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*A Well-Rounded Community:
Integrating Arts to Enhance the Mental Health of
Elementary School Students*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the continued funding cuts to arts programs in elementary schools across the country, their benefits to the mental health of students and the community at large are undeniable. This senior capstone research project takes a deeper look into local art programs that are available to elementary school students and the way those programs enhance their mental health. In addition to enhancement of mental health, integration of the arts in any forms and all formats offer a unique way to round out local communities, which are beneficial to all.

A Well-Rounded Community: Integrating Arts to Enhance the Mental Health of Elementary School Students

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

It is not uncommon for students and teachers to grow weary of the daily grind and frustrated with the monotony of essential lessons covered in an elementary school classroom. Standardized testing and making the grade often come before creative ways of thinking and real connection to the material. Public schools are reducing non-academic classes to avoid any associated costs with non-essential programs and to stress the importance of assessment. While it may not be feasible for schools to offer non-academic classes of an artistic nature due to time restraints or high cost associated with them, it is perfectly within reach to integrate arts into the basic curriculum. In doing so, interests are peaked and emotional well-being and mental health are improved.

When I was just five years old my parents, my sister and I moved from our home in San Jose, California, to the smaller and much less urban City of Gilroy. Just about a thirty minute car ride south of San Jose, Gilroy gave me the opportunity to experience life in a small-town community and all the ups and downs that go along with it. I had a very happy childhood and, without a doubt, the connections I made in Gilroy helped shape me into the woman I am today.

After passing an assessment in Kindergarten, I had the opportunity to attend elementary school with most of the same students every year through enrollment in the GATE program. GATE not only allowed me to create lifelong connections and friendships stressing the importance of planting roots and witnessing growth within a community, but it also offered a unique educational experience all its own. Young and Balli (2014) attest that there is a routine, effortless abundance of creativity at a GATE magnet school which the students appreciate for the incorporation of emotion and creativity in their work. Truly, that was an experience in which one is immersed in arts education in conjunction with the more traditional common core subjects.

Daily exposure to the healing and creative power of the arts sparked something deep within me. While each and every one of my classmates enjoyed our learning style through the GATE program, a few of my peers and me were moved even further. We have used arts education and art therapy to propel our careers forward by sharing what we were taught as children and integrating the arts into anything and everything possible. Higgins (2008) attests to this in that, “[through arts-integration students are] encouraged to think within their practical limits and restrictions but have a conscious mind’s eye towards the unconditional possibilities. ...[this is] a self-reflective process that assists groups of people in a journey together to reach their goals” (p.334).

I have devoted my Liberal Studies area of focus on Visual and Performing Arts partly for pure enjoyment and partly to give a little of what I learned as an arts integrated student back to my future students as well. For the past five years, my position of employment has helped me to educate students between the ages of six and seventeen in the fields of music and theatre. There is no greater blessing I could think of for myself than observing the impact of arts on the developing minds of young children. For me, personally, arts have always been a big part of my life. After thirty years in the arts, - as a hobby, in my education and as a career, – I have seen the positive and negative effects it can have on a person. But, it is most clear that through proper guidance and exposure to the arts, the pros of arts integration far outweigh the cons.

The visible confidence my students gain makes all the hard work and long hours completely worthwhile. Their differentiated ways of looking at life and their schoolwork brought new found excitement to their growing personalities. Additionally inspired are the parents, friends and family who come to support my students in their finished theatrical production. Everyone benefits from exposure to the arts, both in and out of the classroom. Among other numerous life skills, the arts teach patience, creativity and teamwork to those who are open to its power and beauty.

As I finish up my degree and move forward in my career I will use this capstone research project to seek the answer to a series of research questions. To begin with, my primary research questions reads as follows: *How does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community?* The secondary or related research questions I will address include: *Are there schools in the Santa Clara County that currently implement arts integration in the classroom? If so,*

how do they implement arts integration which enhances the mental health of elementary school students and the community? Are there significant community programs outside the classroom that offer artistic activities that enrich the mental health of elementary school students? If there are, how do they improve students' mental health? According to teachers and community organizations, how does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community? Are there arts integration resources available for schools and community organizations to enrich the mental health of students? To tackle these questions I will begin with a review of the literature I consulted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As we move from posing the questions to uncovering the answers, this next section will examine the formal literature consulted in my research. Through a collection of articles, various internet sources and Ted Talks, we gain a better understanding of art-based activity and the unique way it alters one's way of thinking, state of mind and general outlook on life and learning. Here, we will read what researchers and professionals have to say about the incorporation of art-based activity in classrooms and the community.

To begin with, we can take a very literal look at the definition of the terms we are discussing. Perhaps the most abstract of these terms is “arts.” What exactly are the arts? By definition, “arts” refers to the theory and physical expression of creativity found in human societies and cultures. Major constituents of the arts include literature, performing arts (such as music, drama and dance), and visual arts (i.e. sculpting or painting). Some art forms combine a visual element with performance, or artwork with the written word. Now for the more obvious terms; “mental health” is a person’s condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being and a “community” can be defined as a group of people living in close proximity or working together successfully who are skilled, capable or knowledgeable in a lot of different areas.

In an effort to create a unified school community where students were all taught in the same way and given the same opportunities the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was set in motion in 2002. NCLB required states to develop basic assessments that students would complete every year and deemed it necessary to see a desired level of development reached by every student. Schools were wildly in favor of reaching that standard for if they did not they would not receive their allotted federal funding (No Child Left Behind Act Pros and Cons, 2015). So, with money on their minds, schools spent more time on teaching children how to fill in bubbles and pass exams. The idea of creating ideas and critical thinking was pushed aside in favor of standardized testing. Art programs were cut drastically as they did not contribute to the process of taking a test.

Foley (2014) combats this idea in her Ted Talk, “Teaching Art or Teaching to Think Like an Artist?,” where she discusses the importance of art education, creative play and allowing students to be creative thinkers. Foley (2014) states:

Art education has been impacted by the standards and testing culture, like all other disciplines. In a lot of ways we've been focusing on teaching things that are concrete; things like elements of art, art history and foundational skills. In essence, we're teaching things that we can test and assess. But I believe art education needs to focus on developing learners that think like artists. Learners that are creative, curious, seek questions and develop ideas and play, which means we need to be much more intentional about how we communicate art's critical value and how we teach for creativity. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZcFRfJb2ONk>)

Foley (2014) goes on to explain that the number one thing necessary for student success, economic growth and general happiness is creativity itself, not something on which one can be tested. More often than not, students play the role of the artist's assistant or the factory worker simply carrying out the task assigned by the educator. However, as teachers it is our job to prepare future generations for making their mark on the world one day. It is our job to encourage and allow our students to think outside of

the box to create ideas of their own and a new way of thinking.

That new way of thinking must also be applied to one's general wellness and mental health. According to Biley and Galvin (2007), various forms of the arts are applied to mental health patients with undeniable success. Here, they credit arts integration with successfully “re-humanizing” the world of health and social care as it brings about a better understanding of real life experiences and allows for meaningful engagement. Additionally, arts integration offers a safe and welcoming way for self-expression, wholeness and wellness where the human being can shine (Biley & Galvin, 2007).

In further seeking happy students and good mental health, Steele (2016) tells us about Pomaika'i Elementary School in Hawaii where the staff uses fundamental aspects of acting including cooperation and concentration to successfully manage their classrooms. Steele (2016) stated that: “These drama strategies empower students to exercise self-control and accountability while developing a socially and emotionally supportive community of learners” (p. 6). Through arts integration the teachers at Pomaika'i are given the tools they need to connect children to the right kind of energy and attitude necessary in learning and in life. Students here are more willing to try and, inevitably, sometimes fail. Having the proper mindset leads to good mental health. Here children commented on being comfortable should they need to try things a second time around (Steele, 2016). They can laugh at their errors or mistakes and keep a positive attitude which helps their willingness to try again.

In further exploring those students who might need to try again, Burrill (2011) asks why creative and intelligent students sometimes fail in school. It is her belief that our educational systems fail to comprehend and tap into the creative mental processes of young children. It is this failed comprehension that hinders the act of learning. Arts integration can – and should – be helpful in this

situation, but without proper preparation and instruction it will detour and even disturb the child.

According to Burrill (2011),:

[Arts] activities required that the children use a level of motor-sensory and perceptual organization, through the direction of ego-conscious control, which they have not yet adequately developed. This skip in developmental appropriateness, rather than cultivating new learning in the children, seems to cause biological confusion, anxiety, and distrust of themselves and their environment. (para. 42)

So, in order for arts integration to be beneficial for the child, teachers and staff must be properly trained in the correct way to incorporate the arts into the classroom and beyond.

With proper training, Orzulak (2006) has seen how teaching techniques which integrate the arts improve classroom practices and help students in several different ways. Students are engaged and achieve a better understanding of their basic lessons as well as more controversial life subjects. And, not just the students, teachers, too, felt more engaged and willing to open themselves up to new ways of thinking. The change in perspective was beneficial to the general and mental health of everyone involved in the classroom.

That change in perspective has helped countless individuals who are blessed with an exposure to and an involvement in art therapy. In her Ted Talk, Lawton (2016) informs us of this particular branch of the mental health field and how it allows individuals, groups and communities to heal physically, mentally and emotionally. As a creative process which can mirror life processes, the arts have terrific medicinal powers that are open to all and not exclusive to those who would give themselves the title of “artist.”

Lawton (2016) further informs of how it takes courage to create. Despite the fact that from the very beginning when our primeval ancestors would draw and create on cave walls, today there continues to be a lack of arts integration in most environments in which we find ourselves. In order to get proper nourishment from all that the arts have to offer you really have to fight for it. Programs are cut, funding is low and that welcoming outlet for expression is denied to so many who need it:

We need to express ourselves even in the darkest of situations. This creativity, this expression is what keeps people

together. ...Arts and creative outlet are a way to heal, to re-frame, to transform, to relate and [I believe] this belongs in every facet of the wellness model and every type of paradigm of medical and mental health treatment.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPszGBfjuOY&t=9s>)

All this and more fed into the desire to know more about the local programs offered in the Santa Clara County and the school districts within. One rarely hears of art programs that have survived being cut from elementary schools. Considering all the good that they bring to individuals and the community, it seems that if such programs still exist, they should be discussed and shared with the world. In gathering such information the next section, feedback from specific professionals with a knowledge of art-based activities in their respective communities will be further examined.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Given my lifelong involvement in and awareness of the arts, I knew from day one that this would be the subject of my senior thesis paper. What I was not prepared for, was molding a fairly broad subject that I was passionate about into one, specific and focused theme. Since I grew up in a small-town community and am back there now teaching as an adult, I felt it was appropriate to incorporate the idea of community into this project. That also gave me a fun layer to top my general and more broad idea of arts integration. For, surely, the arts are beneficial to the creator but there is also much to be gained for the instructor and the audience as well.

To begin my work, I conducted research online and digitally thumbed through several studies, articles, books, videos and more to find what I needed. Although there was plenty of material out there, the more helpful information for my project came from personal sources I sought out. I designed three slightly different anonymous interview questionnaires for my voluntary participants all of which asked about art programs, how art is involved in their lives and the sort of emotional response they have after exposure to or creating art. One would be sent to a group of five students (See Appendix 3 Interview

Questions for Students), one was sent to five teachers (See Appendix 1 Interview Questions for Teachers) and the last one sent to five administrators of community organizations (See Appendix 2 Interview Questions for Administrators).

The students I selected for this study ranged from 8th to 10th grade. Although this paper specifically focuses on elementary school students, I felt the answers I received would have been better articulated by older students reflecting back on their time in elementary school rather than current elementary school students. The teachers and administrators I sought out ranged from those with several years of experience to those hired within the last year or so. All of these potential subjects have a deep appreciation of the arts and a desire to see it flourish in their respective schools and organizations.

The online research was more beneficial in uncovering the proven effects of arts integration on one's mental health but the interview questions were more helpful in uncovering information pertaining to the Santa Clara County. One teacher lists a specific school in her hometown which offers everything one could want to have in an art integrated elementary school setting. Much of the information provided in the questionnaires was opinion based but that coupled with the online research gave me the information I needed for this project.

In addition to the online research and the interview questionnaires I was also able to draw on my own experience in the arts and arts education. Although I refrained from using my own experiences as subject matter in my paper, I did use it to guide me as I crafted the questions for my colleagues and students.

RESULTS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After a thorough review of the literature consulted for this project and upon completion of the anonymous interview questions, it is fully understood that arts integration is beneficial for the mental health and general betterment of students and the community at large. In this section of the research project, more pertinent responses will be synthesized from literature review and from the interview with the subject participants in this project and use of the data will respond to my related research questions posed in the Introduction and Background section.

So, in consulting the anonymous interview questionnaire we ask: *Are there schools in the Santa Clara County that currently implement arts integration in the classroom? If so, how do they implement arts integration which enhances the mental health of elementary school students and the community?* It is known to be true that, indeed, many local schools incorporate art into their curriculum. However, when directly asked this question, several teachers and professionals came up short in not having explicit information to answer the “who” and “how” of what was being asked of them. There was one subject participant who provided the following information:

Rucker school has a theatre arts program that has been a part of the school culture for more than 30 years. Gilroy Unified has adopted the Sobrato Early Literacy program at the elementary level and students are taught through, song, music, movement, and art projects. ...[Where I teach], Math is used in design and construction. Students research the historical underpinnings of the plays we produce. We collaborate annually with our English Dept by producing a play or playwright studied by students in English classes (Teacher A, Personal Communication, 10 April, 2019) (See Appendix 1A).

Are there significant community programs outside the classroom that offer artistic activities that enrich the mental health of elementary school students? If there are, how do they improve students'

mental health? Four of the five participants answered in the affirmative on this question. The fifth was unsure, but indeed the answer is positive. Programs outside the classroom can be run through the local Parks and Recreation Department, through a local company or perhaps even an individual. There are theatrical groups, dance studios, choirs and more. Although there will very likely be a cost associated with registering for such programs, Teacher A pointed out, “students from low income families may apply for a fee reduction or scholarship” (Teacher A, Personal Communication, 10 April, 2019) (See Appendix 1A). Reduction or removal of registration fees alone will lower a family's stress level which can, in turn, improve a student's mental health.

A variation of this question was given to the teachers and the administrators. Teacher A stated that students will become more motivated and will be filled with a desire to explore and understand (Teacher A, Personal Communication, 10 April, 2019) (See Appendix 1A). Administrator A and Administrator B mentioned boosted confidence levels, better communication, a sense of fulfillment and pride, and enhanced public speaking skills (Administrator A, Personal Communication, 17 April, 2019 & Administrator B, Personal Communication, 10 April, 2019) (See Appendix 2B).

In her study, Bone (2018) finds that involvement with community-based art programs results in improved health overall and specifically a clearer thought process, successful symptom management and improved sleep patterns. The subject participants claimed they were able to really connect to themselves and grow as individuals while finding new avenues in life that they were unaware of prior to their involvement in art-based activity (p. 1185). With their new feelings of self-worth, greater confidence overall and careful attention paid to the creative environment space, Bone (2018) concludes, “...the physical space in which the program is provided is important, as is the emotional environment. This study supports the use of community-based arts programming as an essential

component of the recovery process in mental illness” (p. 1188).

According to teachers and community organizations, how does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community? Administrator A noticed more outgoing behavior and, “a better grasp of overall communication skills which allows [students] to more appropriately articulate their perspective” (Administrator A, Personal Communication, 17 April, 2019). She also claims:

The arts help to cultivate a more well rounded individual with greater capabilities of understanding other perspectives, personalities, and concerns. In addition arts based training has been pivotal in learning to cope in numerous stressful situations, while allowing one to quickly think on their feet and problem solve (Administrator. A, Personal Communication, 17 April, 2019) (See Appendix 2A).

Administrator B commented:

Arts based activities require a level of hard work and discipline that allows children to acquire necessary skills – such as a strong work ethic, perseverance, public speaking, responsibility, mental flexibility and problem solving, creative thinking - all of which assist them throughout their lives (Administrator. B, Personal Communication, 10 April 2019) (See Appendix 2B).

Teacher B discussed the benefits of creative release and reduced stress levels (Teacher B, Personal Communication, 11 April, 2019) (See Appendix 1B) and Teacher C saw the benefits of differentiated learning (Teacher C, Personal Communication, 17 April, 2019) (See Appendix 1C). In recalling music lessons from her elementary school days, Teacher A further explained:

My own experience training as a percussionist has shaped the way my brain functions and allows me to conceive of things as smaller parts of a larger whole and understand how various aspects are related and intertwined. Musical training has predispositioned me to think, analyze, and create from a predominately musical perspective (Teacher A, Personal Communication, 10 April, 2019) (See Appendix 1A).

Are there arts integration resources available for schools and community organizations to

enrich the mental health of students? The subject participants commented on resources available such as peers with whom they can collaborate and local theatre productions providing school shows for young children to see free of charge. The current school show is “1776,” a musical production about our forefathers struggling to craft the Declaration of Independence. This is a perfect way to integrate the arts into the basic classroom curriculum. It was also stated that there are after-school resources available which provide homework assistance for students and lesson plan ideas for teachers which incorporate art-based activities.

Although the interviewees did not provide many specific resources available for arts integration, the research conducted did elude to a broad array of resources to be utilized. Montgomery (2016) mentions documentary films, radio broadcasts, new theatrical works, and engaging and thoughtful visual art work are available for students and communities (para. 4). Additionally, Montgomery (2016) states the importance of repeated exposure to these resources rather than one-time use. “...Sustained participation deepens over time, involving mastery of skills and [creates] belonging in a community of practice” (para. 10).

I will say, I agree with almost every answer provided by my interviewees and found in the research conducted. Whether simply offering a world of alternate colors and viewpoints or in opening a deeper channel for therapeutic release, arts integration enhances the mental health of elementary school students in a community by allowing them freedom of expression and a way to connect that they might not even be aware of. At home, at school or in their after-school activities, integrating arts can facilitate a change in identity that boosts a child's self-esteem, allows them to connect to others and develop a more creative way of thinking.

If nothing else beneficial were to come from the arts, at the very least, you can know that there is proven healing from art-based activities. When there is pain after experiencing a loss there are journal entries and drawings one can manipulate in the healing process. After your daughter marries her high school sweetheart there is singing and dancing to express overwhelming feelings of happiness. Artistic processes in any and all forms must be incorporated into our lives in any and every way if possible.

PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS

The biggest problem I encountered when conducting my research online was that the majority of the information was not entirely relevant specifically to my topic, The data was limited in that the subject matter was not directly referring to elementary school students but was on students with a disability or those belonging to a minority group. However, the information could still be tapped into and cross-subject connections were made.

Even more problematic were the anonymous interviews. The biggest hurdle here was that I received very delayed responses from a few of my subject participants and no responses from over half of those who were originally given questionnaires. Aside from the usual busy day at work or taking care of the family at night, I am sure the delay was mostly due to Spring break falling right around the time my research was to be conducted. However, I ended up getting sufficient information but was slowed down a bit here. Of fifteen questionnaires delivered to would-be subject participants I only received five back; three from teachers, two from administrators and, sadly, nothing from my student group.

The questionnaires also presented me with limited data from a specific group. As far as

exposure to the arts goes I have no doubt that a random study would have provided very different answers. But, for the purposes of their expertise, I sought out participants who had a direct involvement with arts integration. Given their intense involvement in the arts, the limited data was rather surprising. I was shocked to see how many questions were left unanswered by Teacher B, in particular. Lastly, the majority of this information was opinion based.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon reflection of the previous information, I am certain that a few recommendations would go so far in promoting arts integration and increasing students' mental health. To begin with, parents should be aware of and familiar with the benefits of enrolling their child in a GATE program in school. The GATE program offers a unique and widely accepted way of educating students. As previously stated, I was a GATE student for the bulk of my elementary school years. In addition to all the core subjects, there was plenty of arts education woven into our general subjects and also taught separately – at least once a week - for its own merit. Our general teachers were fully aware of the arts and how to incorporate them into our lessons and arts specialists were brought in to teach us as well. GATE made learning fun and created connections across the curriculum which still helps me remember little facts and figures from the textbooks that I read so long ago.

The next recommendation I would make would be for parents and locals to become more aware of programs available in the community and the scholarships and funding which make such programs accessible for all. There are art-based programs in just about every town – through schools, the city, individuals, etc. With a little effort and research parents and guardians can register their children for various art-based activities which will appeal to the child's own personal interest and style.

Finally, and perhaps the most important one should be, to lead by example. Sharing an appreciation of the arts with your students and children is essential to their development and growth. Play with them, sing songs together, read before bedtime and attend the ballet. Fostering an appreciation for many different art forms will increase the child's way of thinking and provide them with a special sort of diversity to expand their world. If children are not given proper exposure to the arts, how will they ever gain the benefits of what art-based activity has to offer them?

CONCLUSION

Through the study and synthesis of several scholarly journals and anonymous interview questionnaires we can answer our initial question which was posed; *How does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary students in a community?* In exploring differing avenues of expression and varied ways of thinking, art-based activities have the potential to do anything and everything to stimulate ones' mental processes. They allow for more complex thought patterns and unique ways of connecting to material. Whether therapeutic or educational, arts are a powerful, individualized tool for healing. Though not only used for mental health recovery purposes, integrating the arts into the lives of the young and old alike will bring about positive personal, emotional and physical changes.

As Lawton (2016) stated quite simply, art is in our DNA. It is the most basic of human needs and should be tapped into often and without limitations. To experience art is to experience creativity and creativity is essential for student's success and happiness. Therefore, the more a student is exposed to different avenues of artistic expression, the more successful and happier they will be. Isn't that what the ideal picture of mental health and wellness looks like?

And so, the benefits of arts integration on the mental health of elementary school students in a community are undeniable and, despite what some may think, are available to all. There is a special

energy, which is a power of healing and an avenue for learning that every student should have access to. With such an opportunity to provide a complete educational experience there should be no consideration given to talk of cutting art-based activities from our young students developmental schools. Be it monetary or otherwise, reasons to cut these programs are invalid.

Supported by research, local parents and professionals, arts integration improves classroom practices and sparks creativity and imagination. A deeper understanding of subject matter is reached as well as a more positive attitude and varied way of looking at the world. Through arts integration students come to appreciate their own unique differences, the differences of others, the perks of working as a collective unit and how to listen and communicate with each other. All of which are necessary skills to live a healthy and a happy life.

As an outlet for expression, it can be a way to control the uncontrollable and traumatic events one encounters as they grow. As an opportunity for entertainment, it is pleasing to the senses and enjoyable to experience or create. As a tool used for conveying messages and memorizing, it is a teachers' best friend. There is no limit to the astounding, healing capabilities of integrating arts into the lives and activities of those within a community.

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APPENDIX 1

Anonymous Survey Questions for Teachers

How has arts-based activity helped you in your career?

How does arts-based activity make you feel?

What characteristics make up that of a “good student”?

What characteristics make up that of a “happy person”?

Did you receive arts-based instruction when you were in elementary school?

If so, how often did you receive this instruction and which areas of art were taught?

Does your life today include a solid involvement in the arts?

If so, how does it compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities?

Are basic lessons in your school (Math, English, History, etc.) blended with other subjects of an artistic nature (Music, Poetry, Dance, Theatre, etc.)?

If so, do you receive guidance as to how to integrate the arts into your lesson plans and where does that guidance come from?

Are there schools in Santa Clara County that currently implement arts integration in the classrooms?

How does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community?

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and contributing to their community? Why or why not?

Are you aware of any significant programs or resources in the community that offer artistic activities to enrich the mental health of elementary school students?

If so, what are they? Is there a cost associated with registering for these programs? Are there any prerequisites a student must meet in order to enroll in these programs?

APPENDIX 1A

Anonymous Survey Questions for Teachers

How has arts-based activity helped you in your career?

My own experience training as a percussionist has shaped the way my brain functions and allows me to conceive of things as smaller parts of a larger whole and understand how various aspects are related and intertwined. Musical training has predispositioned me to think, analyze, and create from a predominately musical perspective.

How does arts-based activity make you feel?

When I am caught in a moment of collaboration with another artist, I am intellectually engaged, and truly energized and excited by the discoveries that we make together. When working alone, I am able to hone in on the problem before me, shut out most distractions, and enter a creative state where I am fully engaged by the way my choices, actions, and decisions cause the product before me take shape.

What characteristics make up that of a “good student”?

Curiosity. Intrinsic motivation. Desire to explore and understand. Risk taking. Critical thinking. Creativity. Appreciation for realms outside of their own. Values knowledge highly. Ability to see/understand connections across events, media, genres, subjects, etc.

What characteristics make up that of a “happy person”?

Ability to let go of that over which one has no or little control. Ability to appreciate the beauty and joy in simple and small moments. Knowledge that one has done one’s best and enjoy the results.

Did you receive arts-based instruction when you were in elementary school?

Yes.

If so, how often did you receive this instruction and which areas of art were taught?

Instrumental Music: played drum 5th and 6th grades. Met once a week for 45 min or so.
Vocal Music: sang in class throughout elementary school, occasionally with school choir. Most of the instruction was with classroom teachers, but sometimes was led by music specialists. Instruction was occasional as fit the curriculum but generally between several times a month to once or twice a week.
Dance: Dance was occasionally pursued throughout elementary school. 6th grade was particularly filled with dance and we cleared the desks to square dance at least once a week.

Does your life today include a solid involvement in the arts?

Yes. I teach theatre and direct.

If so, how does it compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities?

I have been engaged in the arts since age 6 when I began tap and ballet lessons.

Are basic lessons in your school (Math, English, History, etc.) blended with other subjects of an artistic nature (Music, Poetry, Dance, Theatre, etc.)?

Yes. Math is used in design and construction. Students research the historical underpinnings of the plays we produce. We collaborate annually with our English Dept by producing a play or playwright studied by students in English classes. Students of Shakespeare study iambic pentameter and learn to scan the verse. Dance and music are integrated into units of theatre study and are utilized when producing musicals.

If so, do you receive guidance as to how to integrate the arts into your lesson plans and where does that guidance come from?

Comes from me. I assess the needs of my students and determine where I want them to be at the end of the unit of study and design lessons and activities that allow them to learn, practice, and integrate new knowledge and skills.

Are there schools in Santa Clara County that currently implement arts integration in the classrooms?

I have been working in my son's 2nd grade classroom at Rucker to enhance units of study with hands on drama activities. Rucker school has a theatre arts program that has been a part of the school culture for more than 30 years. Gilroy Unified has adopted the Sobrato Early Literacy program at the elementary level and students are taught through, song, music, movement, and art projects.

How does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community?

My son LOVES the Sobrato program. He is a confident, happy learner who anticipates and enjoys the artistic aspect of learning academic content.

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and contributing to their community? Why or why not?

I know they are. They are flexibled, determined, and able to work and think outside of the box. They are intrinsically motivated, focused, have an excellent work ethic, and are adept at solving problems, working together, and functioning under extreme pressure and looming deadlines. They are able to roll with the punches and can listen and respond appropriately to others. They form special friendships and are members of a unique community of like minded individuals. They are generous with their time and energy and able to conceive of a project and work on it consistently over time.

Are you aware of any significant programs or resources in the community that offer artistic activities to enrich the mental health of elementary school students?

Our community has after school programs on nearly every elementary campus with daily activities that include homework assistance, art activities, sports, computers, and assorted games. The city of Gilroy department of Parks and Recreation offers a slew of activities for nearly every interest (including VAPA). Community theatre and multiple individuals provide opportunities for children to participate in theatre and there are multiple dance studios that offer programs for elementary school children. Gilroy also has a strong eccumenical community that provides opportunities for children to receive instruction and participate in activities with their peers and people of all ages in a family environment.

If so, what are they? Is there a cost associated with registering for these programs? Are there any prerequisites a student must meet in order to enroll in these programs?

There generally is a fee associated with these programs, but students from low income families may apply for a fee reduction or scholarship. Some programs are more expensive than others.

APPENDIX 1B

Anonymous Survey Questions for Teachers

How has arts-based activity helped you in your career? Arts based activity has inspired my current career path as a Performing Arts administrator and theater educator.

How does arts-based activity make you feel? Amazing. No better feeling than being on stage and sharing a story with an audience.

What characteristics make up that of a “good student”? For me, a good student is one that is making their best effort and is willing to challenge themselves and not to be afraid to make mistakes in order to learn.

What characteristics make up that of a “happy person”? The appropriate balance between work, family and friends make a “happy person” in my opinion.

Did you receive arts-based instruction when you were in elementary school? Limited in school.

If so, how often did you receive this instruction and which areas of art were taught? I don’t remember.

Does your life today include a solid involvement in the arts? Yes, daily involvement since my job entails managing a large Performing Arts department at a high school.

If so, how does it compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities? I’ve always worked in the arts, so I have no other frame of reference.

Are basic lessons in your school (Math, English, History, etc.) blended with other subjects of an artistic nature (Music, Poetry, Dance, Theatre, etc.)? Yes, there is crossover in curriculum with our English and Religious Studies programs.

If so, do you receive guidance as to how to integrate the arts into your lesson plans and where does that guidance come from? We have time set aside each semester to collaborate as a faculty and we are encouraged to work together with other departments.

Are there schools in Santa Clara County that currently implement arts integration in the classrooms? I don’t know.

How does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community? The arts provide a creative release and I think can reduce the stress levels of participants with this creative outlet.

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and contributing to their community? Why or why not? Yes. The arts is an essential tool for young people to learn how to communicate with their peers and function in the outside world, no matter what

profession they pursue.

Are you aware of any significant programs or resources in the community that offer artistic activities to enrich the mental health of elementary school students? Don't know.

If so, what are they? Is there a cost associated with registering for these programs? Are there any prerequisites a student must meet in order to enroll in these programs? Don't know.

APPENDIX 1C

Anonymous Survey Questions for Teachers

How has arts-based activity helped you in your career? I think creatively, outside the box.

How does arts-based activity make you feel?

What characteristics make up that of a “good student”?

What characteristics make up that of a “happy person”?

Did you receive arts-based instruction when you were in elementary school? Not that I can remember.

If so, how often did you receive this instruction and which areas of art were taught?

Does your life today include a solid involvement in the arts? Most definitely!

If so, how does it compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities? I don't remember a time in my life that didn't include art of some kind.

Are basic lessons in your school (Math, English, History, etc.) blended with other subjects of an artistic nature (Music, Poetry, Dance, Theatre, etc.)? We have arts classes aside from the basics, but I am not aware if/how they are integrated.

If so, do you receive guidance as to how to integrate the arts into your lesson plans and where does that guidance come from?

Are there schools in Santa Clara County that currently implement arts integration in the classrooms?

How does arts integration enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community? It provides an outlet for them outside of sitting at a desk. Differentiated learning at its finest.

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and contributing to their community? Why or why not? Without a doubt. Students who are in the Arts have a broader view of the world at large.

Are you aware of any significant programs or resources in the community that offer artistic activities to enrich the mental health of elementary school students? I believe that SVCT will be doing two special performances of 1776 for schools in the near future, free of charge, or for a very nominal rate.

If so, what are they? Is there a cost associated with registering for these programs? Are there any prerequisites a student must meet in order to enroll in these programs? I do not know.

APPENDIX 2

Anonymous Survey Questions for Administrators of Community Organizations

How has arts-based activity helped you in your career?

What are some of the benefits to arts-based activity?

What characteristics make up that of a “happy person”?

Did you receive arts-based instruction when you were in elementary school?

If so, how often did you receive this instruction and which areas of art were taught?

Does your life today include a solid involvement in the arts?

If so, how does it compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities?

In your experience, how does involvement in the arts enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community?

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and contributing to their community? Why or why not?

Are there any significant programs or resources in the community that offer artistic activities to enrich the mental health of elementary school students?

If so, what are they? Is there a cost associated with registering for these programs? Are there any prerequisites a student must meet in order to enroll in these programs?

What personal experiences and skills do you have within the art community?

What role does the artist have in the community?

APPENDIX 2A

Anonymous Survey Questions for Administrators of Community Organizations

How has arts-based activity helped you in your career?

A: As a choreographer and actress the arts literally feed my work. From being trained in art to dance, every facet of what one learns in the classroom, studio, and stage becomes directly reflected in every piece of work I do. When building for the stage I use creative writing to analyze the lyrics and text to facilitate creation of the movement, while simultaneously utilizing my technical knowledge to maximize the space and objects or apparatus' on stage.

What are some of the benefits to arts-based activity?

A: When engaging in arts activities it greatly helps with one's confidence, sense of pride and accomplishment, creative thinking, teamwork, and communication.

What characteristics make up that of a "happy person"?

A: Typically happy people are associated with upbeat, positive outlooks on life. Physically traits assumed range from smiling to maintaining good posture, making eye contact, and taking a sense of pride in one's appearance.

Did you receive arts-based instruction when you were in elementary school?

A: Yes, once a week our classroom would be taken over by a vibrant music teacher who would teach singing and the recorder, in addition to various visual artistic mediums presented through our primary teacher. Outside of school I would take private vocal coaching and dance.

If so, how often did you receive this instruction and which areas of art were taught?

A: Please see above answer.

Does your life today include a solid involvement in the arts?

A: Yes, my life has always has an artistic presence in numerous capacities.

If so, how does it compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities?

A: My life has never been without the arts. Between gigs I do notice myself getting anxious in anticipation of the next project.

In your experience, how does involvement in the arts enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community?

A: By allowing students to participate in the arts I have noticed much more outgoing behavior, and a better grasp of overall communication skills which allows them to more appropriately articulate their perspective.

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and contributing to their community? Why or why not?

A: Without a doubt the arts helps to cultivate a more well rounded individual with greater capabilities of understanding other perspectives, personalities, and concerns. In addition arts based training has been pivotal in learning to cope in numerous stressful situations, while allowing one to quickly think on

their feet and problem solve.

Are there any significant programs or resources in the community that offer artistic activities to enrich the mental health of elementary school students?

A: Many local entities exist in the Bay Area offering students of all ages a plethora of training facilities and showcase/performance options.

If so, what are they? Is there a cost associated with registering for these programs? Are there any prerequisites a student must meet in order to enroll in these programs?

A: There are too many private facilities to name, but local city governments often offer Parks and Recreation programs with training. Cost is always associated with any training facility. I have never encountered a free facility for the arts.

What personal experiences and skills do you have within the art community?

A: I utilize the arts every day you singing and playing percussion with a band, choreographing shows for people of all ages, and performing as a professional AEA actress.

What role does the artist have in the community?

A: The artist's job is to reflect their observations in the world, the work, and the people around them. We explore and create and push observers to their comfort limits for their greater understanding and (hopefully) growth.

APPENDIX 2B

Anonymous Survey Questions for Administrators of Community Organizations

How has arts-based activity helped you in your career?

Well, considering that I work in the arts, I find that anything that is related to the arts can help inspire what I do, whether than is onstage or behind the scenes. In regards to social/interpersonal skills, having an arts based background allows us to handle public speaking, promotes creative thinking and problem solving, and has taught us to remain flexible in any situation. Improvisational skills have also become handy when plans go awry, classes become indignant and fussy, or when cast mates lose passion for a project.

What are some of the benefits to arts-based activity?

Mood enhancement, the development of professional/interpersonal skills, creative thinking, and all utilizing a growth mindset...

What characteristics make up that of a “happy person”?

Someone that is consistently making the most out of life or any given situation. Someone who is content with living in the moment and displays good energy. Someone who is fun to be around...

Did you receive arts-based instruction when you were in elementary school?

Yes!

If so, how often did you receive this instruction and which areas of art were taught?

We often had arts and crafts in class, and of course the occasional music song a long, but being a part of GATE allowed me to experience more of the arts in various forms (art/painting/drawing, dramatic arts, choral work, dance/movement.) I also was a part of band in the 5th grade meeting after school once a week.

Does your life today include a solid involvement in the arts?

Yes. I am a professional union actor who also directs and choreographs. My day jobs also center around the arts, as I teach dance and do private dance/acting coaching.

If so, how does it compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities?

In all honesty, I don't remember life without arts based activities. I started dance at 5 and don't remember much before that! The arts are such an integral part of my life, well-being, and overall general happiness, that I can't imagine life without it. Removing the arts from my life would be detrimental to my sanity.

In your experience, how does involvement in the arts enhance the mental health of elementary school students in a community?

The arts inspire, heal, teach... The arts open an avenue for expression, where some children may not otherwise have available in their lives. To me, the arts are ESSENTIAL to keeping a mentally sound, inspired, and happy community.

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and

contributing to their community? Why or why not?

Yes! Arts based activities, such as dance, theatre, etc, require a level of hard work and discipline that allows children to acquire necessary skills - such as a strong work ethic, perseverance, public speaking, responsibility, mental flexibility and problem solving, creative thinking, amongst so much - all of which assist them throughout their lives.

Are there any significant programs or resources in the community that offer artistic activities to enrich the mental health of elementary school students?

Yes...

If so, what are they? Is there a cost associated with registering for these programs? Are there any prerequisites a student must meet in order to enroll in these programs?

Children's Theatre, Dance, Vocal Lessons/Choirs, etc...

All cost at least registration fee, if not a monthly fee. They definitely can be exclusive in regards to their cost, meaning those from less privileged families may not be able to afford these necessary opportunities.

What personal experiences and skills do you have within the art community?

I teach dance at a local dance studio, I act professionally throughout CA. I direct and choreograph for community and children's theater.

What role does the artist have in the community?

The role of teacher and student, one who inspires and educates. One who shares their talents with their communities, through performance, through teaching, through inspiration...

APPENDIX 3

Anonymous Survey Questions for Students

How has arts-based activity helped you in your scholastic journey?

How does arts-based activity make you feel?

Do you consider yourself to be a good student?

Do you consider yourself to be a happy person?

What characteristics make up that of a “good student”?

What characteristics make up that of a “happy person”?

How does your life today, with solid involvement in the arts, compare to your life before involvement in arts-based activities?

Do you receive regular instruction in the arts at school?

If so, how often do you receive this instruction and which areas of art are taught?

Are basic lessons in school (Math, English, History, etc.) blended with other subjects of an artistic nature (Music, Poetry, Dance, Theatre, etc.)?

Do you receive instruction in the arts outside of school? If so, how often do you receive this instruction and which areas of art are taught?

Do you believe students participating in arts-based activities are better prepared for life and contributing to their community? Why or why not?

Do you plan to continue with arts-based activities in your adulthood? If so, how do you intend to continue your arts-based activities?