is contemplating on doing.

Ms. Swan further stated that she has asked Abby to write down her feelings and thoughts instead of vocalizing them, in hopes of eventually having her work on the tasks without having to express her feelings and thoughts. While Abby has yet to successfully accomplish this on a consistent basis, Ms. Swan is not terribly concerned since vocalization of feelings and thoughts is a common behavior among the second graders she has taught.

Despite this concern, all in all, it appears that Abby is able not only to multitask her daily responsibilities as a student and as an "actress in training" but also to adeptly bridge the two domains by effectively utilizing her skills in one realm toward the other. Furthermore, she shows evidence of much awareness of how to navigate the demands of the two distinct worlds, while ensuring not to neglect her life at school.

Multitasking school and acting: Zoey. Zoey, by contrast, was ostensibly overwhelmed by the challenges associated with the balancing act between acting and school. When asked whether acting sometimes got in the way of school, Zoey stated:

> Yeah, I sometimes can't come to school because I practice a lot and I am really tired. And, sometimes, I have to miss school to go to rehearsals or auditions. I wish I didn't have to come to school because sometimes school stuff is boring.

Ms. Swan, her teacher, voiced her concern that Zoey was quite frequently tardy. In fact, the third author noted that Zoey consistently missed the first two periods about twice per week during her observation, although there reportedly were no scheduling conflicts. In addition, Zoey's academic performance was far below average in the classroom. The third author's notes reveal that Zoey typically failed to bring her homework, and she often requested that an adult sit with her in class, guiding and praising her step by step, in order for her to get her work accomplished.

Zoey's mother was rather unconcerned about Zoey's less-than-optimal performance in school, stating that she is still young and she should be focusing on her extracurricular activities, such as acting. This view presents an interesting contrast to one promoted by Abby's mother, that participating in acting is encouraged only to *complement*—not outweigh—Abby's academic and social experiences at school.

Zoey, according to Ms. Swan and the third author's notes, is best characterized as "rejected" (Buhs, & Ladd, 2001). She often bothers her peers, acts dramatic whenever she does not get her way, and is frequently avoided by her classmates. In particular, it was reported that Zoey frequently targets Abby as her object of aggression. For example, the third author witnessed Zoey taking down and crumbling up a drawing that Abby had made which was on display in the classroom. When asked why she had done what she did, Zoey answered:

> I don't like her [Abby]. I am sick of her. I see her in school, at the [theater] workshop… Everywhere. I see her too much.

Clearly, Zoey's world revolves around acting, which is cited by both Zoey and her mother as the primary element preventing her from participating fully in the school-based activities. Furthermore, Zoey's participation in acting seemingly stems from her desire for attention; hence, it is driven by her "ego," rather than by the enjoyment of the participation or the desire to master acting-related skills. Hence, her behavior and her comment above concerning Abby reflect the likelihood that Zoey does not want to share the limelight with another child actress at school. Perhaps as a result, Zoey is unable to form and maintain harmonious relationships with her peers—unless she is the focus of other children's attention. Interestingly, Abby remains non-reactionary toward Zoey, stating that she is older than Zoey, who is just acting like a "baby." While it is unclear whether we could assume that acting is contributing to this social disharmony,

Zoey clearly cites Abby's participation in acting as her motive for generating the conflict—which is consistent with this assumption.

Ms. Swan is concerned about the way Zoey's mother deals with Zoey's problematic behavior. She states:

> I know her mother lets her [Zoey] use her "drama" to get away with a lot. That's why she gets dramatic with other kids. I don't allow that in my classroom. I set limits. But I constantly have to tell her that I like her and I care about her, though, because she gets really upset when I am firm with her.

Zoey's mother, when asked about Zoey's behavioral tendencies, indicated that Zoey's behavior was at times unpredictable. She further added that, although Zoey was usually a happy child, the divorce—which had taken place slightly over two years before the study—might be causing Zoey to act out. Thus, while Zoey's mother recognized Zoey's difficult behavior, guilt over her divorce seemingly prompted Zoey's mother to be permissive of her. It should be noted here that individuals react differently to divorce, and we do not intend to cite divorce per se to be contributing to Zoey's behavioral difficulties. This is particularly true, given that Abby, whose parents also divorced around the same time, shows no visible signs of similar behavioral problems. It should however be noted that Abby is in frequent contact with her father, while Zoey sees her father less frequently.

As described here, the two children with similar acting responsibilities, socioeconomic statuses, and family configurations show vastly different participation and performances in school. These differences are also notable because these children are in the same classroom at the same school, sharing the same teachers. One important assertion which can be made is that rigorous participation in acting in and of itself does not necessarily interfere with the school-related responsibilities in a child's life. Abby, who actively participates in acting-related

activities, does not "miss a beat" in school and is doing well both academically and socially. While Abby's own characteristics (e.g., cognitive readiness, temperament, etc.) may certainly contribute to her successful navigation between the two worlds, it is also apparent that her mother promote the idea and practice that she needs to prioritize her responsibilities and she may not participate in acting-related activities if they interfere with her duties as a student and a "good citizen." Zoey, on the other hand, appears to struggle with the fact that schooling interferes with her participation in acting—not vice versa. Additionally, her mother concurs with this attitude indicating that Zoey should ideally be able to focus on acting, rather than school, at this point. Although Zoey's own characteristics, perhaps as was the case with Abby, may be contributing to her less-than-optimal academic and social success in school, the view expressed by both Zoey and her mother appears as though her underperformance is expected.

The value priorities expressed by the participating children and their parents as well as the practices reflective of such prioritization, thus, appear to be linked to the ways in which acting-related activities fit into children's lives as students, which, in turn, appears to be predictive of the academic and social "success" of these children in school. While the importance of children's own characteristics (such as cognitive readiness and temperament) is duly noted, the issues of value priorities therefore deserve to be explored as important predictors of these children's academic and social outcomes.

Value priorities: Abby. Abby articulates that her involvement in acting is a major source of enjoyment. In response to a question, "Why do you want to act?" Abby responded:

> … [B]ecause I like it. It's really neat. Sometimes I play a girl in a different country, or sometimes I get to be a boy! I can pretend and it's fun.

Abby's mother says she originally steered her toward acting because:

> …it seemed like a perfect blend of many physical and musical activities... You know, to help her become creative in many ways and enjoy life. The more she does, the more reasons she'll have to feel good about herself. If she doesn't continue in acting, she'll still have her singing and dancing.

Abby's mother's view is representative of the concept of self-complexity, originally proposed by Linville (1982). According to this notion, when a person is able to define herself along many different domains (e.g., a singer, a dancer, an actor, a student, a daughter, a friend, etc.), hardships in one domain is unlikely to devastate the rest of her sense of self, since she will have other domains to buffer the negative experience. Based on this logic, it can be hypothesized that when Abby faces challenges along one dimension (e.g., not passing a dance audition), she would be resilient because her complex definitions of self can provide a protective buffer.

When asked how much she liked school Abby responded that she truly enjoyed school, and that she loved all of her friends and teachers. In addition, while she liked all subject areas, she reported that she particularly enjoyed reading. Abby states:

> I love books. I always bring books whenever I go somewhere. I want to write my own book, too, but I don't really know what I'm going to write about.

Ms. Swan states that Abby is an avid reader who is two grades above her expected reading level, and she adds that this is greatly enhancing Abby's analytical skills. Abby's mother explains:

> I just wanted Abby to be comfortable with books. So she always had books around her—even when she was in her crib. Always. She loves books. She'd always be reading a book between practices, and sometimes she gets so engaged that she forgets where she is.

As discussed in the *multitasking school and acting* section above, Abby's mother encourages her to focus on her academics (i.e., reading or homework) between lessons. The benefit of this practice might be twofold. First, it serves the practical purpose of refining Abby's academic and reading skills and knowledge. Second, this routine practice may also be teaching Abby the "value" that, while her participation in acting is valued, her academics are also at the core of her

life, and that she should be able to seamlessly switch between the two worlds on command. These two types of benefits—one directly intended and the other somewhat less directly intended—are both powerful ways of socializing children academically and socially (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1991). According to Tobin and his colleagues, for example, Japanese preschool educators have successfully incorporated origami—the traditional Japanese art of paper folding, in their curricula, so as to enhance: (1) children's motor skills and creativity (i.e., the directly intended goals); and (2) children's ability to work diligently, quietly, and independently (i.e., the indirectly intended goals). Abby's mother, perhaps unknowingly, has been providing her with a similar pair of benefits. Abby's high academic performances and social skills only strengthen this hypothesis.

Value priorities: Zoey. In response to the question, "Why do you want to act?" Zoey responded, "I like it because I can be with my mom and she tells me I can do well." In other words, the connection she feels with her mother and the support she receives appears to be the primary motives for Zoey's participation in acting. Zoey's mother provided a different perspective:

> She [Zoey] enjoys being on stage. On stage, she really shines. You put the spotlight on her, and she gets twinkles in her eyes, and you can see that.

Ms. Swan provides an additional perspective. She believes that Zoey's mother might be forcing Zoey to act in order to move her "toward the fame she never achieved herself." Ms. Swan adds that, to Zoey, acting is all about getting the attention she cannot otherwise get—mostly from her mother.

Furthermore, Ms. Swan states:

> Zoey sometimes throws her career in the faces of her classmates. Of course, she pouts when Abby gets attention. She is really protective of her small circle of friends in class. She argues with them a lot and bullies

> them when they don't put her on the pedestal. She basically wants everyone to be paying attention to her, all the time. Maybe that's because her mother treats her like a queen and lets her get away with a lot, as long as Zoey is on stage.

Her participation in acting, thus, appears to revolve around the attention she receives and she hopes to receive, not only on stage but also from her peers, her mother, and perhaps her teachers.

When asked how much she liked school, Zoey simply stated that school was "okay" and that she did not particularly like or dislike school.[3] This response, combined with her view that school was getting in the way of her acting (as discussed in the *multitasking school and acting* section), would suggest that she does not place as much value on school as she does on acting. This is consistent with Zoey's mother's statement introduced earlier that Zoey was too young to be worried about school and should focus on acting. The contrast in the value priorities under which the two participating children are functioning, thus, is notable and strikingly consistent with the academic and social characteristics of these children.

Conclusions and Implications

One of the strengths of the current study is that the two participants share major characteristics, such as their gender, age group, parents' marital status, socioeconomic status, and schooling contexts, while sharing the same extracurricular activity of our current focus. Considering that these two participants are within the age range where a major series of cognitive, physiological and behavioral changes occur (i.e., the 5-to-7 shift; Sameroff & Haith, 1996), the observed differences in the attitudes and behavior between Abby (age 7) and Zoey (age 6) might partly be attributed to the developmental differences. However, there are a couple of reasons to discount the developmental differences as a major source of the current results.

[3] It should be noted that the interviewer attempted to probe further through different ways of framing this question; however, she was unable to elicit more information from Zoey on this question.

First, Ms. Swan and Abby's mother concur that Abby was just as successful in her efforts to balance the two worlds when she was a first grader. Second, there are conspicuous differences in the ways in which the lives of these children are organized. Abby appears to be in a state of harmony with her mother, her peers, and her teacher—independently of her acting career. Furthermore, various school-related and acting-related activities, all of which Abby inherently enjoys, are all interlinked smoothly, as seen in Figure 1. These activities surround the supportive system within which Abby exists, seemingly enhancing her daily experiences, allowing her to multifunction without a sense of disconnect or disorientation. Abby, her mother, and her teacher all appear to share similar expectations—that she is to balance her academics and her acting-related activities.

By contrast, Zoey appears to conceptualize acting, not as a cluster of activities she enjoys but as a means of earning the attention of her mother, her peers, and her teacher. School perhaps only interrupts this real and/or imagined "transaction" in Zoey's view, and the values concerning education expressed by her mother concur with this view (Figure 2). In other words, the support system Abby enjoys is conspicuously absent from Zoey's life. According to this model, various activities and individuals in her life are not organized in a harmonious and supportive manner, which may partly be contributing to the academic and social difficulties Zoey faces. This incongruence is perhaps aggravated by Zoey's mother, who appears to be highly invested in Zoey achieving considerable fame through her participation in show business. In this respect, Zoey's case appears to fit Crocker's model (2002), which discusses the costs to the individual when engaged in the pursuit of self-esteem. Zoey ostensibly feels a sense of self-worth only when she is admired or approved by others. Thus, acting for her is a means to an end—a way to gain admiration and attention—instead of an enjoyable activity that is inherently rewarding. The

short-term benefits that Zoey experiences when her acting related activities result in some level of success do not translate into lasting feelings of self-worth. Therefore, it can be speculated that, when the external validation of her self-esteem is threatened, such as in instances of competition with Abby, Zoey is unable to draw on the support of her multiple worlds and she resorts to hostility and aggression.

An important finding in the current study is that, as Damon (1997) alluded in his work on children's participation in sports as discussed earlier, the nature of the activity may sometimes matter less than the contextual characteristics within which the activity occurs. Specifically, despite a common stereotype that involvement with show business "destroys" children, participation in the entertainment business per se clearly is not a good predictor of children's adjustment, as we have seen with Abby and Zoey. Instead, the current study has shown that their adjustment may be related to the factors surrounding their participation, such as: (1) parents' characteristics, such as their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior toward school and acting; (2) children's own characteristics, such as their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior toward school and acting; and (3) the school lives—which independently and interdependently exert influence on these children's experiences.

This finding allows us to further refine the argument by Akiba and Garcia Coll (2003) discussed earlier that continuity in the demands and characteristics of various contexts may predict smoother psychosocial outcomes. While the nature of the activity (e.g., acting) per se may ostensibly be inconsistent with what is typically thought to be "healthy" for the development of children, the supporting systems, such as family and school, can structure and prioritize children's participation, so as to support these children's efforts to bridge the potential gaps among the demands and characteristics across situations.

The body of research on home-school continuity and attachment to school is relevant in discussing these potential gaps. Typical school-age children learn to transition from functioning primarily at home to functioning equally successfully in the academic and social worlds within the school environment as well (Beveridge, 2004; Meier & Sullivan, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that the "sense of belonging" to school eases this transition by creating a sense of home-school continuity, which has been linked to school success (Hendrix, Sederberg, & Miller, 1990). In addition, students who are involved in extracurricular activities within a school setting have been shown to have a stronger sense of belonging, which fosters a sense of attachment to school, which, in turn, strengthens the developmental experiences of the students (Brown & Evans, 2002). Although both Abby's and Zoey's acting-related activities exclusively took place outside of the school setting, Abby was able to consolidate her multiple worlds by successfully participating in school events, such as the school talent show, utilizing the skills she had acquired outside the school. The two worlds, thus, complemented each other in this situation. In addition, the support Abby's parents provide toward this continuity, due to the value placed on school responsibilities within her multiple activities, allows for positive developmental experiences. In contrast, Zoey's mother's refutation of the value of school may prompt Zoey to feel that her primary focus is to gain success in acting, fostering a sense of alienation from school and school-related matters, such as academic achievement. In order to successfully navigate the multiple worlds in which Zoey must function, she must achieve a stronger sense of the home-school continuity.

There are some limitations associated with the current study. First, while the dual case study design provided us with a precious opportunity to take an exploratory look at the lives of child actors, we must be cautious about generalizing the current findings to a larger group of

child actors. The current results, thus, should be thought to be "*a* story of children in theater," rather than "*the* story of children in theater." For this reason, it is also important to reiterate that many children on stage are home schooled or tutored, and they do not attend regular schools. In order to generalize the current observations to such actors, children on stage who are not attending regular schools must be considered. Second, while children were asked about their social networks in the acting realm, they were not explicitly observed in the acting context. Speaking with their acting coaches and peers from dance classes, for example, may have provided additional perspectives to enhance our understanding of these children's lives—and, ultimately, a more complete picture of the lives of children in show business.

Third, we must acknowledge that Abby and Zoey's teacher, Ms. Swan, clearly held differentiated views for Abby and Zoey. That is, while she is a professional educator who is respected by her colleagues, Ms. Swan's responses gathered for this study were heavily reflective of her opinions and views about the differences between Abby and Zoey. Although there is no evidence that Ms. Swan treated these children differently, it is an undeniable possibility that the knowledge and feelings Ms. Swan expressed during this study might be affecting her behavior toward these children. This, in turn, may be reflected in the ways in which these children act, feel, and think.

The present study, thus, provides a point of departure, based on which future research may be generated to demystify the lives of children on stage, so as to understand and eventually enhance the developmental experiences of those children. In addition, educators, practitioners and other concerned adults should consider the lessons from this study, and examine and engage not only children in theater but also their family members and other surrounding individuals in their educational and counseling efforts.

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Figure 1: A conceptual framework symbolizing Abby's "healthy" participation in theater.

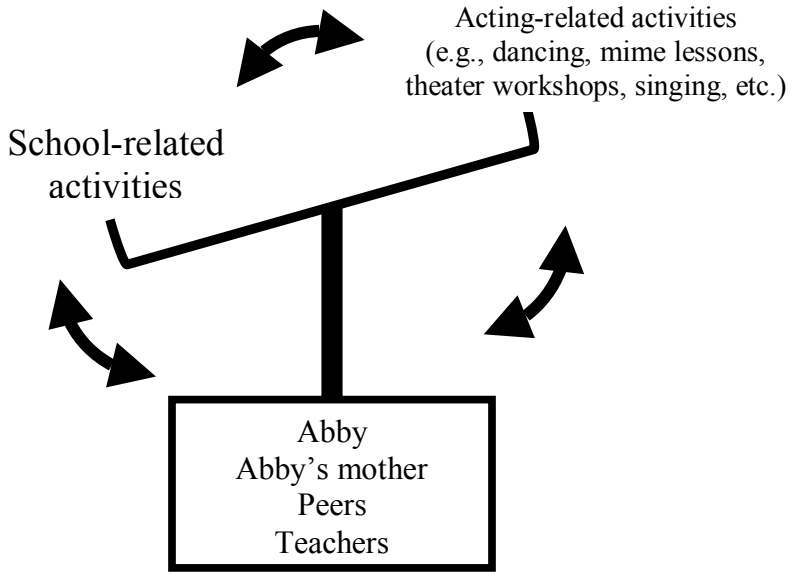
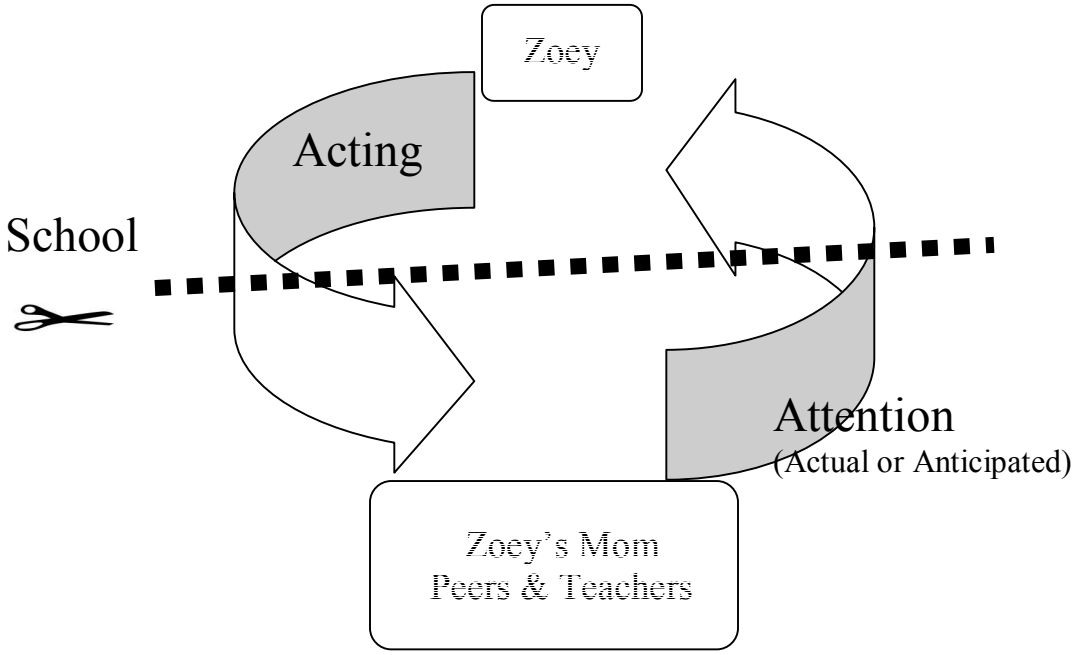


Figure 2: A conceptual framework representing Zoey's motive for participating in theater.



Appendix A: Sample Questions for Interviews

Some of the questions children were asked:

- "How much do you like acting?" "What do you like about acting?"
- "Why do you want to act?"
- "Who makes you want to act?" "How does s/he make you feel that you want to act?"
- "Does acting sometimes get in the way of school?"
  [If the children's initial answers pertained primarily to vacations or weekends, they were probed, "Then, on school nights, does acting sometimes get in the way of school stuff, like your homework?"]
- "How much do you like school?" "What do you like about school?" "What don't you like about school?"
  - If academic preferences were not spontaneously mentioned, children were asked, "What subjects do you like at school?" and/or "What subjects don't you like in school?"
- "Tell me about your friends. Who are your friends?" "Where do you know your friends from?"
- "What do you usually like to do when you are just hanging out?"

Some of the questions parents were asked:

- "Could you describe what kind of a child [child's name] is?"
- "Could you describe [child's name]'s typical day? "What does [child's name] usually do on weekends?" "What does [child's name] usually do in summer?"
- "Is [child's name] currently working as an actress?" "What was her last engagement?"
- "What acting-related lessons does [child's name] take?" "How many times a week does [child's name] participate in acting-related activities and lessons?" "On average, how many hours a day does [child's name] participate in acting-related activities and lessons?"
- "How did [child's name] get into acting?" "Whose idea was it for [child's name] to enter acting?"
- "How supportive are you of [child's name]'s acting career?" "What are some of the reasons?"
- "How does [child's name] enjoy acting?" "What aspects of acting does [child's name] appear to enjoy?" "Are there anything about acting [child's name] doesn't particularly appear to enjoy?"
- "What are some of the concerns you have about [child's name] at home, in school, or perhaps elsewhere?"
- "How does theater fit into other aspects of [child's name]'s life, like schooling and friendship?" "Does acting get in the way of school, or vice versa?"
- "What do you want [child's name] to be when she grows up?"
- "How is [child's name] as a student?"

[continued on the next page]

Some of the general questions the teacher was asked:[4]

- "How would you describe [child's name]?" "What kind of a child is [child's name]?"
- "What are some of the concerns you might have about [child's name], academically, socially or otherwise?"
- "How would you assess the role of acting in [child's name]'s life?"
- "How is [child's name] as a student?"
- "Is [child's name] well liked at school?"

[4] In addition, the teacher was asked about particular issues that were raised in the interviews with children and parents, as well as that caught the observer's attention during her observation of the classroom.