

**Dancing Around the Education Dilemma:**  
*The Choreography of a Qualitative Research Project in Process*

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## ABSTRACT

AMANDA KELLER: Dancing Around the Education Dilemma: *The Choreography of a Qualitative Research Project in Process*  
(Under the Direction of James D. Trier)

As a graduate student, a dance teacher, and a professional dancer, I have seen how dance students, regardless of age or experience, remember sequences of movements in a collective and collaborative way in the dance program, *North Carolina Arts in Action*. They memorize steps by practicing with their peers, and by watching others perform the movement (Day, 2000). The interpretive aspect of dance can encourage individuals to bring one's own background and history into the classroom. The reason for this is that the elements of dance are so broad that everyone can utilize something they know and apply it to dance (Greene, 2001). If this collective remembering of steps and this shared wealth of knowledge that happens in a dance class could be utilized in an academic class, this might create greater understanding amongst students.

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To Mom, Dad, Eve, Alex, and Eric: I'm amazed by your creativity in the yoga studio, on the drums, in dance class, in the architecture studio, and in the kitchen – you inspire me everyday.

“Logic will get you from A to B. Imagination will take you everywhere.”  
–*Albert Einstein*

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## Prelude

As a graduate student, a dance teacher, and a professional dancer, I have seen how dance students, regardless of age or experience, remember sequences of movements in a collective and collaborative way in the dance program, *North Carolina Arts in Action*. They memorize steps by practicing with their peers, and by watching others perform the movement (Day, 2000). The interpretive aspect of dance can encourage individuals to bring one's own background and history into the classroom. The reason for this is that the elements of dance are so broad that everyone can utilize something they know and apply it to dance (Greene, 2001). If this collective remembering of steps and this shared wealth of knowledge that happens in a dance class could be utilized in an academic class, this might create greater understanding amongst students.

North Carolina Arts in Action (NCAIA) is an in-school dance program where teaching artists spend an hour a week teaching dance to each fourth grade class in that school. The students and their classroom teacher will meet with the teaching artist in the designated location for the rehearsals. Through observing students in their Arts in Action classes, I have found that the dance class provides a unique skill set the students would not have acquired anywhere else. Through this study, I want to determine whether the arts have the ability to uplift and unite a group of young people, encouraging generosity, creativity, and inclusiveness, regardless of economic or social status.

I hope to show that a dance program can promote collaboration and understanding amongst students. The purpose of this project is to show educators the full potential of the

arts to uplift and unite children and schools. These important skills that students learn as a result of participating in the arts are invaluable, and are more difficult to achieve in an academic setting. Hopefully, through participation in an arts program, students will learn that everyone has something special to offer to the class. Ideally, this will transfer to other areas of children's lives, including their academic classes.

My research may be able to show that children can understand and appreciate the uplifting power of the arts. It is my hope that my findings will help illustrate the importance of arts programs for children, making everyone, in particular funders of arts programs, more aware of the fact that young people do value the arts.

Using Barbara Rogoff's theory of guided participation as a reference, I answer these questions in this study: 1. Do NCAIA teachers engage in guided participation with their students? 2. How do the arts, in particular dance, allow students to be socially engaged and more culturally aware of each other? 3. How does NCAIA make a difference in students' lives outside of the NCAIA classroom? 4. Are there unique learning opportunities for students in their NCAIA classes that are not usually present in their academic classes? 5. How can a joint partnership between an arts program and a school result in powerful learning opportunities for students?

In order to gain a deep understanding of the program, I conducted observations of the dance classes on a weekly basis, I sat in on a start-up meeting with the classroom teachers and the NCAIA teachers, I interviewed the principals of two of the schools that participate in the program, and deduced some quantitative data of the program. My purpose was to examine the impact of the program on the students as well as the schools

the partner serves. It was my goal to develop answers to the research questions based on my interpretations of the data I collected.

To provide background information to support and develop my findings, I researched published texts that had been written about dance education in public schools in order to address the research questions. The literature review helped provide a historical context to my research so that I could demonstrate the universal benefits of dance programs that have been studied in the past.

In addition to the literature review, I describe Barbara Rogoff's theory of guided participation in detail as a way to focus and explain what is happening in the dance classes. Following the theoretical framework discussion, I present the data I've collected from the program. In the interpretation and analysis section, I make connections with Rogoff's theory, the literature, and the collected data. In this section, I will summarize my findings as well as answer my research questions.

This paper is geared towards potential funders of arts education programs in public school settings. In addition, arts advocates as well as classroom teachers could benefit from the information offered in this paper.

## **A Choreographic Offering**

I would like to present this master's thesis project as a choreographic offering which stages the framework for a qualitative research study. Each section of the paper serves as part of a larger "dance" that is still in process. I will be using the field of choreography as a metaphor to map out this project. Choreography is used as both an expression and a representation for my work.

"A Choreographic Offering" refers to a dance that was created by the famous Mexican choreographer, Jose Limon in 1964 as a tribute to the dance pioneer, Doris Humphrey. ([www.limon.org](http://www.limon.org)) This piece is based on movements from Humphrey's choreography and contains variations, paraphrases and motifs from a number of her dances. I make this connection between this dance piece and my paper to emphasize the similarities in both works. Similar to dance, my paper contains a variety of collected data, theoretical motifs, and paraphrases from multiple sources.

I define choreography as a design of movements with specific motions and forms. It is a method for creating formations and connections between movements and transitioning from one movement to the other in a seamless and organic nature. The designer of the choreography, the choreographer makes choices in order to edit and refine her piece so that the piece is interesting and makes clear statements.

As a self-proclaimed choreographer, when I choreograph a dance, I start with a phrase of movements that I want to work with and then I move on to choreograph a different set of movements. Each phrase becomes refined and set as I develop the piece.



I never begin a dance with a fixed endpoint. My choreography evolves and unfolds in an organic way, influenced by outside forces such as the dancers who are performing the dance, the musical phrasing I've created, and the space in which the dance is performed.

All of these influences play a role in how people interpret the dance. This idea that choreography is never fixed and is influenced by outside forces can be compared to how qualitative research evolves and transitions from one idea to the next. When conducting qualitative research, the investigator will take notes during observations, trying to jot down everything he sees, hears, and feels. When I begin choreographing, I try to incorporate as much movement

Similar to qualitative research, choreography is a process. Both processes begin from an idea, a dream, or a concept and uncover an aspect of a person's thoughts and beliefs. Modern dance choreography does not usually tell a linear story with a beginning, middle, and end. Instead, it creates tensions and relationships with the dancers on stage, or it focuses on one concept from multiple perspectives. Often times, the audience will interpret modern dance choreography in a certain way, depending on a range of factors and reasons. For my paper, I have addressed a concept from multiple perspectives and I hope to shed light on the benefits of a certain dance program. Each reader will take something different from my paper, depending on one's own interests and experiences. This understanding that each person will learn something different about him or herself is something that I hope will happen. If readers begin the paper with the viewpoint that my paper can be read as if watching a dance performance, I think each person will understand how each section fits into the larger project.

This study serves as a representation as well as an expression of my thought process as both a choreographer and a researcher. Using choreography as a way to express the lessons I've learned helps me draw connections between the world of choreography and the world of research. In order for readers to understand my paper, I ask them to think of the paper as a dance that I am in the process of choreographing, with each section representing an exercise that will fit in to the larger picture. My paper can be read as if viewing a dance that is still evolving and unfolding. Each section will highlight certain aspects of the meaning of the dance. At the conclusion of the paper, I will return to this choreography metaphor and describe how thinking in terms of choreography has opened up new possibilities for me in my research.

## Overture

I sprung towards the back of the gymnasium where I found the stage with the red curtains drawn and I heard voices coming from behind the curtains; I was late for the observation. As I approached the stage, I quietly found an opening in the curtains and made my way through to the other side. It was a rainy Wednesday morning and I had planned on arriving to the class early so that I could get situated before the class began. The weather had other plans for me. As I fumbled for an opening in the curtains, I finally appeared and found myself in front of a room full of watchful fourth graders who were all curious about me and my tardiness. I gave a brief hello and ducked into the back of the room where I would conduct my observation for the next hour. The space behind the curtains was congested with backpacks and jackets thrown haphazardly around the room. It felt warm and slightly stuffy in the space, the sign of children hard at work.

The class of twenty students all watched Alton, the teaching artist intently as he instructed them on the first step of the dance. He tested to see if they were listening by telling them to move when he said “1-2-go.” Julie, the musical director began to play and Alton instructed the kids to count the steps to new choreography they were working on so that they can “own it.” The confident students chanted the counts enthusiastically, while the shyer ones softly counted the music. Julie was an active participant in helping the students to understand the musical phrasing. She enunciated each note so that the students could understand how to count the music note by note. I found myself impressed with

the discipline the teacher has instilled in the kids to understand the importance of timing and phrasing when learning how to dance.

The class was working on their dance for the end-of-year performance. The theme of the performance was North Carolina History and each class represented a different aspect of that history. This particular class was working on their dance which corresponded to the Cherokee Indian Trail of Tears chapter in North Carolina history. The teacher gave the class strong movements which symbolized hunting and gathering for food, and a gruesome and life threatening journey as a people lost their land to the greed of colonizers. I had been informed that the historical component to these dances coincided with what the students were learning in their academic classes.

*“Elbows up. Feet are parallel to each other and are hip distant apart. Now, when I say go you will take a giant step to stage right and begin the dance once Julie begins playing. Does everyone know where stage right is? Yes? Point to stage right. Ok, good.”*

After the students began to feel more comfortable with the new choreography, Alton asked three students to perform the step for the class. After the three students performed the steps, Alton asked the class to raise their hands and tell everyone what the dancers had done well. By asking the class what was good about the performance, Alton nurtures a positive learning space where students can compliment each other, as well as learn from each other. There was a constant theme throughout the class of praising and recognizing individual students who had been working hard on the steps

Alton utilized a variety of teaching techniques to give students different modes to learn the choreography. One of the techniques he used was demonstrating how strong he

wanted the step to be executed with the pitch of his voice. He also used the pitch of his voice to show if the students were not performing with enough energy.

Alton would frequently give dance steps a name in which the kids could remember it by. For example, during the class, he taught a step in which the students were crouched down and they ran around themselves in a circle. He named this the “chase your tail” step. He taught this step by demonstrating it first and then asked the kids to repeat what he had just done. As he danced the step he would sing the name of the step and told the kids to do the same.

Another student had performed the step well and she is asked to show the “correct way” of doing the steps. She was nervous to perform in front of her peers and was unable to complete the step. She looked embarrassed after she finished by Alton encouraged her by telling her it was a good effort and told the class to clap for their fellow classmate.

## Setting the Stage for the Study

*Picture this: Students who are unable to think creatively or abstractly; who have no sense of diversity or culture; who have only been taught to utilize certain parts of their brains; and do not know how to work collaboratively. (Gardner 1999: 41-43)*

In her 2011 State of the State Address, South Carolina Governor, Nikki Haley made a pledge that the South Carolina Government should not fund the state's Arts Commission. She explained, "And the reality is the role of South Carolina's government in the year 2011 can no longer be to fund an Arts Commission that costs us \$2.5 million... We must make decisions that do the least amount of harm and have the best long-term effect." ([www.fitsnews.com](http://www.fitsnews.com)) Out of the state's six billion dollar budget, the Governor can't seem to find a place for the arts. ([www.thinkprogress.org](http://www.thinkprogress.org))

In Governor Haley's opinion, cutting arts funding will do the least amount of harm and have the best long-term effect for her state. Little does the Governor understand that the "Picture this" scene is not a far exaggeration from where her state and the country as a whole are headed if funding for the arts continues to be regarded as a waste of money.

Haley is not the only U.S. governor who wants to cut and/or eliminate the funding for her state's arts council. "Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker moved to cut state arts funding by 73 percent, and eliminate the state percent for art programs. In Arizona, Governor Jan Brewer has eliminated funding for the Arizona Commission for the Arts,

while Florida Governor Rick Scott has proposed no grant funding for the state division of cultural affairs.” (Artnet.com)

This is a horror story for supporters of the arts who read the statistics and watch government officials making judgment calls which place the arts at the bottom of the funding totem poll. The arts in public schools are also affected by the decisions of the government officials who do not value the arts. Not only are the arts in schools being cut, but students are being taught that the arts are less important than their other academic classes.

I paint this nightmare to juxtapose it with NCAIA. The program is funded by private donors as well as the funds raised by schools’ PTA fundraisers. Because of the lack of state funding for the arts, NCAIA does not depend solely on grants from state funded arts organizations. This is partially the reason why NCAIA is flourishing in the five different elementary schools it serves. The other reason is not as clear-cut. How does Arts in Action manage to stay afloat amidst these turbulent anti-arts waters?

In its seventh year running, NCAIA continues to make its mark in the hearts of the schools it serves. This is in large part a result of each school's leadership as well as from the director of NCAIA. Lisa Van Deman, the executive director of NCAIA is a strong believer in the value of the program for students. Lisa’s vision has allowed the program to flourish during a time of economic uncertainty.

I've had the opportunity to speak with two principals who both express the joy and sense of freedom that students gain from the program. They acknowledged the sacrifices made in order to keep the program in their schools, but to them, it’s all worth it. The cost of NCAIA works on a sliding scale. Schools with a healthy budget pay for the

majority of the program, with the help of the school's PTA fundraisers. For other schools, NCAIA is responsible for the majority of its funding, which is done primarily through private donors. Schools who are partnering with NCAIA for the first time are given a free year in which to test it out as a pilot program and determine if it's a good fit for the school.

The Arts in Action staff is always in close communication with their community partners. Without an understanding of the needs of each partner, Arts in Action would not be able to remain in the schools. The community partners have a responsibility to provide the space and the time for Arts in Action in their schools and Arts in Action has a responsibility to offer high quality dance instruction that promotes creativity, collaboration, exercise and a different way to learn.



## **Choreographer's Bio**

“If you want to continue in this dance conservatory and receive your BFA, you’re gonna need to lose some weight. Your body looks fine for a normal person, but you’re not here to be normal, you’re here to dance. I hope you take this probation as a warning, that, if you don’t shape up by the end of the year, you’re out.” These words, spoken by my ballet teacher when I was 18, and a freshman at a prestigious dance conservatory stuck with me throughout that year.

Frightened of gaining weight and getting kicked out of the program, I became obsessed with everything I ate. Instead of trying to learn everything I could to improve my dancing, I was solely focused on my body. I would spend so much time examining myself in the mirror, that I wouldn’t learn the choreography. I was losing weight, but my dancing was suffering. I no longer felt happy to be dancing. At the end of the year, I had lost weight, but not enough. I was strongly recommended by my advisor to leave the program. After that painful year in the dance conservatory, I seriously questioned whether I wanted to continue dancing. I associated dance, in particular, classical dance, with my negative body image and a dream that had turned into a nightmare.

I transferred to a liberal arts college in New York City and decided to not give up on dance. I double majored in Social and Historical Inquiry and Dance. My negative body image was still present as I navigated my way through living in the big city, but over the course of the next few years, I relearned why I loved dance. The dancers in the program were also interested in a liberal arts experience, in addition to their dance classes.

There was less competition amongst the dancers, and none of my teachers ever mentioned weight. After I graduated from college, I danced professionally for a contemporary ballet company. This was a wonderful experience for me, and it gave me hope in the dance field. I remembered why I wanted to dance in the first place, and I also realized what I didn't like about the dance world.

This deep personal connection to dance has influenced my choice to study the effectiveness of Arts in Action. My history with dance has led me to understand the amazing qualities it has to offer, but also some of the negative outcomes that could result from a discipline that requires so much training of the body. I was interested in learning about what the Arts in Action teachers emphasize in their classes. Was it perfect technique and a perfect body, or was it something else? As someone who had not experienced dance in school before, I wanted to see what the differences were in taking private dance lessons versus taking mandatory dance classes in school.

I take all of this background with me as I observe these Arts in Action dance classes. I am situated as a classically trained and disciplined dancer. I have trained as a ballet dancer since I was five. My parents enrolled me in private lessons at the local ballet studio and I continued at this studio until I graduated from high school. In high school, my school life and my dance life were kept completely separate. I rarely socialized with students from school, but I would regularly get together with my dance friends after our rehearsals. I felt that no one in school understood or appreciated my dedication to dance.

In high school I was shy and quiet and I would rarely raise my hand in class. The teachers thought I was a good student, but not someone who could take on leadership

roles. To this day, I am still shy and quiet, but I have made an effort to exert myself and to speak up more in classes. When I became a teacher, I realized that I needed to be able to talk comfortably and confidently in front of a group of people. Through experience and practice, I have been able to change the way I present myself. I can now speak confidently to a group of people, without showing them how nervous I am. Underneath it all, I am still shy, and I empathize with other shy and quiet kids. When I conduct my observation of students, I find myself drawn to the quiet students. How do these students make their voices heard?

One of the schools I am observing is similar in demographics to the elementary school I attended. Both my school and the school I am observing are located in affluent suburbs, with predominantly white, middle class families. There are also some Asian families, and very few African American and Latino families. Just like at my elementary school, the majority of the teachers are white women.

As a white, middle class family, it was not difficult for my family to fit in with the rest of the families in our school district. As a Jewish family, we were in the minority, but this difference was not a noticeable difference.

It wasn't until I was a freshman in college at the dance conservatory, when I experienced anti-Semitism. I was really upset because I had not been cast in the dance performance and I had gone to my advisor for guidance. He had said something along the lines of, "You don't want to act like you're Jewish, always feeling sorry for yourself." He did not know that I am Jewish and I did not reveal this fact to him. As I reflect on why I didn't say anything, I think the reason was because I respected him and I cared about what he thought of me. I'm angry at myself for not saying anything to him at the

time, but since then I've learned how to stick up for myself. All of this information about my past affects my positionality. I've experienced a teacher who was in a position of power, making me feel as if I was unable to express myself. I hope that I will never cause someone to feel as if he/she can't express themselves because of me.

I take all of my dance baggage with me in this research. On a more direct level with the Arts in Action program, I am also a teaching artist for them. I have close ties with the teaching staff, as well as the artistic director. These personal connections are important to keep in mind when I conduct this research

Although the program takes place in the school, Arts in Action is not considered part of the school. It is an outside program. My positionality does not allow me to fully understand how the school views the program. Through interviews with the principal and classroom teachers, I have been able to pick up some information, but I will probably never understand the whole picture. I need to also be aware of my position as a graduate student when I conduct this research. Will the classroom teachers without graduate degrees think of me differently than the ones who do have graduate degrees? Will the students think of me as their teacher or the researcher? Will this work affect my relationship with my students? My placement in my research is important, and I need to consider how my experiences will affect and change my interpretation of the work.

## **Behind the Scenes**

I will be using sections of Barbara Rogoff's book, "The Cultural Nature of Human Development" (2003) as a way to illustrate that communal learning through observation, working towards a common goal, and peer bonding have strong roots in an arts-based setting. Rogoff introduces the idea of guided participation in her book where the teacher encourages and guides students to work together with peers. The teachers help students build responsible and communicative relationships with each other. The emphasis is on group learning and group interaction, and not as focused on student to teacher interactions.

NCAIA illustrates how community dance classes can be realms of collaboration amongst students, creating opportunities for students to observe each other and to encourage one another. NCAIA strives to create an environment where students can feel comfortable expressing themselves in an unfamiliar way.

Based on observations I've conducted of the program, I have seen students voluntarily review choreography with one or two classmates throughout the class. Students will also watch others as a way to understand the movements. I have seen students practice the choreography when they are given a water break during class, and even when they are out on the playground during recess. The students would not necessarily have collaborated with each other without the encouragement of a teacher. The Arts in Action teacher must constantly emphasize the importance of counting the music for each other and making time for students to watch each other.

The teachers and students in the class have created a community, which, according to Barbara Rogoff in an interview for *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, also helps to promote cultural experiences. (Interview with Rogoff). On a more practical level, Rogoff believes that, "A key feature of putting ideas into practice is to adapt them to local circumstances. Programs cannot be 'one size fits all.'" The teachers' understanding of the culture of a school is important. Schools which emphasize individualism and autonomy may be less willing to accept the concept of collaborative-peer orientation.

In some schools, particularly in American schools, the classroom is not designed in such a way where the collectiveness of the group benefits each individual student. Although there are exceptions, in my experience, classrooms are proponents of individualistic ideals. When speaking about the hierarchies that exist in academic settings, Mary Fitzgerald writes in her chapter, *Community Dance*, "Individual achievement typically receives higher acclaim than collective efforts" (Dance, Social Justice 266). I think we need to move in the opposite direction and give the highest praise to students who have successfully worked in a group together. Elizabeth Cagan suggests in "Individualism, Collectivism, and Radical Educational Reform," that "fostering a collectivist character in children based on altruism, cooperation, and concern for others" (Cagan 27) should pave the way for educational reform. In reality, students excel by scoring the highest on tests and competing for the teacher's attention. Struggling students usually wouldn't benefit from the successes of the brighter students.

In some communities around the world, children are encouraged to engage in the activities of their community so that they will learn how to contribute and to be

interdependent (Rogoff 64). Part of a child's education in these environments involves observing the other community members and then attempting to apply what was observed. This environment allows children to experiment with new discoveries. Once children have become comfortable with contributing to their community, the goal is usually not to become autonomous and to move away from the community. The skills learned will in fact prepare individuals to become more attached and connected to their communities.

Regardless of whether or not some communities emphasize the importance of autonomy, interdependence, or both autonomy and interdependence, there is usually only one dominant approach to teaching these lessons. There is the standard American schooling approach of learning and there is the communal, family-oriented approach that takes place outside of an academic setting. In general, a certain kind of learning usually takes place in an academic setting and another kind of learning takes place out in the community. The lessons that are learned and how they are taught tend to remain in each setting and do not typically cross over to the other setting.

A major part of schooling has to do with showing proof that you know and understand the material. This is conducted through taking exams. Students must demonstrate that they know the topic in order to progress to the next level. It seems that in learning that takes place in communities, children will show their competence by successfully completing a task, not by writing about the task. Competence is proven through actions, not through words. Looking at an example of how lessons don't translate well between schools and communities, a child who has learned how to weave may not be able to describe what she can do, but she has observed her mother weave and she has practiced with the guidance of her mother. Her hands have memorized the

motions and the technique over time, but if she is unable to describe in words what she is doing, this would probably not be acceptable in an academic setting.

It would appear as if this divide between how things are taught and learned in white, middle class, American schools versus how things are taught and learned out in the community would not find common ground. It is important to think about how these differences in goals will effect child development because the children are learning about what their culture values.

I see similarities between what Rogoff described and what takes place in the NCAIA classroom. In the NCAIA classroom, all of the adults are encouraged to be physically engaged in the dance sequences being learned. This means that the AIA teacher dances, the assistant NCAIA teacher dances, the classroom teacher dances, the classroom teacher's assistant dances, and the pianist dances (When he/she is not playing).

If teachers are able to create an opportunity for students to share information with each other in an interactive and collective way, like they do in these dance classes, I think this would help create bonds amongst students who wouldn't otherwise make connections with each other. As described by Mary Fitzgerald, "Exchanging knowledge through dance allows new relationships to form within society, and some of the borders that normally exist between different communities begin to blur, allowing for an expansion and redefinition of personal worlds, as well as of the cultural fabric" (Dance, Human Rights, & Social Justice 259). I think all art forms have the potential to create greater understanding amongst students. Learning to work with a group is a crucial aspect of human development. Arts classes could provide multiple opportunities for students to collaborate with each other.



## **Rehearsing the Steps**

### **Demystifying the Arts in Schools**

This literature exploration will help illuminate the concept I introduce in my thesis which is that the arts promote collaboration, communication, understanding and community amongst students. By looking at texts that span a period of forty years, I hope to expand the point that even though the arts have never been appreciated or completely understood in schools, they provide invaluable and crucial components of an education.

The purpose of this review is to help support my claim that schools and arts programs need to better understand each other's cultures in order for a successful partnership to exist. I will highlight the main concepts in this review to emphasize this point. Throughout my thesis I will incorporate aspects of this literature review as a way to help interpret the data I have collected.

I will be focusing on four concepts in this literature review that help to address my research questions as well as demonstrate how the texts illuminate my thesis. The concepts I explore are: The arts as a safe haven for untraditional students, school teacher's attitudes concerning the arts, how the arts provide un-testable skills, and the role of the arts in interdisciplinary teaching.

### **Search Process**

I conducted my search for literature through the UNC library search and through Google scholar. I used the keywords: *dance, arts, public schools, education*. I assumed

that I would need to sift my way through the articles which focused on practical application and the resources which were more theoretical. I was searching for the theoretical texts for this paper. When I began, I was interested in looking at texts that had been written over a span of time in order to access the changes in attitudes and policies concerning arts education in public schools. I looked at the earliest texts that had been written on the topic, the most current texts, and everything in between. I found that theoretical texts about the arts in public schooling began to appear in the scholarly journals in the mid to late 60s. Prior to this time, there had been texts written about the arts in public schools, but these were mostly practical resources of arts activities.

Based on the constraints of time and space, I will be touching briefly on each of the following texts. I will summarize the main points and then discuss the theoretical underpinnings each author uses. I will then describe how each work helps to support my ideas in my thesis. Later on in the paper I will incorporate these texts into the discussion and interpretation of the data collection section.

### **The Arts as a Safe Haven for Untraditional Students**

In an article from the Herald Sun, “FPG Students Showcase Putting Arts into Action,” which covered the 2012 Arts in Action end of year performance at FPG, Audrey Poindexter, a fourth grade teacher at FPG who helps coordinate the AIA scheduling explains, “ There is a huge refugee population at FPG, especially from Thailand. Dancing and creating art does not involve language. The program allows these kids to feel successful and for once they don’t have to speak English in order to keep up.” (Thomas, *The Herald Sun*). Poindexter is pointing to the fact that the arts have a special place in

the lives of students who may feel limited by their English language skills. Poindexter's comment is synonymous with two of the questions I raise in the Introduction section which consider how students' lives are changed outside of the NCAIA classroom and how NCAIA provides unique learning opportunities. This idea that the arts provide an outlet for certain students because they do not need to rely on their language skills is highlighted in the article, "The Lady in Pink: Modern Dance in Elementary Schools" by Nina Collier.

The author describes an in-school modern dance program which was sponsored by Youth Concerts of New Mexico during the 1966-67 school year. Youth Concerts of New Mexico brought live musical performance to elementary and high schools throughout the state to schools that have enrollments consisting largely of underprivileged children. According to the article, the children struggled with English, but when this modern dance program was introduced, the English Language Learners had a chance to express themselves through a new language. The author theorizes that "The use of modern dance [was used] as an educational tool, particularly as an introduction to music" (59).

Using the arts to promote literacy with English Language Learners is not commonly used in schools. If schools were more aware of the potential for the arts to assist ELLs, they may be able to justify the arts in their budget. In addition, this "new language" that the author describes in the article may also be able to promote greater understanding amongst diverse students who have been unable to communicate with each other on a deeper level.

Another group of students that the arts are inclusive of are students who have not traditionally excelled in their regular academic classes. In the article, “The Benefits of Dance Education in a Middle School Setting” by Wrenn Cook, the dance teachers are not the main classroom teachers who know these children from their regular classes. The artistic staff is not aware of these students’ reading levels, their math competency, or how well they perform on standardized tests. The teachers learn who these students are from the dance classes. They look at their dance skills, their ability to learn choreography, to help others in the class, and how they behave in the rehearsals. These students have an opportunity to excel at something that is still within their school but it is outside of their normal classroom. This is an exhilarating experience for these students because it is new and different, while at the same time familiar since they are dancing with their fellow classmates in their own school.

In both articles, these two groups of students who are usually marginalized in school are given an opportunity to feel connected to their class as well as to excel in an area that utilizes skills they haven’t been able to tap into during their regular classes. This is an example of how *Arts in Action*, and the arts in general provide an opportunity for social justice in school.

### **School Teachers’ Attitudes Concerning the Arts**

Without communication and understanding between the NCAIA staff and the partnering schools, *Arts in Action* would be ineffective at the sites and would ultimately be unable to sustain itself. The ability for the NCAIA staff to communicate the importance of program for students is crucial. In the article, “Effects of an In-Service

Program on Eight Teachers Attitudes and Practices Regarding Creative Dance,” the author helps to illustrate how important it is for the AIA staff and the school partners to be in close communication with each other. When each group is able to communicate their goals within the partnership, then both groups have a higher chance of accomplishing them. In addition, the classroom teachers can utilize teaching techniques that are utilized in the dance classes and vice versa. For example, one technique that I’ve seen the classroom teachers is the way the AIA teachers will get the students to quiet down and focus. They will clap their hands in a specific rhythm and then the children will clap their hands to the same rhythm. This technique has proven to consistently get the students’ attention.

Prior to this study, none of the participant teachers were using creative dance in their classrooms. Despite all of their concerns and doubts about creative dance at the beginning of the study, the findings of the study show that, “All teachers changed both their reported attitudes toward and practices regarding creative dance, and all change was in the direction of greater receptivity to creative dance” (99).

Before the workshop, the teachers were hesitant to use creative dance in their classrooms because they were uncomfortable with this teaching technique. They didn’t know how to incorporate this form into their lesson plan because they didn’t see a connection between dance and a different subject area. The idea isn’t to use dance as a supplement, but as a complement, alongside a more traditional subject.

Thinking about dance as a catalyst is a central point in my thesis. Dance to promote social justice and collaboration are just a couple ways that I have come to regard its function. Although I do view dance as a catalyst, this should not be its main function.

Dance does provide many worthwhile lessons for students, but the purpose of the dance program I am describing is to teach students how to dance. In addition to reaping all the benefits of learning a new art form, there are additional advantages such as exercise, discipline and self awareness. The authors in the article, “Preparing Pre-Service Generalist Teachers to use Creative Movement in K-6,” are teacher educators who teach a course titled *Dance in Elementary School Classrooms* to pre-service elementary school teachers in a school of education. For most of the students enrolled in the course, they are experiencing dance for the first time.

The article demonstrates the effectiveness of incorporating the arts into a lesson plan. In the article, the authors demonstrate the benefit of arts integration for students to see how something can be taught in multiple ways. In addition, based on the layout of the space, the students and the teachers probably needed to move some of the desks and chairs around to make room for the “dance space.” This new orientation of the room may break up the monotony of the school day. There are multiple possibilities for thinking about the spacing of a classroom, and creative dance may provide a catalyst for students and teachers to start thinking about these alternate possibilities.

Both articles highlight the importance of a classroom teacher’s understanding of the benefits of the arts for her students. If classroom teachers do not believe in the power of the arts, then programs like *Arts in Action* would be able to remain in the schools. The classroom teachers involved in the program are asked to give up valuable class time as well as be willing to answer questions from parents who may have reservations about their children dancing in school.

## **The Arts Provide Un-testable Skills**

Logan's article, "Dance in the Schools: A Personal Account," addresses the question I raise in the Introduction section which focuses on how AIA provides unique learning opportunities which are not necessarily present in students' academic classes. Kinesthetic learning is almost never utilized when teaching traditional subject areas. According to Howard Gardner in his description of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, "it entails the potential of using one's whole body or parts of the body to solve problems. It is the ability to use mental abilities to coordinate bodily movements" (Gardner 1999: 41-43). Howard Gardner sees mental and physical activity as related. The arts programs are providing an opportunity for students to make those mind-body connections that haven't been made before.

Logan believes that the reason why dance has been neglected in public schools is because dance does not utilize a linear approach to learning, which "sometimes makes it difficult for students to gain ready access to it, especially in an educational system that values more linear approaches to learning" (301). Dance is kinesthetic learning, a type of learning that is usually not taught in schools.

If artists are able to communicate how dance is learned and understood, they may have an easier time of introducing arts programs in the schools. It is important to keep in mind that this relationship works both ways. Educators need to have an open-mind when thinking about the benefits of arts programs. In today's high stakes testing era, it seems as though if something can't be tested, it's not valuable. Un-testable traits such as collaboration, communication, community and understanding amongst students are crucial to the development of a well-rounded individual. These are the precise traits which the arts seek to reinforce. As we begin to better understand what makes a person

successful in the work force, hopefully educators will realize that all of the qualities that the arts promote are vital components to a person's success in the job market.

Drawing on the notion of why the arts have not been fully accepted as a traditional subject in schools, Ellen Winner and Monica Cooper believe that this is because the arts are viewed as a way to improve academic achievement and are not viewed as a stand alone subject. Their article, "Mute Those Claims: No Evidence (Yet) for a Causal Link between Arts Study and Academic Achievement," is an important article in my study because it examines the ongoing topic of whether or not the arts promote academic achievement.

The authors believe that the arts in education are detrimental to the integrity of the art form that is taught. This is a valid concern and worth taking into account. It is unclear in the article how academic achievement is measured. If student test scores are the determining factor, then this is an inadequate way to measure how the arts impact students. This article addresses the question of the arts promoting social engagement and cultural awareness. Students learn the importance of contributing and participating in the class so that the end-of-the year performance will be "professional." (Tisino, Personal Interview).

The authors examine a number of studies that have been conducted with findings that show links between participation in the arts and academic achievement. Based on their assessments, the authors find no causal link between the two. They believe that instead of supporting the arts, these studies actually make the arts in education more vulnerable. The authors believe that the arts should stand on their own as an essential



subject in the school day. According to the authors, the primary focus of art should never be to aid learning in another domain.

Regardless of how student achievement was measured, arts programs that only serve the purpose of boosting students' test scores do not help to teach students about the value of the arts. They are there primarily to supplement students' academic classes. I believe that the arts provide a unique learning opportunity for students. Although the lessons learned may not translate to a test score, these skills are necessary and crucial.

### **Interdisciplinary Approaches**

In my first research question I present in the Introduction, I examine how the AIA teaching artists engage in guided participation with the students. Through encouragement, demonstration, and an emphasis on students as the teachers, the AIA teachers encourage students not to rely heavily on them for support. This type of interdependence found in art classes is a skill that academic areas could adopt for their own practices. The interdisciplinary teaching approach may be an opportunity for the guided participation that is found in the Arts in Action classes to translate to a different subject area.

As a way to find common ground between arts integration and distinct art courses, the author in "Dance in Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning," presents an approach which combines aspects of both traditions. This involves the interplay between two distinct disciplines. In order for this approach to be effective, both disciplines must be fully understood by the students. In addition, everyone involved in this learning process, including the students, must understand the reason why the two disciplines are being utilized. In other words, there must be a reason to use an interdisciplinary approach,

which is that a topic cannot be fully understood with only one frame of reference.

Students must be given both frameworks in order to see the full picture.

This combination approach involves a lot of planning time and collaboration between teachers, but it provides an opportunity for students to experience the aesthetic qualities of dance, as well as the context of dance. It presents a broader and more dynamic picture of dance, which, I believe will help boost the legitimacy for dance in schools.

This is a helpful article to read when thinking about how the arts should relate to the more traditional academic subjects taught in school. It finds a solution for the problem of the arts taking a subservient role to the dominating school subject areas. Instead of the arts being an add-on to this anthropology unit, the arts are co-taught next to anthropology. This collaboration can only be possible when teachers from both subject areas can find a way to relate to each other without losing the integrity of either.

In terms of my own research, prior to reading “Method Meets Art” by Patricia Leavy, I had never considered dance as a form of qualitative research. The abstract nature of dance makes it difficult to generate meaning. After reading Leavy’s chapter, I had a better understanding that there are no hard truths in qualitative research, so using dance to represent data helps to evoke a multi-dimensional understanding. In terms of what the literature contributes, Leavy describes Arts-based research as: providing alternatives to traditional research methods; Tools that use creative arts to address research questions; The idea that theory and practice are intertwined; Draws on literary writing, music, dance, visual art, film, poems; Offers new pathways for creating knowledge within and across disciplinary boundaries; and creates a varied audience of

readers. In her book, Leavy incorporates all of these aspects of Arts-based research as a way to demonstrate all of the possibilities that this type of work opens up for researchers.

Leavy explains her journey as a researcher who at first used conventional research methods early in her career, but realized that these methods were inadequate for describing certain aspects of social life, reenacting participant experiences, and expressing feelings. Her book is an in-depth introduction to Arts-based research.

Arts-based research emerged from the similarity between artistic practice and the practice of qualitative research. This type of work can represent voices that have traditionally gone unheard. In each chapter, Leavy presents a different art form and the ways that it can be used to conduct qualitative research. Chapter Six of the book is designated for Dance and Movement. In this chapter, Leavy explores the advantages and disadvantages of dance as a representational form of qualitative research.

Both of these texts illustrate how interdisciplinary approaches will help bring the arts to the forefront in schools, allowing for children and teachers to realize the full potential of the arts to not only complement the more traditional subjects, but also serve as a way to teach life lessons that are unique to an arts education.

## **Act 1**

The information I collected was gathered from the following sources: observational notes taken at six different times for a total of six hours of observation, participant observation as a teacher in the AIA program on an ongoing basis, two separate interviews from two Arts in Action teaching artists, two separate interviews from the principals at two participating schools, an audience survey completed by sixty audience members during one of the end-of-the year performances, a participant observation survey completed by all of the fourth graders and teachers, notes taken from the start-up meeting between AIA staff and the classroom teachers, and a questionnaire given to students at the end of the AIA summer intensive.

The amount of data I've collected was overwhelming and difficult to digest. I realized midway through the project that I had bitten off probably more than I could chew. In addition to the dilemma of having way too much data, I also needed to understand my status as both an insider and an outsider to the organization. As a teaching artist, I was working for the organization I was writing about. In addition, I had become friends with the other AIA staff. When I interviewed them, I was interviewing them as both a researcher and a friend. Although I would have liked to separate the two, I knew that this would have been impossible. With this understanding I conducted the interviews with both of these lenses.

I would like to present a sampling of the data I've collected for this project. In order to organize the material, I've included the data that addresses one or more of the

four questions I posed in my introduction: 1. Do NCAIA teachers engage in guided participation, as defined by Barbara Rogoff, with their students? 2. How do the arts, in particular dance, allow students to be socially engaged and more culturally aware of each other? 3. Does NCAIA make a difference in students' lives outside of the NCAIA classroom? 4. Are there unique learning opportunities for students in their NCAIA classes that are not emphasized in their academic classes? 5. How can a joint partnership between an arts program and a school result in powerful learning opportunities for students? With these questions in mind, I will incorporate the collected data with the articles from the literature review section as part of the discussion and interpretation of what I've learned.

## **Act 1 Overture**

In this section, I present a range of data I've collected in different forms. The first type of data is part of a transcription from a start-up meeting between the classroom teachers and the NCAIA staff. Following the transcription, I've included a few noteworthy quotes from participants of the study taken from a variety of sources. I've included my own commentary surrounding these quotes as a way to provide a context. Following the comments from the participants, I've included descriptions and interpretations of four interviews I conducted; two with members of the AIA teaching staff and two with the principals at two of the partnering schools.

## Scene 1

**Research Question Addressed:** How can a joint partnership between an arts program and a school result in powerful learning opportunities for students?

Taking the article from the literature review, “Effects of an In-Service Program on Eight Teachers Attitudes and Practices Regarding Creative Dance” as a reference, Mac Donald stresses the importance of communication that needs to exist between the classroom teachers and the teaching artists in order for an effective collaboration to take place. The meeting that takes place at the beginning of the AIA residency allows members of these two worlds to come together and discuss common goals they share. The joint effort of teaching different aspects of a unit on the environment will help both parties since they will be reinforcing each other’s lessons. This is an excerpt from my notes:

Alton Tisino, the artistic director introduced the theme for this year’s performance: The environment and “Going Green.” The title of the show will be: A Beautiful Place: The Story of the Green City.

For the teachers who are new to AIA, Alton explained how each class would be working on a different dance that pertained to the theme of the performance. The themes for the class dances are: waste management, cultivation, construction, and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The fourth grade teachers all expressed interest in the topic for the performance proposed by Alton. Part of the science curriculum for the fourth graders includes: animal adaptations, rocks and minerals, leaving a carbon footprint, and alternative energy. The teachers felt that the AIA theme is very relevant to what they will be teaching in their classrooms.

This start-up meeting addresses the question: How can a joint partnership between an arts program and a school result in powerful learning opportunities for students? This

idea of teaching the same topic from two different lenses is similar to what Alison Rhodes describes in the journal article, “Dance in Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning.” By using multiple disciplines to teach one topic, students have an opportunity to think about the topic in a deeper way. In the *Herald Sun* article which covered the end-of-the-year performance at one of the partner schools, “Rachel Graul, a 10-year-old fourth-grade dancer, said participating taught her it’s her job to protect the Earth, and each person must pitch in to keep it beautiful” (Thomas, The Herald Sun). Through participating in the dance rehearsals, this student learned the value in group participation.

## Scene 2

**Research Question Addressed:** Are there unique learning opportunities for students in their AIA classes that are not usually present in their academic classes?

My goal in this section is to demonstrate how this community dance program is successfully addressing the needs of a diverse population of young people. The participants in my study include the fourth graders, as well as the fourth grade teachers, the parents of the students, and people from the community who watched the end-of-the-year performance. I also consider myself a participant in this study. I have been involved with this organization for the past two years, and in this section, I try to piece together tidbits of comments I've collected in my memory, as well as narrate crucial elements of interviews I have conducted.

There are certain things that take place in school that can not be measured on a test. One of these things is how quickly a new student is able to adjust to the environment. For some students, this adjustment is a smooth transition, while others struggle to adapt. Although there is no evidence that links student adaptability with higher test scores, it would seem to make sense that if a student feels comfortable with the learning environment, then he/she will score higher on tests. I bring this up to discuss a comment from a fourth grade student who participated in AIA after moving from a different school. He says, "As a new student, I found I could fit right into the class."

Through my observations of the program, there are several ways this student could have been able to "fit right in." As described in the introduction section, there are



plenty of opportunities for students to watch each other during the class. Students are encouraged to offer reasons why their classmates performed a particular step well. In addition, the teaching artist always encourages the students to help each other with the choreography by asking students to review together. This type of collaboration may be making a world of difference for new students to the school. The fact is that the benefits of AIA may not be easily measured by a test score.

Taking the article, “Mute Those Claims: No Evidence (Yet) for a Causal Link between Arts Study and Academic Achievement,” Ellen Winner and Monica Cooper think that using academic achievement as a way to legitimize the arts is dangerous because it downplays the value of the arts on its own. In my opinion, I don’t think it’s wrong to show how the arts increase academic achievement if it is not the main reason to support the arts in schools. Both principals I spoke with support AIA in all artistic and academic facets. This is what makes AIA so successful and allows it to reach its full potential. If the arts are able to help new students feel more comfortable in their new school, or help students improve in their academic classes, then those are just two examples of the positive results of this type of program.

At the end-of-the-year performance, students and teachers have an opportunity to write about their experiences with NCAIA. In one of the evaluations, a fourth grade teacher commented that “AIA evens out the playing field. Everyone has a new opportunity to excel. The high level of student engagement is great. Students saw some of their more timid classmates in a totally new light.” (AIA teacher evaluation form) For this teacher, dance was seen as completely different and separate from what students were learning in their regular classes. This kinesthetic learning was a new experience for the

majority of the students, which helped to “even out the playing field,” for them. Moira Logan describes the kinesthetic learning experience in her article, “Dance in the Schools: A Personal Account.” Logan believes that it has been difficult to integrate kinesthetic learning into schools because it is not understood in a linear way that the majority of the traditional subject areas are approached.

For the teacher who wrote the evaluation, she believed that this new learning experience was a wonderful opportunity for her students because they had a chance to utilize certain skills that are not normally highlighted. She also felt that this situation would allow for different types of students to shine in front of their classmates.

## Scene 3

### a. Interview with Marlon Torres, Arts in Action Teacher

**Research Question Addressed:** Do NCAIA teachers engage in guided participation with their students?

In an in-depth interview with one of the Arts in Action teachers, Marlon Torres, I was interested in finding out if he discussed the communal bonds that I saw being created in the Arts in Action setting. I asked him questions about individualism and community in American culture, compared to community identity in the Latino culture that he grew up in. Marlon told me that dance is a natural form of self-expression in Venezuela where he is from. Marlon considers dance to be a social interaction, a way of communicating. He went on to explain that in some communities, it is natural for peers to want to help each other, but in other cultures this is not the case.

Marlon thinks that in American communities, particularly affluent ones, the focus on the group as a community needs to be encouraged more. He believes that Arts in Action is a good opportunity to practice working together as a group in a school setting. By participating in this program during the school day, Marlon believes that this will help put the arts on an equal level with academics. Dance classes can help academic classes in other ways as well. The students are exerted by the physical discipline of these dance classes, and Marlon thinks that classroom teachers are able to approach their students when the students are calmer and more settled.

During a break in between classes one day, I wanted to test Marlon's theory about students learning to help one another in their classes. I asked a student if she helps others

during her NCAIA classes. She told me that, “We would help each other stay on beat by counting for each other.” I have seen for myself this type of teamwork in the dance classes as well as during the actual performances. Students will be in the wings watching their classmates and quietly counting the beats for each other so that they are loud enough for the performers to hear but quiet enough that the audience would never know. It’s a beautiful thing to watch this type of teamwork take place.

**b. Interview with Gina Parner\*, Principal of Harvey Elementary School\***

**Research Question Addressed:** How does NCAIA make a difference in students’ lives outside of the NCAIA classroom?

I had the opportunity to interview Gina Parner last month about her impressions of Arts in Action. Mrs. Parner is the principal of Harvey Elementary School which partners with the program. Principal Parner is an African American, middle aged woman. According to Parner, 91% of the students require free or reduced lunches. The demographic of the school is predominantly African American.

Mrs. Parner brings NCAIA to wherever she goes. Last year, Parner was the principal at Scaggs Elementary\* which partnered with Arts in Action. Now that Parner is at Harvey, AIA now partners with Harvey. Mrs. Parner believes whole-heartedly in this program.

In her report for the Oregon School Study Council, Lenora Cohen’s beliefs strongly resemble Principal Parner’s comments that arts classes during the school day help boost students’ interest in coming to school. Towards the end of her report, Cohen offered strategies that can be used to develop creativity at the district, school, and classroom levels. Cohen believed that it “should be the mission of schools to find what

children are interested and proficient in and then seek ways to develop and channel those abilities, academic and otherwise” (p. 37). Every child is gifted in one area, and it is up to teachers and administrators to foster that talent in each child. Principal Parner believes that AIA is a chance to foster multiple talents in every child.

One of the most interesting aspects of the interview occurred right at the end when I asked Mrs. Parner whether the boys benefited from the program as much as the girls since, in my opinion, dance is usually associated with women. Parner pointed out:

But that’s a cultural difference. Because African Americans and Hispanic/Latino students, they just naturally dance and sing [laughs] with rhythm so I don’t think it’s a problem. But you know what, kids today. What’s the number one thing they like to do? Go to Youtube, listen to music. So, I just think it’s generational too. Kids love music. They think its cool, they like to dance, they’re not afraid anymore like we were when we were kids. And even then, we enjoyed it as well. But, it’s in our blood [laughs].

In an interview I conducted with Dr. Grace\*, the principal at Benjamin Elementary School\*, she felt that boys and girls do benefit differently from the program and that it is more difficult to get the boys interested in the program. She also mentioned that having a male dance teacher was a help. Dr. Grace is a white, middle aged woman who is the principal at a predominantly white, affluent school in Chapel Hill, NC. However, the school does have a diverse group of students who represent a variety of races and cultures.

(\*Pseudonym)

**c. Interview with Dr. Johanna Grace\*, Principal of Benjamin Elementary School\***

**Research Question Addressed:** How do the arts, in particular dance, allow students to be socially engaged and more culturally aware of each other?

The interview I conducted with Dr. Grace took place the same week as my

interview with Mrs. Parner and I used the same questions for both interviews. Based on the responses from both Dr. Grace and Mrs. Parner, I modified the questions in order to go along with the flow of the interview. The original questions can be found in Appendix 1. With Dr. Grace's interview, she was much more interested in the study as a whole than the actual interview. She was curious about who else I was interviewing, what kinds of information I was looking at, and what background research I was conducting. Unlike Mrs. Parner, Dr. Grace came to Benjamin when AIA was already partnering with the school. Despite her lack of history with the program, she still seemed connected and supportive of AIA.

As the principal of an elementary school with a highly diverse student body who comes from all over the world, Dr. Grace was especially interested in my question concerning English Language Learners and their ability to navigate Arts in Action. Dr. Grace thinks, "It's a really great way for them to learn English as well, so it's through dance and through the music and its another really great thing for our kids and we have a lot of kids who are ELLs" (Dr. Grace personal interview).

As described in the article, "The Lady in Pink: Modern Dance in Elementary Schools," Collier describes dance as a universal language for English Language Learners. It is a language that can be understood amongst students who do not share the same native language, but can understand each other's emotions and desires through this non verbal form of expression.

(\*Pseudonym)

**d. Interview with Alton Tisino and Julie Bradley, NCAIA Artistic Director and NCAIA Musical Director**

**Research Question Addressed:** Are there unique learning opportunities for students in their NCAIA classes that are not usually present in their academic classes?

Alton Tisino, the Artist Director of the program and Julie Bradley, the Musical Director have been part of NCAIA since its inception in 2005. Both Julie and Alton believe that the program has affected students outside of the dance classroom. Since they have been part of the program from the beginning, students who were in the program in previous years will come back to tell them how much the program meant to them. In addition, the fourth grade teachers who participate in the program year after year have developed strong relationships with Julie and Alton. Students who are no longer in the fourth grade have the opportunity to participate in LEAP team, which is NCAIA's program for students who want to continue after fourth grade.

Alton incorporates the idea of the creative economy to show how Arts in Action affects students outside of the classroom. This idea that creativity will increase economic well-being was referred to as the creative economy by John Howkins (2001). The creative economy is made up of industries such as: advertising, architecture, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, and the performing arts (Howkins 2001, pp. 88–117). These industries have the potential to bring in a competitive profit on the world market. In addition to Howkins' theory on the creative economy, other scholars have written about the lucrative potential of these creative fields, suggesting that "human creativity is the ultimate economic resource," (Florida 2002, p. xiii). The question surfaces as to whether or not learning skills to be used for the creative economy is harmful or helpful to a child's creative development? In Alton's opinion, these practical skills are helpful because

people are required to use creativity in any job they have. Alton explains in an interview I conducted:

*A lot of people will say the arts in education, but “Art is Education.” It teaches you so much about self-expression, creativity, collaboration, and discipline. In today’s world creativity is so important. You need to be creative in whatever job you have and the arts help develop and nurture creativity. The arts help develop the whole child and not just the logical and linguistic smartness that traditional schooling emphasizes.*

At another point in the interview, Alton describes a student who was considered by his teacher to be a “trouble-maker.” Before Alton knew any of his back-story, he chose this student to be the star of the show. According to Alton, “The performance was a huge success and the teacher was amazed that the student had been able to accomplish so much in order to perform.” (Personal Interview Alton Tisino). This type of opportunity for this “trouble-maker” is congruent with Wrenn Cook’s article, “The Benefits of Dance Education in a Middle School Setting.” Cook believes that separate dance classes in school allow a safe-haven for marginalized students who have been unsuccessful in their academic classes.



## **Act 2**

The Arts in Action teachers, principals, students, and classroom teachers all have different ideas concerning the impact of the program on the students. For the purpose of this paper, I will limit the analysis of the data which address the theme of guided participation as described by Rogoff in relation to the research questions.

In this framework, Rogoff explains that, “The concept of guided participation is central to my proposal that learning is a process of changing participation in community activities. It is a process of taking on new roles and responsibilities...Such learning and interaction involve similar basic processes as well as distinct forms of guided participation around the world.” I will be focusing on participants in this study who discuss the idea that “Communication and coordination during participation in shared endeavors are key aspects of how people develop” (Rogoff 2003). This emphasis on communication and coordination relates to the 1968 article, “The Lady in Pink: Modern Dance in Elementary Schools.” In the article, Collier describes how students who struggled to communicate with English found that the arts provided a new language in which they could express themselves. In my interpretation of what occurs in the Arts in Action classes, ELL learners are not stunted in their development of coordination and communication skills because of the language barriers, but are instead given an opportunity to grow and learn with the rest of their class.

Marlon Torres, the dance instructor I interviewed spoke about the importance of teaching children to work together and support each other in the classroom. He feels that

this support is not taught in the United States and it's much more about the individual rising to the top. He thinks that group support is so important in the Arts in Action classes because everyone is required to work together for the show to be a success. Without this team work, the show would be fragmented and messy.

Another reason why Mr. Torres thinks that communication and coordination amongst the students is crucial is that everyone is learning dance for the first time, putting them all in vulnerable positions. Talking through insecurities about the dance steps is important for students who may feel uncomfortable in this new environment. For Torres, it is the NCAIA teacher's responsibility to bring out the supportive and encouraging attitude in the students. The teachers must be prepared to ask questions that will help students become interested in each other's development. Torres' interview directly relates to the idea of guided participation described by Rogoff. The AIA teachers engage in a student-centered learning environment where the focus is on building strong and supportive relationships amongst students.

Principal Parner believes that the elements of dance lend themselves to students working together and learning together. Since dance is a creative endeavor, she believes it's only natural that students will learn how to interact with each other because they are constantly creating new worlds for themselves. She places a lot of emphasis on the Arts in Action teachers' ability to uplift and encourage the students to excel in their classes. She notes that students who were excelling in their NCAIA classes were still getting "write ups" in their regular classes. She thought it was important to understand why this is happening. Although she is no longer the principal at Scaggs, she hopes that the teachers have thought about how the students were successful in their AIA classes and

not necessarily in their academic classes. Perhaps the use of guided participation may provide a way to bridge this dichotomy.

Thinking about the article, “Mute Those Claims: No Evidence (Yet) for a Causal Link between Arts Study and Academic Achievement,” the authors in the article see no link between arts study and academic achievement. In Principal Parner’s opinion, the students in her school were also unable to find a connection between what they were doing in their Arts in Action classes versus what they were doing in their regular classes. This dichotomy could also have to do with the different types of intelligences which are utilized in each class (Gardner, 1999). In the article, academic achievement is measured in a standardized way, and does not take into account certain aspects that are not measured on a test (collaboration, communication, peer-support, etc.) If students are given a way to understand that all of these qualities that are taught in NCAIA are also applicable in their regular classes, they may be able to bridge the disconnect that exists between the two.

Dr. Grace believes that the students and the classroom teachers are able to create a greater connection in the Arts in Action classes. The students see their teacher in a whole new light in these classes. The teacher is encouraged to dance and participate in the class with her students. In addition, the classroom teachers may also see their students in a new light. Students who were not standouts in the regular classes may be able to shine in this environment.

The article, “Preparing Pre-Service Generalist Teachers to use Creative Movement in K-6,” is helpful to discuss in this context because, although the classroom teachers are not themselves teaching the dance classes, they are still participating in these

classes and learning about dance education in the process. Teachers I've spoken with have said that they use Arts in Action as a motivating factor to help students become excited about the week. Teachers who have an understanding of what the students' are learning in their Arts in Action classes may be able to help them translate lessons they are learning in one class and apply it to the other class.

In my interview with Alton Tisino and Julie Bradley, they express similar beliefs with the ideas in "The Benefits of Dance Education in a Middle School Setting." Wrenn Cook explains that a major advantage in a separate dance class is that the dance teachers do not go into the class with preconceived notions of the students. During the interview, Alton described a situation in which he had chosen a student to be the lead in the show, only to find out from the student's teacher that he was considered a "trouble-maker" in his regular classes. Alton provided this student with a new opportunity to prove himself and to do something that would make his school and his family proud of him. Alton went on to explain that the student rose to the occasion and was a star in the production. In addition to the dance instructors looking at the students from clean slates, the students may also be able to view these separate arts classes as a safe-haven from their other classes. Students have the opportunity to prove to their classmates and to themselves that they can excel in something.

If we are able to create an opportunity for students to share information with each other in an interactive and collective way, like they do in these dance classes, I think this would help create bonds amongst students who wouldn't otherwise make connections with each other. As described by Mary Fitzgerald, "Exchanging knowledge through dance allows new relationships to form within society, and some of the borders that

normally exist between different communities begin to blur, allowing for an expansion and redefinition of personal worlds, as well as of the cultural fabric” (Dance, Human Rights, & Social Justice 259).

The question remains as to whether these skills can be put into practice in a setting outside of the dance class. Dance classes provide experiences and lessons that are truly unique. Does this mean that the joy students get out of dance classes cannot be replicated in an academic setting? In an ideal world, dance classes would be accessible to every student. But the reality is that due to funding issues, public schools are not able to provide separate dance classes for their students. When schools are unable to fund dance programs, it is important to consider what they do offer to students.

Maxine Greene, a philosopher on the arts and education provides an answer in an essay from, “Releasing the Imagination.” The answer lies in the ability to build a strong sense of community in the classroom, allowing for trust and friendships to emerge amongst the participants. She explains, “Like freedom, it [community] has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common...it ought to enable those involved to imagine alternative possibilities for their own becoming and their group's becoming” (Releasing the Imagination 39). When students learn to appreciate each other’s gifts and talents, regardless of whether these are dance talents or academic talents, they can start to actively engage in social justice.

On a more practical level, Barbara Rogoff feels that,

“A related feature of designing programs is to include the people for whom the programs are designed, as contributors in the planning as well as implementation of the programs... Programs can assist people in learning new ways of doing things while maintaining other ways, and can help people learn when to use each approach. This is a

matter of enlarging people's *repertoires of cultural practice*" (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Rogoff, 2003)."

NCAIA meets the needs of the students at each school it serves because the program has learned how to cater to the culture and the dynamics of each school it serves. NCAIA functions slightly different at each partner school. Only after the Arts in Action staff become familiar with the students, the classroom teachers and the administrative staff, can it succeed in meeting its objectives. This study demonstrates how powerful the arts can be in creating an environment where students can feel free to be themselves.

## **Choreography within a Choreography**

Leavy's *Method Meets Art* helped me realize that I could represent data in dance form. Although I have been choreographing for the past five years and learning qualitative research for the past two, this combination approach was a completely new concept to me. I am still grappling with the challenges of conducting qualitative research on a dance program, so using dance as the form to represent my research presented challenges.

I choreographed a modern dance piece as an interpretation of what I've learned from my research during this project. The dancers are undergraduates at UNC who are part of a student dance group called Modernextension. When I choreographed the dance, I decided it was important to create a script to go alongside the piece. This was a choice I made that I hope did not disrupt the integrity of the dance. The modern dance presentation was an experimental application of the research and it helped me to view my work from a completely different level. It is my hope that the audience was able to think about my research in a new way.

### **Script of *Breaking Away***

#### **Dancers:**

**Mother 1/ Teacher – Hanna Blackwell**

**Mother 2/ Teacher– Alison Grimme**

**Child 1 – Katie Flowers**

**Child 2 – Meredith Sunstrom**

The opening scene depicts a community member of a particular society who is sharing a story with the audience. The woman looks at the audience from a “magnifying glass,” as if to say, I can see you watching us. This is an opportunity for the performer to look at the audience, before the audience looks at her.

The story begins as a narrative journey in which the performers depict a certain way of life in a particular community (the community is supposed to be middle class, white, American – as interpreted by Amanda). The ideals in this community are individualism, being self-sufficient, and being the highest academic achiever.

The audience is first introduced to a “pregnant” woman walking. She journeys in a circle to the center of the stage, while also making circles with her body. (head, legs, whole body). The woman is depicting her pregnancy – the joy of expecting a child, the anxiety and fears of her life changing dramatically, while also dealing with the emotional and physical changes. The woman depicts all of these inner thoughts in her dancing.

The woman’s path during pregnancy is based on the expectations and norms of her society. She has read all of the books, taken all of the right vitamins, gone to see her doctor at all the right times, and she is in a stable and loving marriage.

Another “pregnant” woman enters the stage. This woman has entered the society recently. She wants to do all of the right things for her baby, just as the first woman, but she does not have the social or economic capital to know what the “correct” steps are taken in this society during pregnancy. She is new to this society, not speaking the same language as the first woman. Her path is not as safe and planned out as her counterpart. She has a loving husband, but since the couple has just moved here, he is not working yet. Her family members are still back in the society she came from, so she does not have a solid support system. The woman follows the lead of the first woman, attempting to navigate her pregnancy in a new society. She circles the woman on the outskirts, trying to learn everything she can from her.

Since the first woman is immersed in the ideals of her community, she considers her role as highly individualized. She knows the other mother is out there, but she doesn’t see her path crossing with the other woman. She believes that everyone should follow their own paths.

The first mother has given birth and as time passes, it has gotten to the point where she can start to let her child out on her own. She wants her child to be able to do things on her own. The mother assists the child in doing a “cartwheel” and then the child is encouraged to try it on her own.

The other mother, who does not come from a society where individualism is the ideal, but where community relations and working together are highlighted, keeps her child close to her so that she can learn from her mother. The mother does a cartwheel and the child follows her lead. The two do the cartwheels together.

The first child has ventured out on her own, while her mother watches her from a distance. Meredith wants to play with Katie and goes over to her. While the mothers are watching their children, they unintentionally walk backwards until they are touching back to back. They jump out of the way as soon as they feel the other person. The mother



doesn't like who Katie is playing with and goes over to her. Katie runs around her mother and jumps on her back. Meredith goes back to her mother and jumps on her back.

The mothers make a circle with the children on their back and they bring their children together to attend school. The mother/child pairs are mirroring each other to symbolize the commonality in this society of attending school. The families who have been different in raising their children all end up at the same location when their children begin school. The experiences of each child are different, but they will be asked to participate in the same activities, answer the same questions, and take the same tests as each other.

The mothers are now connected because of their children. Although the children experience similar activities in school, they are still being raised by their families' expectations and ideals, with varying degree. The first mother may be reinforcing and reiterating the same kinds of lessons being taught in school, while the second mother is teaching her child a different set of skills and expectations to achieve.

The round circular motion performed by the mothers as they are seated symbolizes the shift of the children being taught solely by their parents to now being taught by their teachers during the school day. When they stand up, the mothers are now the teachers in the dance. [They play both classroom teachers and Arts in Action teachers at different points in the dance]

The kids have been circling their mothers/teachers on the floor to represent that this transformation of learning from one's mother to learning from one's teacher can be seamless in some situations and problematic in others. The kids on the floor now stand up and start running around in a circle to represent students beginning their education in school.

The classroom teachers begin a dance of their own to represent the start of children's education in school. The teachers form triangles on their bodies, representing "beams of knowledge" they are giving to the children. They also represent different stories that the audience is learning from the performers.

When the dance begins, the children sit down to watch/learn from their teachers. The teachers demonstrate their expertise of the material and show the children what they will be learning. The teachers continue to dance and then when they push the air back with their hands and fall backwards, this represents that the teachers are now going to review the material with the students and the students are expected to remember the material.

The students begin the dance from the beginning. Child One remembers all of the teachers' instructions and repeats the same dance as her teachers. She will join them as they continue their dance.

Child Two connects the dance she observed with something her mother taught her. She veers off course and continues with a different kind of dancing (Different dance style)

The narrative now shifts to students in their Arts in Action (AIA) classes. The teachers now represent AIA classes. The teachers and students all form a diagonal line and walk towards a common “goal.” The line shifts downwards as they struggle with a difficulty in class. The teacher and students see each other eye to eye and mirror each other. They perform a group dance together.

After the group has ventured to stage left, they are now back in their regular class. This is an AP class and the students are expected to learn a lot of material very quickly. The circle they have formed gets faster and faster as the semester unfolds. The students in the class are all concerned with getting the highest scores and they are happy when another student does poorly on a test. Child 2 does not understand this type of culture in the classroom and she feels out of place. She decides to leave the class because she doesn’t feel supported by her peers. She leaves the circle unnoticed. Soon, the others realize that she has left the class. They don’t like that she left and decide to drag her back in, only to push her back out again.

The teacher leads her students in a new lesson. The teacher dances first and the students follow soon after. Child 2 dances by herself. She is uncomfortable, feeling isolated and would prefer being around others who support each other. The piece ends with the student on her own while the students in their classroom are raising their hands and vying for the teacher’s attention.

## **Finale**

As I watched the end-of-the-year performance backstage at Benjamin Elementary, I reflected on what I have learned from this dance program. Prior to joining the NCAIA team, I never realized the potential for this type of collaboration between a dance program and an elementary school. I had always understood the importance of the arts in the development of a child, but I never realized how a dance program could have such a profound effect on all of its participants, including me. As I reflect on my interest in the arts in education prior to joining NCAIA, this interest was only peripheral and did not affect me in the way I now feel about arts programs in schools. I do not claim that this arts program has all of the answers or solves all of the problems that exist in schools. Instead, it serves as aloe vera on a deep cut. It helps to alleviate a sting and cool it down. It allows students to negotiate the discomforts and anxieties they may feel in school by providing them with a new layer, a new opportunity in the school day.

## Post-Performance Discussion 1

### Quantitative Data – Absentee Data

In the graphs below, I have disaggregated the absentee rates of students in 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Benjamin from the 2010 – 2011 school year in order to determine whether or not students were more likely to attend school when they had their Arts in Action class.

Below each graph, I have described what the graph represents and I have indicated which days the students participated in AIA.

#### Number of Unexcused Absences in the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Grades 2010-2011 School Year (3/7/11-3/25/11)

Monday-3/7		Tuesday-3/8		Wednesday- 3/9		Thursday-3/10		Friday-3/11	
3rd	no school	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3rd	0	3rd	1	3rd	0
4 <sup>th</sup>	no school	4 <sup>th</sup>	4	4 <sup>th</sup>	0	4 <sup>th</sup>	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	1
5th	no school	5 <sup>th</sup>	3	5th	0	5th	1	5th	1
Monday-3/14		Tuesday-3/15		Wednesday- 3/16		Thursday-3/17		Friday-3/18	
3rd	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	3rd	0	3rd	2	3rd	1
4 <sup>th</sup>	0	4 <sup>th</sup>	0	4 <sup>th</sup>	0	4 <sup>th</sup>	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	2
5th	2	5 <sup>th</sup>	0	5th	0	5th	5	5th	6
Monday-3/21		Tuesday-3/22		Wednesday- 3/23		Thursday- 3/24		Friday-3/25	
3rd	0	3 <sup>rd</sup>	0	3rd	0	3rd	1	3rd	no school
4 <sup>th</sup>	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	0	4 <sup>th</sup>	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	1	4 <sup>th</sup>	no school
5th	2	5 <sup>th</sup>	3	5th	1	5th	2	5th	no school

The graph above shows the number of unexcused absences for students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Benjamin Elementary. The bolded text indicates that students in the fourth grade participated in Arts in Action on these days. I chose these three weeks because they took place two weeks leading up to the final performance and also include the week of the performance. While I looked at absentee rates throughout the entire Arts in Action residency (November – March), these three weeks show the least amount of unexcused absences during the Arts in Action days compared to the rest of the week.

### Number of Total Absences (Unexcused and Excused) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Grades (12/6/10-12/17/10)

Monday-12/6		Tuesday-12/7		<b>Wednesday- 12/8/2010</b>		Thursday-12/9		Friday-12/10	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	5	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	3	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	3	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	5
5 <sup>th</sup>	2	5 <sup>th</sup>	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	3	5 <sup>th</sup>	0	5 <sup>th</sup>	3
Monday-12/13		Tuesday-12/14		<b>Wednesday- 12/15/2010</b>		Thursday-12/16		Friday-12/17	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	8	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4	3 <sup>rd</sup>	6	3 <sup>rd</sup>	no school	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	5	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	6	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	no school	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	4
5 <sup>th</sup>	5	5 <sup>th</sup>	3	5 <sup>th</sup>	3	5 <sup>th</sup>	no school	5 <sup>th</sup>	6
Monday-1/3		Tuesday-1/4		<b>Wednesday- 1/5/2011</b>		Thursday-1/6		Friday-1/7	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	3	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	1	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	3	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	3	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	7	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	5
5 <sup>th</sup>	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	4	5 <sup>th</sup>	4	5 <sup>th</sup>	4	5 <sup>th</sup>	3

The graph above shows the combined number of unexcused and excused absences for students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Benjamin Elementary. The bolded text indicates that students in the fourth grade participated in Arts in Action on these days. These three weeks occurred in the middle of the residency and indicate that the combined number of unexcused and excused absences are not affected by the days that Arts in Action took place.

### Number of Unexcused Absences in the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Grades (12/6/10-1/7/11)

Monday-12/6		Tuesday-12/7		<b>Wednesday- 12/8/2010</b>		Thursday-12/9		Friday-12/10	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	0	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	0	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	1	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2
5 <sup>th</sup>	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	0	5 <sup>th</sup>	2	5 <sup>th</sup>	0	5 <sup>th</sup>	2
Monday-12/13		Tuesday-12/14		<b>Wednesday- 12/15/2010</b>		Thursday-12/16		Friday-12/17	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	0	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	no school	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	0	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	1	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	1	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	no school	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	3
5 <sup>th</sup>	4	5 <sup>th</sup>	2	5 <sup>th</sup>	3	5 <sup>th</sup>	no school	5 <sup>th</sup>	5
Monday-1/3		Tuesday-1/4		<b>Wednesday- 1/5/2011</b>		Thursday-1/6		Friday-1/7	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	3	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1	3 <sup>rd</sup>	1
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	0	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	2	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	1
5 <sup>th</sup>	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	4	5 <sup>th</sup>	1	5 <sup>th</sup>	0

The graph above shows the number of unexcused absences for students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade at Benjamin Elementary. The bolded text indicates that students in the fourth grade participated in Arts in Action on these days. These three weeks occurred in the middle of the residency and indicate that the number of unexcused absences are not affected by the days that Arts in Action took place.

### Analysis of Quantitative Data

This work I did with the absentee rates is the first type of quantitative research I've conducted for a study. Since this was my first time working with numbers, it was challenging for me to know how to separate the data. I knew I wanted to look at examine

whether or not there were less absences on the days that students had Arts in Action from the 2010-2011 school year, but I didn't know how I would compare the numbers to the days students didn't have Arts in Action. I decided to look at the absentee rates of students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade so that I could compare all three numbers.

The next problem I encountered was that the absentee forms were also divided into students who were absent the entire day, students who were only absent in the morning before noon, students who were late in the morning, and students who were late in the afternoon. There were so many variable that I was working with. I didn't know if I should include latenesses in my tally of students who were not present during Arts in Action. I knew when the Arts in Action classes took place last year, but some of them occurred before noon and some towards the end of the day. I would need to know when the late students had arrived and whose class they were in in order to determine whether or not they missed Arts in Action. In addition the absences were divided into unexcused and excused absences.

To make things less complicated, I decided to only look at the unexcused absences from all of the students. I looked at 3 weeks in the middle of the residency and 3 weeks at the end of the residency. During the middle of the program, I did not see any significant drops in absentee rates during the Arts in Action days compared to the rest of the week. I did notice that there were never more absences during those days compared to the rest of the week. The absences either dropped or remained the same on those days.

When looking at the absentee rates of the students in the program two weeks leading up to the performance and the week of the performance, there were less students

absent during the Arts in Action days. There was never more than one unexcused absence during those days.

## Survey Results

At the end-of-the year performance, I handed out audience surveys to all audience members who attended the daytime performance as well as the evening performance. In total, 65 people completed their surveys and handed them in. This was the first time I had created a survey, so I was new to the art of survey-making. (The survey can be found in the Appendix 1 section). There were two questions in the survey that I found to be the most interesting because they provided the most information.

The first question was:

If you are a parent/guardian/family member of a child involved with Arts in Action, please answer the following questions:  
My child takes art (dance, music, painting) classes outside of school.

Out of the 37 participants who identified themselves as parents, 28 parents said that their child does not take art outside of school and 9 parents said that they do. Although this is only a small sampling of all of the fourth grade parents, it still shows that the majority of students receive all of their arts education in school.

The second question which helped to inform my understanding for this study was: On a scale of 1-5, with one being not at all and 5 being very much, please indicate what Arts in Action provides:

1. Discipline and Focus	1	2	3	4	5
2. Chance to express oneself	1	2	3	4	5
3. More confidence in other subject areas	1	2	3	4	5
4. Skills to think creatively	1	2	3	4	5

After reading through all 65 surveys, the majority of the responses were 4s or 5s for all of the categories. The most discrepancy I found was with the question that AIA provides more confidence in other subject areas. This category scored the lowest out of the rest of the categories with scores of 2s and 3s. In addition, some people felt that they were unable to grade this category, but they were able to circle numbers for the rest of the categories. I was curious to understand why this area was the most unclear for the participants.

### **Collected documents:**

#### **What makes an excellent Arts in Action dancer? (Given to students at the beginning of the program)**

An excellent dancer:

Brings focus and enthusiasm to each class

Comes to each class prepared and ready to work

Always gives 100% best effort

Never gives up, even when challenged

Dances with energy and joy

Listens carefully and follows directions

Picks up steps quickly, or works outside of class to master steps between rehearsals

Respects and supports teachers and peers

Is a great team player – willing to lead and demonstrate, applaud the efforts of others, model or teach a step when asked, & at times, step out of the spotlight to give others a chance to shine.

#### **Participant Evaluation Form (Given to teachers and students at the end of the year)**

1. NC AIA helped my students develop self-discipline
2. NC AIA helped my students develop a standard of excellence
3. NC AIA helped my students develop self-confidence
4. NC AIA fostered better relationships between me and my students throughout our work together in NC AIA.
5. My students formed new friendships with children as a result of NC AIA participation.
6. NC AIA made going to school a joyful experience for many of my students.
7. How did NC AIA program impact your class? Did you see areas of growth of some of your students through their NC AIA participation? Please explain.
8. What do you like about NC AIA? What do you dislike about it?
9. We say that NC AIA promotes self-discipline and confidence that impacts other areas of a student's academic and personal life. Did you see evidence of that in the classroom or



in a child's interaction with their peers? Please explain.

10. How can NC AIA do more to support your goals for your students? What are some ways to integrate the dance experience with the academic curriculum or vice versa?

**Arts in Action Audience Survey / Encuesta para la Audiencia de Arts in Action (Given to audience members at the end of the year performance)**

1. What is your connection to Arts in Action? / ¿Cuál es su conexión al programa Arts in Action?

- ☐ Parent/guardian/family member of student in the program / Padre o madre / guardián /miembro de familia de un estudiante en el programa
- ☐ Teacher / Maestro
- ☐ Community Member / Miembro de la comunidad
- ☐ Staff / Personal
- ☐ Administrator / Administrador
- ☐ Other / Otro \_\_\_\_\_

2. If you are a parent/guardian/family member of a child involved with Arts in Action, please answer the following questions / Si eres un padre o madre/guardián/miembro de familia de un estudiante que participa en Arts in Action, por favor responda las siguientes preguntas:

My child / Mi hijo e hija:

- a. Is / Es: Male / Nino Female / Nina Prefer not to say / Prefiero no decir
- b. Takes art (dance, music, painting) classes outside of school / Participa en las clases de arte (baile, música, pintura, etc) en otro programa o escuela Yes / Si No
- c. Talks to you about Arts in Action / Me informa/comienta sobre el programa Arts in Action Yes / Si No

3. If you answered yes to question C, please answer the following question / Si respondió sí en la Pregunta C, por favor responda las siguientes preguntas:

c1. What aspects of Arts in Action (AIA) does your child talk to you about? / ¿Su hijo/hija le habla de cuáles aspectos de Arts in Action (AIA)?

- ☐ AIA Teachers / Los maestros de AIA
- ☐ Dance Movements / Los movimientos de baile
- ☐ Performance / Las presentaciones de baile
- ☐ Music / Música
- ☐ Friends in the class / Amigos en la clase

4. What is your race or ethnic background? / ¿Cuál es su raza o etnicidad?

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native / Indio americano o nativo de Alaska
- ☐ Asian or Pacific Islander / Asiático o isleño del pacífico
- ☐ Black or African American / Negro o afroamericano

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino / Hispánico o latino
- ☐ Two or more races / Dos o más razas \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ White or Caucasian / Blanco o caucásico

→

5. Do you have an interest in the arts? / ¿Tiene un interés en las artes?

Yes / Si          No

If yes, please describe / Si responde sí, por favor elabore:

\_\_\_\_\_.

6. What is your highest education level? / ¿Cuál es su nivel de educación más alta?

- ☐ High school diploma / Diploma de la escuela secundario
- ☐ Some college / Alguna educación de la universidad
- ☐ Undergraduate degree / Graduado de la universidad
- ☐ Graduate degree / Tiene una maestría
- ☐ Other / Otro \_\_\_\_\_

7. Please check all that apply / Por favor marque todo lo que aplique: I have / Yo...

- ☐ Observed an Arts in Action class / He observado una clase de Arts in Action
- ☐ Talked to student(s) about the program / He hablado con un estudiante/estudiantes sobre el programa
- ☐ Talked to parents about the program / He hablado con otros padres sobre el programa
- ☐ Attended the Arts in Action performance last year / He asistido una presentación de Arts in Action el año pasado

8. On a scale of 1-5, with one being not at all and 5 being very much, please indicate what Arts in Action provides for students / En una escala de 1-5, en el cual 1 significa nunca, y 5 representa mucho, por favor indique lo que Arts in Action provee para los estudiantes:

1. Discipline and Focus / Disciplina y enfoque	1	2	3	4	5
2. Chance to express oneself / Oportunidad para expresarse	1	2	3	4	5
3. More confidence in other subject areas / Más confianza en otras áreas de estudio	1	2	3	4	5
4. Skills to think creatively / Capacidad de pensar creativamente	1	2	3	4	5

Please provide any comments your would like to share about Arts in Action / Por favor escriba cualquier comentario que le gustaría compartir sobre Arts in Action.

\_\_\_\_\_.

**Arts in Action Summer Intensive Questionnaire (Given to students at the end of the week-long intensive)**

1. What was your favorite part of Arts in Action camp? Please explain.
2. Does Arts in Action help you work with others better? Please explain.
3. How do you remember the dances you learned during Arts in Action camp?
4. What was challenging about creating your dances in a group?
5. How did you help others during camp?
6. What did you learn about yourself during camp that you didn't know before?
7. Do you think it's important to have dance classes in school? Please explain.
8. What skills did you learn from AIA camp?
9. What was different about AIA at school and AIA camp?

**Interview Guide for Arts in Action Teacher**

1. Could you give me a brief introduction of where you are from and what you currently do?
2. What is your dance background?
3. Is anyone else in your family involved with dance or another art form?
4. How did you get involved with AIA?
5. Some of the students you teach are learning English as a second language. Can you talk about the challenges you face when teaching students who have different native languages?
6. How do the students view you as a teacher? Do native Spanish speakers view you differently than English native speakers?
7. How familiar are you with your students? Do you know their family or anything about them individually?
8. Can you describe the different methods you use to teach choreography?
9. How effective are you at connecting with the students' families?
10. How important is it for the students to be learning dance during the school day?
11. Do you think the students learn techniques/skills in your class that they apply to their academic classes?
12. How/do you develop a sense of community in your classroom? Do you think this is an important aspect?
13. Do you encourage students to help each other learn the choreography during class? Do you set aside time for students to review with each other?
14. How do you address the needs of every student in your classroom? Do you think any one is left out?
15. Do you think it's possible to measure the impact of AIA on the students? How would you measure it?
16. Do students divide themselves into groups in your class? If so, how do they divide? (Ability, race, language, gender, etc.)

**Interview Guide for Elementary School Principals**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your background in the arts?
2. Do you think it's important for children to take art classes during the school day?
3. Did you face any challenges introducing AIA to the elementary school? Did parents and teachers have questions about it?

4. What do you think AIA provides to students?
5. Do you think AIA reaches every student? Are there any students who haven't benefited from AIA?
6. Do you think AIA affects children in their academic classes?
7. Do students need to miss their regular classes to attend AIA classes?
8. Do you think AIA helps children with behavioral difficulties?
9. Do you know if the students have had experiences with the arts prior to AIA?
10. What do you think will help make AIA successful at Holt?
11. Has AIA provided an outlet for students?
12. Do you think AIA brings students closer together?
13. Have you seen children helping one another in their AIA classes?
14. Do you think classroom teachers incorporated any of the AIA techniques into their classes?

## **Post-Performance Discussion 2**

### **Self-Assessment of Techniques**

Although I didn't have a theoretical lens at the start of my research, after doing a literature review of several different frameworks that I could possibly use for my research, I started "trying on" different theories. In addition to the preparation of reading various articles about dance education, I began working for AIA a year before I started my research. As a teacher in the program, I have gained insider status into this organization. I've become friendly with the other dance teachers and I've learned how the organization operates with the local schools it serves. I've been able to talk to the classroom teachers and some of the students I teach about their experiences with AIA on an informal level. Since I've invested a year of my time in the program, I feel as if I've been able to acclimate myself with the program.

This project has helped me to understand the importance of collaborative work with my participants. Although this is a lengthy process, I think I've set a ground work for trusting and comfortable relationships with my participants. It is my hope that I share with them some of my observations and impressions I've documented about the program so that they can respond to what I've written. Qualitative research is personal and therefore it is never neutral, despite how hard we try to remain objective.

As I think back to my qualitative research, one of my strengths is that I've learned to refrain from passing quick judgment on the situation I am observing. This is a responsibility and a sensitivity I must have as a researcher. I recognize that I am in a

position of power when I make observations or conduct interviews, and my consultants may feel threatened, or that they may not be able to tell me the full story. Thinking about the power dynamics in a situation will be beneficial to the thoroughness of my work. I think it is also important to be able to talk to my consultants in a way that does not use a lot of jargon, or theories that are specific to educational research.

I think it is also important to give consultants multiple methods to express themselves. One way that I do this is by giving the interview I've transcribed to the interviewee and letting them make corrections to what they've said. I've found that the consultants feel much happier after they've been able to adjust their words to be a more accurate depiction of themselves.

In Elizabeth Becker's chapter, "Hey That's Me in That Ethnography!" in "Postcritical Ethnography: Reinscribing Critique," she felt that she could not be completely open with the researcher who had come into her school because of the power dynamics in the school and also because she didn't have the discourse to express her feelings with the researcher. This chapter demonstrates that consultants may feel as if they can't relate to the person conducting the research, which could cause a hindrance to an understanding of the situation. I think a strength I bring to the table when conducting research is that I know how to convey that I am an honest and empathetic person and as a result people consider me approachable and non-threatening.

Reflecting on the work I've conducted for this study, I think I've been able to examine the program from multiple perspectives. Although I would have liked to interview the classroom teachers and some of the students, I've considered the voices of

the AIA teachers and the two principals. If I had more time, I would have interviewed more of the players involved with the program.

## **Encore**

Similar to choreography, qualitative research can take on many different shapes and forms. There is not a set way for conducting research nor is there a certain way to choreograph. I am relatively new to both researching and choreographing and I am still figuring out which style fits my needs and interests in the most productive and beneficial way.

After completing this research project, it occurred to me that I tend to gather as much information and detail about a certain topic before I can begin to analyze and interpret any meaning from the data. In choreography as well, I like to choreograph as much movement as I can possibly create before I start to edit and crop sections. Both processes have taught me the importance of finding the main points and highlighting them. If I provide too much information, the main points tend to get lost in the crowd.

I think my ability to generate too much material can be beneficial in some respects because it gives me a lot of material to play around with. On the other hand, the task of editing and flushing out the main points can seem daunting.

Thinking about my paper in the same way as my choreography has helped me to realize that the way I order my sections will impact the meaning of the piece as a whole. I've come to the understanding that my work will be interpreted differently by each audience member depending on choices I make in the work. This power I have to influence how someone understands my writing or my choreography is something to keep in mind.



Another important lesson I've learned from thinking about my paper as choreography is the importance of transitions. Transitions connect one idea to the next and are important for a reader's understanding of the work as a whole. Transitions can be smooth and seamless, without the reader or the audience member even realizing that a new section has started. They can also be definite and abrupt, making clear distinctions between sections. The writer and the choreographer have important choices to make in term of transitioning from one idea to the next.

The concept of musical phrasing is another choreographic motif that fits in with how I've written this paper as well as the tempo of the piece. How fast or slow a dance is performed will change the meaning of the dance. If a dance is presented with upbeat music, it is typically understood as a happy, uplifting dance. If a dance is presented with slower, more mellow music, the dance take on a different meaning. This musical phrasing is similar to how I presented *Arts in Action* in juxtaposition to the devastation of states cutting arts funding across the country. By framing the program in such contrast, I was able to create more drama as well as point out the uniqueness of the program.

The choreographed dance that I created from some of the ideas of my thesis has helped me to fully realize the similarities between how I choreograph and how I conduct qualitative research. When I began choreographing that dance, it wasn't my intention for the dance to relate to my thesis. As the movement unfolded however, I could see some of the motifs appearing in the dance. For a casual onlooker, it would be almost impossible to realize how the dance relates to my thesis, so it is my job to highlight which aspects of the choreography relate to students learning through observation, for example. In order to bring this point home, I choreographed one part in the dance where two of the dancers

sit down on the stage and watch two other dancers perform the steps. After these dancers finish, the two that were watching stand up and perform the same steps.

The idea that research is a process is one of the main similarities I see between the two fields. For me, my choreography is never completely finished. There is always something that could be refined or tweaked in a different way or the timing could be changed to create a different effect. In addition, I have the sense that like choreography, with research I can build off of this paper and take it in a new direction in the future. I can quote a section of this paper in a new paper I've written as a way to provide background information or to solidify a point I am trying to make.

This paper has helped me both as a researcher and a choreographer to think about my process for creating and presenting art. In the case of this paper, I presented an arts program in an artful way. I hope my readers will have learned that the arts can be used in a multitude of ways to present concepts and themes. Presenting my thesis as an artful piece will hopefully attract a wide array of people to read my paper and learn something they didn't know before about the importance of the arts.

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