

Integrating Theater Arts into the Classroom:  
The New Responsibilities of the Elementary School Teacher

Jessica Brock

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### **Abstract**

This paper researches how teachers can successfully incorporate Theater Arts into their daily schedules and lesson plans without necessarily teaching a lesson on the subject itself. A common problem that teachers face is not being able to engage students in the learning process; likewise, the students do not retain much of what they are taught.

The purpose of this study is to find out if, and how, students benefit from teachers integrating Theater Arts into their lessons as well as finding effective ways of doing so. The assumption is that teachers may be able to better engage their students if they are theatrical or involve Theater Arts in their instruction method.

The literature that has been reviewed for this study suggests that Theater Arts integration in some subjects improves morale across all subjects, resulting in overall academic improvement. Additionally, an interview with an experienced elementary school teacher confirms that integrating Theater Arts into curriculum engages students and provides an additional way to teach and assess second language learners.

This study finds that Theater Arts integration in curriculum engages students in the learning process and promotes a greater affinity for education. If students are eager to learn, they will pay closer attention to subject matter. Once students are more engaged in school, schools will perform better on academic testing and produce students who have a positive attitude towards education.

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

I can vividly remember my high school history teacher acting out a one-man interpretation of the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago. He used theatrical body movements, performed the gangsters' actions, and told the story at the same time. He was captivating, and years later I can still remember specific details of this lesson. I cannot remember many specific details I read out of the history textbook. When I was faced with teaching fourth grade, I challenged myself to find a way of helping the students learn and retain California History. Recalling my high school memory, I taught the class a lesson using the same method my teacher had used. I also asked students to participate in acting out the scenarios. The students were very engaged and more interested in the subject matter than I had ever experienced. When the students were asked to recall details a few days later, the level of retention was impressive.

### **Statement of Problem**

Many traditional teaching methods, such as reading from a textbook and answering questions, partner reading (when two students take turns reading out loud to each other,) or listening to a recording of a text while following along, fail to fully engage a student's attention. When a student's attention is not engaged, his or her retention level is minimal. If a teacher is not commanding the students' attention with the subject matter, the students will tend to lose focus and be off-task, resulting in further loss of knowledge and requiring more of the teacher's time to administer consequences.

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore how teachers can incorporate Theater Arts into their lessons and/or teaching styles, and to find if doing so has a positive effect on students. The instruction of more traditional subjects such as Language Arts, Math, and History often takes precedence over Theater Arts in the classroom when teachers feel the pressure of time constraints. As well, budget cuts are frequently cutting funding for Theater Arts programs in schools. If teachers do not take it upon themselves to seek alternative ways to expose students to Theater Arts, they may never be exposed to the subject area.

## **Research Questions**

How can teachers effectively incorporate teaching Theater Arts into their lesson plans and/or teaching styles? What are the results of teachers incorporating Theater Arts into their lesson plans?

Theater Arts can be defined as any form of performance art including: dancing, acting, singing, or storytelling. It is a broad term that encompasses numerous forms of expressing oneself in a dramatic or theatrical way. For the purpose of this paper, Theater Arts refers to dancing, acting, singing, and storytelling.

## **Theoretical Rationale**

The theory of multiple intelligence, developed by Howard Gardner (Brualdi, et al.,1996), applies to the use of Theater Arts in teaching. This theory supports the idea that there are multiple types of intelligence including: spatial, linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, and existential. Gardner's studies found that most people learn using several of the seven intelligences he established (Brualdi, et al., 1996). A person who learns from a teacher using Theater Arts in his or her curriculum will

have several intelligences appealed to; these intelligences may include linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, spatial, and interpersonal. The more intelligences a teacher can appeal to, the more success he or she will have engaging students in education.

If theater arts are used in classroom curriculum, teachers are appealing to several types of intelligences. Students are actively engaged both physically and mentally, using language, body movement, sound, and communication.

Social development theory of Lev Vygotsky (Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999) maintains that people develop skills from the culture by which they are surrounded; essentially, they learn without realizing they are learning. For example, if students are having an enjoyable time writing and performing a skit about how the human digestive tract works, they are learning while having a good time and may not actually realize that they are doing schoolwork and learning. The idea of using Theater Arts in lesson plans is consistent with this theme of social development; the idea is that the students will be caught up and involved with the active learning style and will retain knowledge without actually trying to or realizing that they are learning.

### **Assumptions**

The following are my assumptions as I begin my focus on this research topic:

1. Students retain more of what they are taught if they are engaged by a lesson.
2. Using theatricality (character voices, acting out scenarios being taught, physical movement,) while teaching will engage students.
3. Students become more comfortable with public speaking if they have practice speaking or performing in front of a crowd. Requiring them to perform in front of their peers provides that opportunity.

Traditional teaching methods (partner reading, listening to the teacher read aloud, answering written questions after reading material) do not appeal to most students and retention is low. Teachers who incorporate Theater Arts into their lesson plans and teaching styles can more effectively engage students and build useful skills such as public speaking, self-esteem, and literacy.

### **Background and Need**

The research of Smithrim and Upitis (2005), highlights a study of several schools with similar socioeconomic statuses (including controls) that implemented an arts based curriculum. Each teacher worked with an artist to design lessons that integrated arts into the curriculum. The study took place over three years and sampled roughly 6000 individuals, including students, teachers and parents.

The conclusion of the study found that not only did the students improve academically, but also their overall self-esteem increased. Students who attended schools that implemented the arts curriculum scored slightly higher in every subject than students from schools that did not. The arts were not implemented into the mathematics lessons, but mathematics scores improved higher than any other subject; the evidence shows that students became more highly engaged in school, resulting in an overall academic improvement. This information was indicated using several identifiers, including standardized testing, writing samples, surveys on attitudes, open-ended surveys, and interviews (one-on-one and group) (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005).



## Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

### Introduction

This section provides an overview of the literature on theater arts. It begins with setting the research question in historical context, how Arts in education came to existence, and some of the problems the U.S. is currently facing in the Arts department. Included in the review are examples of teachers who have in some way integrated Theater Arts into their classroom curriculum. These examples include several schools that participated in a yearlong formal study, teachers who participated in workshops and put what they learned into action in their classrooms, and one teacher who brought a guest artist into her classroom to help her facilitate a Theater Arts based reading lesson plan.

### Historical Context

The United States Office of Education was established in 1867 (Gauthier, 2003), but at that time did not put any emphasis on arts education. It was not until 1961, when John F. Kennedy took office as President of the United States, that the arts in education began to gain support (Gauthier, 2003).

The movement began with little funding and support, but this would grow and expand over time. Kennedy supported this movement because he saw a lack of arts appreciation in American culture. Before Kennedy could complete his mission to integrate the arts into American culture and education, he was assassinated. His successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, continued his movement to support the arts.

In 1964, Congress passed an act called the National Arts and Cultural Development Act, which established a council in the White House required to advise, support, maintain, promote,

and encourage the arts on local, state, and federal levels. This act eventually became the basis of a Bill, and eventually the Arts and Humanities Program formed. This Act, Bill, and Program are still in existence. The era of when this emergence of the arts in American government has come to be known as the “Camelot Years” (Gauthier, 2003).

In the past decade, the work of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson related to support for Arts education has been disintegrating. Time and money are increasingly cut from schools, while recommended academic content standards are growing. There has been reduction in class time and funding designated to teaching the arts. In some U.S. schools, art programs have been completely eliminated. From 1962 to 1989, the average amount of art instruction in grades 1-6 had declined by 18% (Mims & Lankford, 1995).

Schoolteachers are facing a challenge of having too much to do in terms of mandated subject area teaching responsibilities with not enough time or money to support them. With continuously shrinking school time and budgets, this issue does not appear to be going away any time soon.

## **Review of Previous Research**

### *Arts Programs in the Schools*

In a study taking place over one year in two similar schools in Ohio, fourth grade classes that integrated arts into the curriculum using a program called Arts Interdisciplinary Model Program in the Arts for Children and Teachers (IMPACT) (Kinney & Forsyth, 2005) were assigned a full time arts team. The teams worked with classroom teachers to plan lessons that integrated arts into the curriculum in order to “reinforce learning in other academics and the arts.” (Kinney & Forsyth, 2005). The students received arts instruction often and on a regular basis. The results showed that schools utilizing the Arts IMPACT program scored higher on

standardized tests in the subjects of math, science, and citizenship than similar schools who do not use the program. However, there were no significant differences found in the subjects of reading and writing. This study found that integrated arts instruction has “either a positive effect upon student achievement or no adverse effect” (Kinney & Forsyth, 2005 p 35).

Several teachers who participated in a Theater Arts integration training session in Maryland applied the activities they had learned into their everyday activities. These teachers found that students’ understanding of vocabulary significantly improved as a result of these practices (Mardirosian, Lewis, & Fox, 2007). One teacher noted that Theater Arts integration in curriculum was an effective way to teach and assess understanding of second language learners because it does not rely solely on language. (Mardirosian, Lewis, & Fox, 2007).

One researcher took up residency in a classroom, observing a teacher instruct third and fourth grade remedial readers for one year. The teacher found that her students were not engaged with traditional round robin reading (when a teacher randomly calls on students to read aloud while the rest of the class follows along visually.) “The time it took a child to negotiate the page of text often ensured lack of attention from the other children. When [the teacher] read, with varying intonation and character voices, they listened, but when their peers read, many found other things to do” (Wolf, 1998 p. 395). She sought other ways to engage her students and decided to focus on Theater Arts. She came to this decision after observing her students perform short plays in their free time and their response to being able to entertain others. This teacher arranged to have a guest teacher, a local drama teacher, help her with the integration. To learn language arts, the students read from scripts and participated in theater games to learn to use their voices and bodies while building concentration, vocabulary, and retention skills (Wolf, 1998). It was found that students considered *reading* to be when words were stated in a

monotone voice, but considered it *acting* when the words were read with inflection and expression. If the students thought of what they were doing as reading, their energy and concentration were low, and they considered it “boring, hard, and uncool.” In contrast, if the students thought of what they were doing as acting, they were eager to participate. Once their teacher discovered this, she began presenting reading in a new light. She explained quotation marks as what the characters were saying, and presented the narrator as a storyteller. As her method of teaching reading shifted, so did the general class attitude towards reading. Students began to enjoy reading, and were eager to volunteer to read aloud.

There is no statistical data provided by the government on Theater Arts curriculum. The only statistical data of the arts was taken after an 11-year span (1997 and 2008), and included only the arts subject of visual arts and music. Questions included asking students to describe differences in art and analyzing and describing art. Students were scored on a scale from 0-300 in each subject. The highest score in music was 194, and the highest Visual Arts score was 193. Students were also scored on a 0-100 scale in creating art. The average score was 52. It is notable that White and Asian/Pacific Islander students scored higher than Black and Hispanic students (22-23 points.) Female students averaged 10-11 points higher than their male counterparts. There was no significant difference in the percentages of students attending schools offering instruction in music and visual arts from 1997 to 2008 (Keiper, Sandene, Persky & Kuang, 2009).

## **Administrative Records**

Each state has varying content standards for subjects, but visual and performing arts is always included. The exact standards are different from state to state, but even in Kindergarten teachers are expected to teach Theater Arts. In California, the basic Kindergarten standards include Artistic Perception, Creative Expression, Historical and Cultural Context, Aesthetic Valuing, and Connecting and Applying what they have learned (California Department of Education, 2010 a). Teachers are under an enormous amount of pressure to cover all content standards, and Theater Arts is one that is often overlooked. However, it can be easy to teach these standards while covering other subjects such as Language Arts, history, and math. Something as simple as turning a history lesson into a storytelling session can engage the students and help them visualize the past. A dress up corner can help students gather ideas for creative writing (Crawford, 2004).

## **Chapter 3 Method**

### **Description of Method**

In order to directly research how theater arts can be integrated in to classroom curriculum and the effects in may or may not have on students, I interviewed an expert in the field of teaching. The teacher interviewed has taught sixth grade for several years, and is currently teaching kindergarten for the second year. The elementary school site by which this teacher is employed is located in an upper-middle class neighborhood in Southern California. The school currently holds the title of a “California Distinguished School,” an honor bestowed on schools proving academic excellence. While there is no data on the exact number of English learners (EL’s) available, the district has an average of 16.3% in Kindergarten and drops to 8.3% by sixth grade. Of all the EL’s in the school, 36.2% speak Korean, 21.2% speak Spanish, and 10% speak Filipino. Other languages spoken include Arabic, Mandarin, French, German, Hindi, Russian, Japanese, Vietnamese, and more (California Department of Education, 2010 b).

### **Access and Permission**

Access to this professional expert and school site were granted to me because we are employed in the same district. I chose to use the resources closest to me because I would be granted the most access to data and personal interviews. In addition to these reasons, I felt that any potential interviewees would be more honest and detailed if they felt comfortable with the interviewer.

In the interview, I asked a series of direct questions pertaining to the topic and transcribed the interview verbatim so no details are left out. This allows the reader to absorb the information and reach his or her own conclusion on the subject matter. The interview and location were kept confidential to protect the privacy of those involved.

### **Ethical Standards**

A university advisor reviewed and approved this paper. The interviewee may be referred to as “she,” “the teacher,” or other possible descriptors that keep her identity protected. Any documentation of the interview has been kept safely stored and locked.

### **Data Gathering Strategies**

To gather data for this study, an interview technique was used. The interviewee was a teacher who is currently employed in a Kindergarten classroom, but has additional experience teaching sixth grade. The interviewee was asked questions relevant to this study and provided answers based on her professional experience. The data collected will be presented verbatim in the next chapter.

### **Data Analysis Strategies**

To analyze the data gathered from the interview once it was completed, I reviewed the information for common themes. I looked to find any consistencies or inconsistencies in the given answers, and compared the results to my previous assumptions and research.

## Chapter 4 Findings

### Interview with an Expert

To acquire a better understanding of how a seasoned teacher might integrate theater arts into everyday curriculum and her thoughts on how the students are affected, I interviewed a veteran teacher at an elementary school in Southern California in an upper-middle class district. This teacher has taught sixth grade and Kindergarten. Our interview focuses on integrating Theater Arts into a kindergarten setting, the grade level she currently teaches.

**Question:** “How do you integrate Theater Arts into your curriculum?”

**Response:** “We begin each day with a calendar song and dance. Singing songs help the students remember the days of the week and months of the year. We also perform the *Three Piggy Opera* [a short musical based on the story *The Three Little Pigs*] each year. We integrate that into the curriculum using writing assignments after reading several versions of the *Three Little Pigs*. In math, we use questions like ‘How many pigs are left if the wolf gets mad and eats one?’”

**Question:** “Why do you believe it’s important to integrate Theater Arts into teaching?”

**Response:** “It’s important for students to be able to express themselves in different ways. There are so many different learning styles; some thrive with movement, music, and expression. Those students might not shine in other subjects.”

**Question:** “How do the students respond to Theater Arts integrated into the curriculum?”

**Response:** “With enthusiasm, they love it. Once in a blue moon someone doesn’t participate; that requires a talk with the student and their parents about their report card. But 99.9% of the time they love it.

**Question:** “Describe other ways you could integrate Theater Arts into your curriculum.”



**Response:** “Later in the year, or in the upper grades, Reader’s Theater is a great way to integrate Theater Arts. [The students] read it, talk, act it out. It strengthens comprehension, helps remember sequencing, brings out emotions in reading, and builds enthusiasm.”

**Question:** “What do you perceive the effects might be on students if they had more exposure to Theater Arts in the curriculum?”

**Response:** “Theater Arts are great for English Learners. Research has shown that you learn by doing. Their interest level seems to be higher when I use Theater Arts to teach. The students who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, whose families don’t always make school a top priority, also have a higher interest level when I use Theater Arts. I also think API [Academic Performance Index] scores would go up. There is sort of a ‘domino effect;’ class is more relaxed, more fun. You’re learning without knowing you’re learning.”

In observing this class rehearse for their annual production of “*Three Piggy Opera*,” one student in particular really stood out among the others. This student had hardly said a word during my observations. I found out from the teacher that he was painfully shy and would not even speak his name for several days at the beginning of the school year. His parents’ first language was not English. He quickly averted his eyes when anyone looked at him. The teacher was surprised when he volunteered to audition for the role of the Big Bad Wolf, but allowed him the opportunity and he won the role. During their rehearsal I observed him crouching behind a “tree” in the set, waiting for his moment to pounce out, deliver his lines, and perform a song and dance that would be repeated several times throughout the play. When his cue came, he jumped up, full of life and character, and gruffly recited his lines loud and clear. Then he burst into his song, facing the audience with confidence. His face contorted into a fierce and menacing growl just as his character was intended to do. He never missed a step of his choreographed dance.

This student had found an outlet, and the teacher had discovered a way for him to open up in front of an audience.

Another activity I observed was a “Listen and Move” activity. The students listened to noises on a c.d. and acted out the movements that went with the sounds. For example, when a “Boing! Boing! Boing!” sound played, the students hopped around the room. This is another way the teacher integrated Theater Arts into her curriculum, and sharpened gross motor skills at the same time. This teacher does not have specific training in Theater Arts, but has found ways of integrating the basic principals into her classroom. She developed her skills with experience, sharing ideas with other teachers, and using outside sources (such as the internet or books). Observing her in action, I noticed that she fluctuated voice tone and volume frequently. When posing questions to the class, she used intonation to make the questions seem very mysterious. There was enthusiasm in her voice, facial expressions, and body language as she taught her lessons.

Through my interview and observations, I found that Theater Arts integration in the classroom boosts moral and creative expression. If students are allowed this freedom of expression they will feel more in control of their education. School will be less of a chore and more of a privilege; they will love school and learning. It seems as though when students have an interest in one aspect of school, it makes other subjects more relevant, especially if multiple subjects are linked by a common theme. As indicated in the interview, there will always be some students who do not enjoy Theater Arts practices. However, including those students in the activities will teach them how to accept differences in learning styles and that sometimes they will have to participate in activities that they do not particularly enjoy.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

### Summary of Major Findings

In researching this subject I have found that integrating Theater Arts into elementary classroom curriculum only benefits students. It seems that students not only perform better in the subject area that a teacher incorporates Theater Arts into, but in all subject matter. This is most likely due to an attitude shift in their attitude towards school. In addition to scoring higher in the subject areas of math, science, and citizenship, students show increased vocabulary, concentration, and retention skills. Theater Arts offer an alternative method for teachers to assess second language learners understanding and retention in a way that may not rely solely on their language skills. Finally, integrating Theater Arts into classroom curriculum offers an outlet for creative expression where students might not have otherwise had it.

Based upon the studies referred to in chapter two, an interview with a professional, and my own observations, I will include two sample lesson plans that integrate Theater Arts into everyday classroom curriculum. The first sample lesson plan utilizes storytelling, turning a history lesson into an exciting story that will engage students. This lesson plan requires facial expression and enthusiasm from the teacher to excite the students. This sample lesson plan takes place in the middle of a sequence of lesson plans so that an example of re-teaching can be exemplified at the start. The second sample lesson plan turns an everyday science lesson on human digestion into a skit that the students act out. This lesson plan requires participation from the students and very few materials.

## **Lesson Plan #1 Grade Level- 4th**

Subject Matter- California History (Bear Flag Revolt)

California Content Standard 4.3- Students explain the economic, social and political life in California from the establishment of the Bear Flag Republic through the Mexican-American War, the Gold Rush, and the granting of statehood.

Introduction- “Yesterday we left off at a pretty exciting point in California history. Can we recall what we know so far?” (Students raise their hands and recite facts that they remember from the previous lesson. This sets the tone in the class and prepares the students for what they are about to learn.) Ask that the students make sure to pay close attention to detail because you will be asking for volunteers to act out part of the story. Presentation- (Begin by quickly restating the events and led up to where you are starting.) “We already know that the first people to live in California were the California Indians. Then, Spain gained control. Next, California became part of Mexico.

As The United States began to expand west, many Americans wanted California to become part of the United States.

“By the mid-1840s there were about 7,000 Californios in California. Most were Mexican citizens, and Mexican law said that only Mexican citizens could own land. (Some Americans became Mexican citizens so they could own land).

“In 1845 James Polk became president of the United States. By this time, about 1,000 settlers had come to California from the U.S. There were trappers, merchants, ranchers, and farmers. Pio Pico, the Mexican governor of California, started to get a little worried. I am going to tell you why, and before I do I want to teach you a new vocabulary term: Manifest Destiny. This is

the idea that it was America's God-given right and duty to expand from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean.

“Pio Pico knew that President Polk believed in Manifest Destiny, and that most Americans did as well. With all of these settlers coming in to Mexico believing that it was their right and duty to expand their territory, Pico knew that his Mexican territory would be in trouble. Polk said in a speech that he would protect the ‘right of the United States to... our land that lies beyond the Rocky Mountains.’ He was promising to protect Americans who settled in California.

“Now, before we go on, I just want to point out that President Polk only told the people that he wanted to expand because of Manifest Destiny, because God wanted the U.S. to stretch from ocean to ocean. Can you think of any other reasons that Polk might have had to expand the U.S.'s territory to include California?

(Call on students who have raised their hands.)

“In 1846, a group of new settlers called the Bears was ready to rebel (this means to refuse to obey the people who are in charge). The Bears wanted to end Mexican government in California. They decided that the first place they were going to overtake was the headquarters of part of the Mexican army in Northern California. This place was called Sonoma. The man in charge there was named Col. Vallejo. Vallejo, like the Bears, did not think that Mexico was doing a good job of governing California. One morning, Col. Vallejo woke up to 33 rebels pounding at his door to take over. What do you think he did? Instead of fighting them, Vallejo invited them in and agreed to give them control of Sonoma.

“Instead of claiming California as part of the United States, the Bears declared a new country, called the Republic of California, and created a new flag to stand for it. The flag was created

quickly, and had a star, a grizzly bear, and the words California Republic on it. This event is now known as the Bear Flag Revolt.”

Here, select a few student volunteers. Assign roles (General Vallejo, several Bears) and in approximately thirty seconds explain that you would like them to act out what happened between General Vallejo and the Bears. The performing students will become very enthusiastic about storming up to General Vallejo’s door and acting like they are ready to start a war. The class will respond to the humorous scenario of General Vallejo inviting his would-be attackers into his home for a friendly gathering.

End the lesson plan with this question- “How long do you think the Republic of California lasted? (Wait for answers.) Less than one month. But what happened had started something- California had declared war on Mexico.

This lesson plan engages the students by using enthusiastic storytelling and making re-telling events with the excitement and vigor that they deserve. Instructors must remember that this is most likely the first time any of their students have heard anything about these historical occurrences. This was a very important event in California’s journey to statehood, and with the proper delivery students will remember it.

## **Lesson Plan #2 Grade Level- 5th**

Subject Matter- Life Sciences (Digestive System)

California Content Standard 2.c- Students know the sequential steps of digestion and the roles of the teeth, mouth, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, large intestine, and colon in the function of the digestive system.

Introduction- First, engage the students by making it personal: “What is your favorite food?”

Draw it. Then start with what they know: “Who thinks they know what happens to food when it’s inside your body? Why do we eat food?” Make a chart: What I think I know, What I want to learn, What I found out. To engage the students further, give them some interesting facts:

them some cool facts: “How many of you have eaten a REALLY BIG meal? Do you know how big your stomach is? It’s only the size of your fist! How do you think all that food fits in there?”

Once the students are engaged, the lesson plan can begin.

Presentation: “Today we are going to talk about the journey food makes through your body. You are going to find out about the roller coaster that goes through your body, and what happens before it comes out the other end! By the end of this lesson you will have written a short skit in small groups about the digestive system. We will perform the skits in front of each other.”

Break students into small groups. Assign each group member a different role in the digestive process. Using their science books, students are asked to determine the function of their organ and the order in which food is processed through them. Students will make signs to wear around their necks to inform their classmates of their part in the digestive process. Then, the groups will work together to write a short skit that follows food through the digestive tract. Each group member must recite lines that describe their organ’s function in the process. Do not give too much instruction- leave room for creativity. Allow approximately thirty minutes (or longer

depending on the needs of students) before asking students to wrap up this process. End this lesson plan by asking the students to perform their skits for their classmates.

This lesson plan engages students mentally and physically; they are learning about science and Theater Arts simultaneously. This assignment promotes excitement about learning science, allows students a chance to move their bodies in the classroom, and enables kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learners an opportunity to learn in the best way possible. This assignment encourages students to become more comfortable with performing and public speaking while building their science vocabulary.

### **Comparison of Findings to Previous Literature**

My research is in agreement with the previous written research. All available research showed that integrating Theater Arts into classroom curriculum has either a positive effect on students or no effect on students. I saw firsthand the excitement that overcame the students when they were acting out a story rather than simply reading it. This is in congruence with the study of students who were the pupils of a guest drama teacher introducing theater games as a form of reading (Wolf, 1998). The students were eager to participate and did not look upon what they were doing as a chore.

### **Limitations/Gaps in the Research**

There is little to no statistical data to be found from the government on Theater Arts performance or integration. The majority of literature found in this subject area focused on schools that implemented programs to integrate Theater Arts or invited guest teachers into the classroom (each requires funding.) There was little research found on individual teachers who integrated Theater Arts into their classroom on their own and recorded the results. This study had a zero dollar budget for research, and was also limited by time and accessibility of additional



school sites. Field research in low-income neighborhood schools would make this study more complete, as would case studies of individual teachers who integrated Theater Arts into their curriculum and the results (over a number of years.)

### **Implications for Future Research**

This study opens a number of other doors for future research. Comparison of retention and vocabulary skills between students from schools that have a policy of teaching directly from a book (particularly Program Improvement schools) and those that learn in an environment in which the teacher regularly integrates Theater Arts into his or her curriculum would have an impact on the significance of this study. This would be most effective with the support of government funding and results yielding statistical data.

Other research may include focusing on the results of students in low income areas and their results versus students in middle- to high- income areas who have Theater Arts integrated into their curriculum. Additionally, study of second language learners who have and have not had Theater Arts integrated into their curriculum may more accurately show their level of comprehension; this is because teachers could assess their knowledge in ways that do not necessarily require language skills but reveal conceptual skills. Further study of how integrating Theater Arts into classroom curriculum may or may not benefit shy or socially awkward students would be another area of relevance connected with this study. My observance of one very shy student shining as a result of Theater Arts in the classroom left me wondering how other students in this situation might react; was this an unusual reaction or could Theater Arts help more young students become more socially comfortable?

**Overall Significance of the Study**

This study found that teachers who integrate Theater Arts into their classroom curriculum produce students who exhibit better retention, higher vocabulary skills, and generally better attitudes towards school. If teachers integrate Theater Arts into their classrooms they are benefiting their students and promoting higher classroom morale while covering content standards that are frequently overlooked. With better retention, a larger vocabulary bank, and higher interest in school, it is likely that test scores would improve and students would receive a better education.

The intention of this study was to determine if Theater Arts had a positive influence on students' educations, and if so, to encourage more teachers to integrate Theater Arts into their classroom curriculum. Because the outcome of this study shows that integrating Theater Arts into curriculum does have a positive influence on students' educations, it is assumed that more teachers will integrate Theater Arts into their teaching techniques.

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