

**Passion in Education:
The Performing Arts and
Social and Emotional Learning**

A written creative work submitted to the faculty of

In fulfillment of
The requirements for
The degree

Master of Education

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that *Passion in Education: The Performing Arts and Social and Emotional Learning* meets the criteria for approval of a project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree: **Master of Education**

Professor of Education

Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing focus on the social and emotional needs of students in schools. There have been many unsuccessful efforts to reform schools. Social and emotional learning (SEL) has been a missing piece of these efforts (Elias, 1997). Proponents of SEL in schools recognize that the performing arts form a natural link with social and emotional skills (Elias, 1997). In an era focused on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), performing arts activities are not recognized for the potential impact those experiences can have on students (Roberts, 2007). The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of being involved in a musical theatre production on students' social and emotional learning. An in-depth look at the environment that was created during the course of the production and how that environment contributed to an atmosphere that supported positive growth in students' SEL was undertaken. Seven participants were involved in a three-month process of rehearsals and performances for a production of the musical *Annie*. Rehearsal observations, student interviews, and teacher questionnaires were used to gather qualitative data about the production experience. Analysis of the data led to an understanding of the growth experienced by the participants in the following areas of SEL: Self Awareness; Social Awareness; Responsible Decision Making; Self-Management; and Relationship Management. Further analysis of the data resulted in the identification of three key components of the production environment that allowed for positive social and emotional growth. The production was a whole person undertaking; there were individual opportunities for success; and it involved active participation in a caring community. I certify that the Abstract above is a correct representation of the content of this written work.

Name and Title of Faculty Advisor

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Passion in Education

The Performing Arts and Social and Emotional Learning

The struggles of American schools are well known. Test scores are dismal, graduation rates are low, college professors say students are not prepared for college, and employers complain graduates are ill prepared for work (Wagner, 2008). In *The Global Achievement Gap* (2008), Tony Wagner writes that American schools do very well the things they were designed to do. However, Wagner argued, the design itself is outdated. Traditional schooling has become obsolete (Wagner, 2008).

Schools today do the same things schools did thirty, even fifty, years ago (Wagner, 2008). Schools served their purpose by producing graduates who had learned the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Teachers taught and students received information. Paulo Freire (1970) called this “banking education,” students receiving pre-selected knowledge from the all-knowing teacher. This traditional style of education is what many people still experience throughout their years of schooling. Recent high school graduates describe a very traditional school experience (Wagner, 2008). In the past 10 years, though, there has been an unacceptably high rate of violence, bullying, dropout, depression, fear, hopelessness, and other negative behaviors among students (McCombs, 2004). The current system is not meeting the needs of today’s students and communities.

The American government knows that schools are not producing the types of students that are going to successfully lead America into the twenty-first century (Postman, 1995). As a consequence, education legislation, in particular the No Child Left Behind Act, may be seen as well intentioned, but over the past 10 years has only served to make a big problem worse by increasing our reliance on standardized testing (Ohanian, 1999). According to Ohanian (1999), the standardization taking place in America's schools will not raise test scores or lower dropout

rates. Ohanian (1999) further notes that the uniformitarian curriculum espoused by standards supporters will end up causing the dropout rate to skyrocket. Standards supporters talk about reaching all students, but what is really offered with lists and tables is a "classroom universe of narrow isolationism" (Ohanian, 1999, p. 13). When a school's success or failure is dependent upon its scores on a standardized test, it is no wonder that the school spends most of its time and money teaching students how to do well on that test. In this system based on the regurgitation of information, imagination is alienated (McCleary, 1993).

Performing Arts in a Test Prep Curriculum

As the American government has put an emphasis on test scores and the curriculum has become narrowed, schools around the country offer what can be described as a test prep curriculum (Wagner, 2008). In this test prep curriculum, the arts components are the first thing to "crash to the cutting room floor" (Davis, 2008, p.1). The arts are an important and even integral aspect of society and culture. Generations of people that have inhabited Earth have relied on the arts to communicate their history, ideals, hopes, and promises to younger generations and others. Polls and surveys reveal that parents value the arts as an important part of education (Davis, 2008). Research abounds on the positive impact that the arts have on teaching and learning in other subject areas (Arts Education Partnership, 2004). However, when an arts curriculum is packaged as a way to make improvements in other areas, and is not seen as valuable for what only the arts can teach, the arts are expendable (Davis, 2008).

Schools that do not teach the arts have varied reasons, which include:

- students who have real talent do not need arts instruction;
- arts achievement cannot be measured or tested;
- there is no time to teach the arts;

- the arts cost too much;
- the arts will survive in the community even if eliminated in schools (Davis, 2008).

The arts are at the outer rim of what is taught. The arts are not important, the standards are. In American schools individuality is not appreciated, uniformity is expected (Eisner, 2002). However, if American schools do not begin to value the arts for the powerful learning that arises because of what only the arts can offer, America will have little hope for a more humane future (Davis, 2008). A culture inhabited by people whose imagination has been impoverished and numbed has a static future. In such a culture there is little change because there is little sense of possibility (Eisner, 2002). The arts have the power to help people imagine and create new possibilities, to extend beyond the predicted.

The Arts and Social and Emotional Learning - Promoting Skills Needed Today

Today's students need new skills to prepare them for college, career, and citizenship in the twenty-first century (Wagner, 2008). According to Wager (2008), it is no longer enough to learn the three R's. Today's students must be able to think critically and problem solve. Additionally, they need to have agility, curiosity, imagination, effective oral and written communication skills, and the ability to collaborate as part of a team. If schools can succeed in producing individuals who have these new skills, a young generation with a renewed responsibility for the care of our world will be created (Wagner, 2008). In this struggle for a better tomorrow the arts play a central role in promoting a curriculum that is focused on social development as well as academic development (Fowler, 1996). There is an emphasis in our schools on the natural sciences and math, with some believing those subjects to be more important than the arts. But, the emphasis on science does not induce insights into essential issues like death, spirituality, ways of living, and the meaning of work and life (Csikszentmihalyi

& Schiefele, 1992). In the arts, decisions are made because they are meaningful (Reimer, 1992). The arts provide an opportunity for passionate undertakings that are significant and intrinsically rewarding.

Sir Ken Robinson (2009) writes that the very future of our communities hinges on people discovering their elements, the things they are passionate about. Our education system has contributed to a generation of people "who don't know who they really are" (2009, p. xi). If children are to grow up and live successful, creative, passionate, responsible, and meaningful lives, it is essential they be exposed to, encouraged, and supported in the areas they love. In a testing-focused, standardized curriculum many students are not, as Robinson would say, in their "element." An education that ignores student interest and passion is largely unsuccessful (Wagner, 2008).

Purpose and Question

Elliot Eisner (2002) says there is an enormous amount of research that must still be conducted in arts education. One of the most important areas is the study of the environment and social dimensions of arts education experiences (Eisner, 2002).

The purpose of this research study was to qualitatively examine the impact of a performing arts experience on students' lives. The following question was the driving force of this study: What is the impact of being involved in a musical theatre production on students' social and emotional learning?

In this study social and emotional learning is defined as the process and skills through which we "learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, become ethically and responsible, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviors" (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2004, pp. 4). The key competencies of SEL are Self

Awareness, Social Awareness, Responsible Decision Making, Self-Management, and Relationship Management (Zins et al., 2004).

The sub-questions below were used as guideposts to aid in the gathering of data and the development of interview and questionnaire questions.

Sub-questions

- How does participation in a musical theatre production impact students' social skills?
- How does participation in a musical theatre production impact students' self-awareness and self-confidence?
- What impact do the director, music director, and children's choir director see on students' social and emotional learning?
- What are the components of the musical theatre production environment that support positive student socialization?

Educational leaders and policy makers need to recognize that there is a population of students who are passionate about the performing arts. These students should participate in performing arts experiences as part of their basic education. They deserve the opportunity to discover, learn, and reach beyond their potential in an area that celebrates culture and humanity.

Literature Review

This investigation studied the impact of musical theatre on students' social and emotional learning (SEL). The purpose of this literature review is to define SEL and discuss the current role that SEL plays in education. Following that is a discussion of the performing arts, leading into a discussion of research that has been conducted in arts education and musical theatre. This review is organized in the following sections: (a) social and emotional learning, (b) the role of SEL in education, (c) SEL in a caring community, (d) the performing arts as experience, and (e) arts in education research.

Social and Emotional Learning

This study examined the concept of social and emotional learning (SEL). According to Cohen (1999), social and emotional competencies include self-reflective capacities as well as the ability to recognize what others are thinking and feeling. The key SEL competencies are:

- Self Awareness - self identity, self-efficacy, recognizing strengths, identifying emotions
- Social Awareness - empathy, perspective taking, appreciating diversity, respect
- Responsible Decision Making - problem solving, reflecting, responsibility
- Self-Management - impulse control and stress management, discipline, organization
- Relationship Management - communication, relationship building, working cooperatively

(Zins et al., 2004)

The SEL competencies are best taught in an environment in which people are respected and valued. In that environment students are members of a caring community where they can freely express themselves and make mistakes. The students feel a deep sense of belonging, personal fulfillment, and responsibility (Elias, 1997). This supportive environment affirms students in their efforts to "initiate, ask questions, venture opinions, make mistakes, reflect on

experience, take on new subjects, and do all the risk-taking that learning entails" (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, 2004, p. 190).

Successful support and growth in the SEL competencies are essential for success in life. Through SEL people learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, develop positive relationships, and behave ethically and responsibly (Zins, et al., 2004). It is impossible to achieve important life tasks without SEL skills (Elias et al., 1997).

The Role of SEL in Education

Brain studies have shown that learning that takes place throughout life is inextricably linked to social and emotional situations (Elias et al., 1997). Emotion drives many functions of our brain including memory, learning, and attention. Meaningful, sustained learning is a "whole person phenomenon" (McCombs, 2004). Noted theorists have found clear links between affect, cognition, and behavior. Freud, Dewey, and Bandura supported the notion that "one's ability to regulate strong emotions and to have self-awareness" will have a direct impact on social and academic learning (Greenberg, Kusche, & Riggs, 2004, p. 171). In 1990 a task force appointed by the American Psychological Association conducted a review of school design and reform. The task force created a framework for school design consisting of fourteen principles. Of those fourteen principles, components of SEL are clearly identified in the following:

Principle 7: Motivational and Emotional Influences on Learning: What and how much is learned is influenced by the learner's motivation. Motivation to learn, in turn, is influenced by the individual's emotional states, beliefs, interests, goals, and habits of thinking.

Principle 8: Intrinsic Motivation to Learn: The learner's creativity, higher order thinking and natural curiosity all contribute to motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is

stimulated by tasks of optimal novelty and difficulty, relevant to personal interests and providing for personal choice and control.

Principle 11: Social Influences on Learning: Learning is influenced by social interactions, interpersonal relations, and communication with others (McCombs, 2004).

Even with the identification of SEL competencies as key components of education by the American Psychological Association, recent efforts to improve American public education have, for a large part, ignored the importance of SEL (Elias et al., 1997). Most American schools emphasize production and control rather than diversity and creativity (Eisner, 2002). This industrial enculturation of our schools does not place an importance on social learning. In most educational settings, social skills are secondary to the meeting of academic standards (Walberg, Wang, Weisberg, & Zins 2004). The ultimate goal in schools has become how well students perform on high stakes tests. Schools are thus hesitant to engage in activities for which they "cannot predict clear, discernable benefits to students academic progress as reflected in their test scores" (Zins et al., 2004, p. 5). There is too much emphasis on punitive consequences for students, teachers, administrators, and schools when test scores are not what they should be. This inhibitive environment does not encourage schools to spend money on SEL initiatives (McCombs, 2007). For the schools that have initiated SEL programs there have been successes and failures. Unsuccessful efforts have been the result of SEL programs that were not integrated into the curriculum. They have been short-term, isolated add-ons to the curriculum (Zins et al., 2004).

In many cases, though, highly effective schools that have successfully integrated SEL programs have proven the important role that SEL has to play in the education of young people

(Elias et al., 1997). Schools that have made a purposeful effort to focus on the social as well as academic aspects of schooling have seen better behavior from their students as well as a rise in academic achievement (Walberg et al, 2004). Johnson and Johnson (2004) found that students who worked cooperatively and were supported in their social and emotional growth tended to be more involved in activities and tasks and attached greater importance to success. Students who lacked key SEL competencies tended to feel afraid, helpless, isolated, and inadequate (Johnson & Johnson, 2004).

School leaders and educators need to acknowledge that learning is a social process and schooling is a social experience (Walberg et al., 2004). The education community must recognize that "knowledge of ourselves and others, as well as the capacity to use this knowledge to solve problems creatively provides an essential foundation for both academic learning and the capacity to become an active, constructive citizen" (Cohen, 1999, p. 3). Schools need to overcome the push towards uniformity and develop a connectionist pedagogy (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997). Goodman and Kuzmic (1997) described that in a connectionist classroom social bonding is the key to a value-laden curriculum that encourages compassion, civic responsibility, and commitment.

SEL in a Caring Community

Erikson's stages of psychosocial development provide a glimpse into the important social and emotional skills that are learned in the phases of childhood. From learning how to read social cues and verbal/nonverbal communications; establishing positive relationships; and constructing a personal identity; to using social and emotional skills to handle complex life situations, Erikson's stages clearly articulate the kinds of SEL competencies that should be learned at each age level (Elias, et al., 1997). When designing and implementing SEL programs,

researchers have found that the creation of a caring community is essential (Schaps et al., 2004).

A caring community of learners has:

Caring and supportive relationships between adults and peers

Varied and frequent experiences of accomplishment and contribution

Opportunities for self assessment and reflection

Active participation in the intellectual and social life of the community

Respect for individual differences and valuing of diversity

A meaningful engaging and enjoyable curriculum

A balance between active learning and direct instruction

A balance between individual and collaborative learning

Salient community values of caring, justice, responsibility, and learning

(Schaps et al., 2004, p. 193)

In this type of community, where SEL competencies can be learned, there is a common purpose and set of ideals shared by all members of the community. Essential pieces of an SEL environment include a free and open interaction between adults and students; high standards of behavior and achievement; positive learning experiences that support self esteem and self efficacy (Elias et al., 2004); opportunities for success; a sense of safety and belonging; ownership resulting from choice (Zins et al., 2004); the practicing of interpersonal effectiveness; and opportunities for self-actualization (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). In a caring community each member feels valued and supported.

The Performing Arts as Experience

The arts as a social experience. Just as education is recognized as a social experience, so are the performing arts. The performing arts have the potential to provide people with an

experience that helps them feel alive (Eisner, 2002). Eisner (2002) expounded that the arts create meaningful experiences. "We live in an empirical environment. We experience it. Senses are our first avenue to consciousness" (p. 1). The arts provide an experience that personally affects one's life through a creative process; the focus is not fully on the product but also on the process (Dewey, 1980). It is a process that can help establish contact with others, share a culture, and expand our minds (Eisner, 2002). Arts experiences make it possible to engage young people in the building of meaningful relationships through "shared interests, a sense of belonging, and taking equal part in something that is significant and of quality" (Chambers, 2011, p. 35).

The arts as self-awareness. Arts experiences give enormous potential for individual growth and reflection (Eisner, 2002). The context of imagination provides a safety net for experiment, rehearsal, and expansion. In the creative process that is the arts, individuals must go through steps that are highly self-reflective (Eisner, 2002). Beginning with an idea, seeing that it comes to fruition, and then working on it so that it achieves a state of quality requires an understanding of a vision and the resilience to push oneself until the vision is achieved (Eisner, 2002). In the creative process, artists have opportunities to express their feelings, engage in hard work, succeed in the face of challenges, engage in ongoing reflection, and achieve personal autonomy (Davis, 2008). Participation in arts education is, at its core, about the development of artistic skills. The development of artistic skills has the power to increase confidence and self-esteem, and empower people by giving them a voice (Verrant, 2011; Wood, 2011).

The arts as social awareness. Growing beyond the self-awakening experiences that the arts can create, the arts allow people to look at the whole of an undertaking (Ross, 2005). The group work involved in the performing arts leads to the development of mindful understanding

and the quelling of differences (Ross, 2005). The arts create satisfying and expressive relationships as people work together to create something of high quality (Eisner, 2002). Eisner (2002) observed that sharing, guiding, connecting, and respectfully interacting are natural occurrences in the arts. In the creating and sharing of artistic work there is positive communication with others (Eisner, 2002). The arts are a celebration of diversity that help people discover connections and distinctions from others. Those connections demand social responsibility and caring for others (Fowler, 1996; Davis, 2008). The human connection that is at the core of the creative process leads to meaningful human understanding. The arts help ask and answer the question "How can I matter and make a difference in the world around me?" (Davis, 2008, p.5).

The unique experience of musical theatre. Musical theatre provides an arts experience in which self-awareness and social awareness can thrive. Integrating music, drama, and dance; the combination that is musical theatre creates a unique interdisciplinary arts experience (Roberts, 2007). In musical theatre "music can instantly create an atmosphere, set a mood or convey a spirit that would otherwise require a great many words to do" (Lehman, 1995, p. 38).

With origins in a multicultural American society, musical theatre has the potential to change people's lives (Lerner, 1986). The musical theatre experience has the power to promote a feeling of shared community and help combat against personal isolation and fear by mirroring or challenging deeply held societal beliefs (Jones, 2003). It is a global art form that has attracted cultures from all over the world (Loney, 1984).

Arts in Education Research

There is pressure in schools today to serve corporate and commercial needs (Fowler, 1996). This pressure has created a core of subjects that is important above all others. The arts

are thus seen as expendable. Ironically, the best schools in our society are the ones with the best arts programs (Fowler, 1996). Most often than not, the schools that have strong arts programs are charter, pilot, or private schools (Davis, 2008). Many students are not exposed to the arts in school, but successful schools have shown that the arts are essential to the education of compassionate, thoughtful, and responsible human beings (Davis, 2008). What follows is a look at some of the research that has been done in the performing arts and education.

The performing arts and cognitive ability. A sizeable amount of research has been done to establish a connection between the arts and cognitive development (Arts Education, 2004). Brinda (2008) found that theatre experiences led to an increase in grades, willingness to participate, and joy of reading literature in adults. Burton (2000) found that students in arts-rich schools scored higher on assessments of academic self-concept (Burton, Horowitz, Abeles, 2000). Kornfeld and Leydon (2005) set out to prove that drama is not "frill" (p. 230). In a study on history, literature, and drama, Kornfeld and Leydon (2005) found that drama engaged students, enhanced their understanding of literature and history, helped integrate content areas, and allowed students to connect information which may otherwise have been unrelated to their lives. The use of theatre created an authentic experience that the students were excited about, thus helping them to better learn and remember history (Kornfeld & Leydon, 2005). Otten, Stigler, and Woodward (2004) discovered a rewarding relationship between drama and history. The students not only displayed improved test scores, but also enjoyed the theatre activities more than traditional learning experiences they had previously experienced in social studies (Otten, Stigler, & Woodward, 2004).

The performing arts and social development. There has been a substantial amount of research done on the connection between the arts and social development (Arts Education,

2004). Wolf (1999) found that by creating an opera, students were able to engage in collaborative problem solving. During the creation of the opera students made constructive critiques and revised their ideas to link their comments to a common theme. As time went on the students became "increasingly expert at taking turns, asking questions, and...actively participating in the coherent work towards quality" (Wolf, 1999, p. 94). Brouillette (2010) found that arts activities fostered social and emotional understanding thus enabling children to better coordinate their own desires and needs with others, which resulted in group collaboration. McLennan (2008) studied the benefits of using sociodrama to promote caring relationships among elementary students. Through the use of sociodrama (theatre activities that are directly related to social issues) she saw the power of drama to transform classrooms from repressive places of standardization and uniformity to places that nurture and celebrate individuals, preparing them "for a lifetime of learning and existing cooperatively in a complex society" (McLennan, 2008, p.456). In a study on the intrinsic rewards of schooling, Csikszentmihalyi and Schiefele (1992) discovered that students involved in arts activities found more intrinsic rewards in their experiences than students involved in math and science. The researchers concluded that the arts experiences were of higher quality, succeeding in posing high challenges and requiring a high level of skill. This resulted in higher levels of engagement, self-satisfaction, and a stronger sense of meaning (Csikszentmihalyi & Schiefele, 1992).

In a systematic review of 14 studies Daykin, Evans, Salmon, McEachran, and Brain (2008) found that performing arts experiences supported improvements in the social skills and interactions of young people. Several of the studies examined described ways in which performing arts experiences impacted the positive development of social skills and self-

confidence. The studies further suggested that the performing arts provided an opportunity to enhance peer interaction and co-operation (Daykin, Evans, Salmon, McEachran, & Brain, 2008).

Musical theatre research. A small number of studies have been conducted that provide a deep description of the involvement of students in musical theatre productions (Roberts, 2007). Pitts (2007) studied the participation of high school students in a school production of the musical *Anything Goes*. The students involved in her study showed clear growth in music skills, and described the environment during the production as one of enjoyment and friendship. The students felt they were a part of something that was greater than their individual contribution (Pitts, 2007). Gribitz found that inner city high school students involved in a musical theatre production had more positive attitudes towards school and school climate. This positive attitude was a result of bonds formed between the faculty and students, mutual respect, collective problem solving, group responsibility, and the feelings of joy and elation in performing (as cited in Davey, 2010). In 2007, Larson and Brown studied the involvement of adolescents in a high school production of *Les Miserable*. They found that the unique culture of the musical theatre setting led to an emotionally positive and safe environment. This safe environment provided the youth with opportunities for perspective taking and positive emotional development (Larson & Brown, 2007).

Roberts (2007) examined the participation of fifth graders in a musical theatre production and found that the experience expanded the students' knowledge of musical theatre, sharpened students' higher level thinking skills, and created opportunities for students to engage in problem solving. Corby found a positive association between participation in a musical theatre production and motivation and academic achievement in high school students (as cited in Roberts, 2007). Ogden (2008) investigated the lifelong impact of involvement in musical theatre

productions during elementary school. Participants in Ogden's study described how some of their most meaningful experiences in elementary school included involvement in musical theatre productions. Years later, it was the performing arts memories that were cherished even though the arts may not have been valued by the school. Ogden (2008) suggests that musical theatre experiences should be a core part of every elementary school's curriculum.

Needed research in arts education. Although a sizable amount of work has been done in regards to the study of the academic and social aspects of arts education, there is still much research that needs to be conducted (Eisner, 2002; Arts Education Partnership, 2004). Gardner (1990) argues that we know more about learning in the sciences because far more research has been conducted in that area. Eisner (2002) believes that arts education researchers have the power to challenge many commonly held beliefs about educational research. According to Eisner (2002), the field needs research studies that ask important questions about what arts teachers do and the kinds of activities students are engaged in. He believes that arts educators have much to share and report about the social organization and design of the creative educational environment that they help to create with their students (Eisner, 2002). There is a clear need for well-reported research in arts education (Daykin et al., 2008).

Summary

The performing arts when practiced in educational environments provide a myriad of positive outcomes. Not only are the arts instrumental in bringing about academic improvement, they are beneficial to the social development of children. With the current focus in American schools on standardization and uniformity the arts have been on the cutting block. The performing arts are not seen as part of the core curriculum. With the focus on test scores and academic standards, social and emotional skills have taken a secondary role in our schools.

Nonetheless, a safe and positive social environment is an essential aspect of education. Schools need to start attending to the social and emotional needs of the students they serve. The performing arts provide a context in which to teach and promote social and emotional learning skills. Musical theatre, in particular, provides a unique mixing of dance, drama, and music as well as the opportunity to engage in the process of putting on a production. This combination provides the ideal creative atmosphere to engage students in a positive social experience.

Methodology

The research study was a collective case study, or multiple case design, of seven cases. The primary question of this study was: What is the impact of being involved in a musical theatre production on students' social and emotional learning?

The driving force of this study was the aforementioned question. As mentioned in the introduction, the sub-questions below acted as guideposts to aid in the gathering of data and the development of questionnaires and interview questions.

Sub-questions

- How does participation in a musical theatre production impact students' social skills?
- How does participation in a musical theatre production impact students' self-awareness and self-confidence?
- What impact do the director, music director, and children's choir director see on students' social and emotional learning?
- What are the components of the musical theatre production environment that support positive student socialization?

Participants

The participants in this research study were students at a private school in Hawai'i. The Hawaiian culture, along with learning in the visual and performing arts, was a part of each student's core education. The school was comprised of students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Six of the students that participated in the study were female and one student was male. Two of the students were in third grade, one of the students was in sixth grade, and the remaining four students were in their senior year of high school. The only male participant was a senior. All seven students were involved in the school's musical production of

Annie! The students were selected based on their involvement in the production. Each of the participants played a main character in the production and devoted approximately six to ten hours each week to rehearsals. The researcher choreographed the production.

Instruments and Materials

This case study, like many case studies, relied on qualitative research (Christensen and Johnson, 2008). This investigation examined in detail the personal experiences of seven students. The key sources of data over the course of the research process were interviews conducted with the students, observations of the students during the production process, and questionnaires given to the director, music director, and children's choir director. The student interview questions and teacher questionnaire were developed by the researcher based on the key competencies of social and emotional learning described previously in the Literature Review of this paper. A sample of the instrument is contained in Appendix A.

The student interview questions were designed to obtain information in three different areas: 1) Background information on the student including details about previous experience in the performing arts. 2) Information about their participation in *Annie* including details about favorite aspects, challenges, and social aspects of the production. 3) A reflection of the experience including details about how others responded to the show, important lessons learned, and feelings about involvement in future productions.

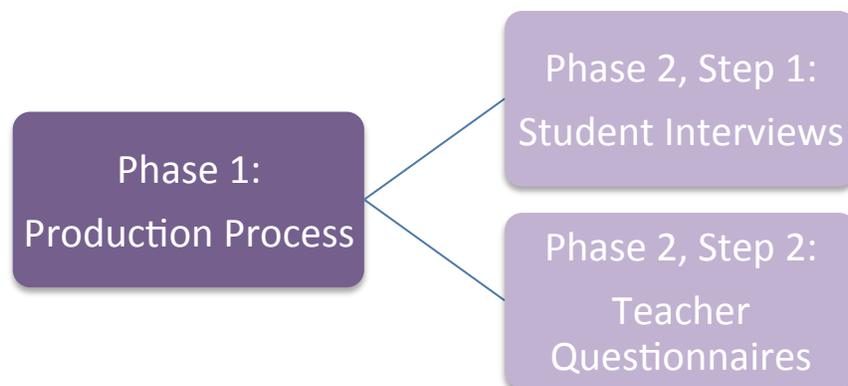
The teacher questionnaire was designed by the researcher to gather information from the director, music director, and children's choir director regarding their opinion of how the production impacted students' social and emotional learning. The teacher questionnaire solicited responses on the ways in which involvement in the production impacted students' relationship building, self-management, and self-awareness skills.

Participation by the researcher in the production process provided an essential piece in the gathering of research. The researcher studied production experiences and how those experiences contributed to an environment that supported social and emotional learning. The researcher recorded details about how the director, music director, and children's choir director engaged students in the rehearsal and performance process. Student behavior and notable events were recorded through anecdotal notes.

Procedures

Participation in the production process, student interviews, and teacher questionnaires provided the triangulation of methods and data that research methodologists advocate (Christensen and Johnson, 2008). The first phase in the research procedure was the completion of the production process. Phase two was the administration of the student interviews and teacher questionnaires (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Procedures



Phase 1: production process. Phase 1 of the procedures, the production process was divided into three production phases. Notes were recorded and saved on the researcher's password protected laptop. The notes were then used to create a summary of the main activities

of each of the three phases of the production process. Rehearsals took place three times a week for the first four weeks of the production. During the last two weeks of the production rehearsals were conducted five times a week. Rehearsal times varied with rehearsals lasting from one to four hours. These phases are described below.

Production phase one. The first phase of the production process consisted of the first two weeks of rehearsals. During this phase there was concerted effort on the part of the director to create an environment of trust. This was accomplished by a variety of engaging and stimulating theatre activities that allowed the students to interact with and rely on each other. The high school students were asked to guide the younger students through a number of the activities. This allowed the younger students to get to know the older students and helped all cast members develop positive relationships. Some of these activities were focused on character development while others were done with the purpose of having students work together as a team. During these rehearsals the younger students were especially attentive to the older students. They recognized that the older students were teaching them something important and respected their efforts. Another essential component of these activities was the opportunity for students to take turns leading and following. This helped to create an atmosphere in which one felt safe doing new things, learning from others, helping others, and guiding others.

During phase one cast members were getting to know each other and the entire ensemble realized their responsibility to the rest of the cast. Emphasis during rehearsals was placed on the important role of the individual in doing their best job to contribute to the success of the entire production, which would ultimately result in a successful show. As the students became more comfortable with each other, they were able to experiment more with characterization and creativity, knowing they were in a place that would positively support their risk-taking.

Rehearsal phase two. Phase two of the rehearsal process was a period in which students began to rehearse with the director, music director, children's choir director, and choreographer the various scenes and musical numbers in the production. These rehearsals often consisted of small groups of students working closely together to learn and rehearse a certain part of the musical.

During phase two rehearsals there was a sense of purpose. Expectations were clearly defined. It was a time of learning and exploration. There was much laughter and joy in an atmosphere of safe risk-taking. Students tried new things, supported each other, and knew that it was acceptable to make mistakes. Throughout this phase students devoted a significant amount of time outside of rehearsals to memorizing lines and practicing their singing, acting, and choreography. This individual commitment to the production resulted in rehearsals that allowed students to continuously improve as they built upon what each of them had done. Individual contributions came together to create quality contributions.

An important component to the success of the production that was clearly evident in phase two was the support of the director, music director, children's choir director, and choreographer. There was a positive relationship between the adults and students that were involved in the production. Both adults and students had the same goal: an excellent production. The adults trusted that the students were trying their best, working hard, and pushing themselves. The students trusted the adults to support them, work with them, and help them grow. During the rehearsals in phase two students learned their blocking, songs, choreography, and improved their characterization. The director continued to emphasize the importance of everyone's commitment to the production through time and energy.

During this phase a significant amount of time was spent on practicing. Scenes, songs, and dance numbers were rehearsed over and over. There was much review and group support so that everyone learned their part and was able to do their best job. It became more and more obvious that the individuals who were doing their best were contributing the most to the ensemble. Individual accomplishments and involvement were essential to the success of the group.

Phase two was a time in which students were provided a basic set of instructions for their parts in the show but were encouraged to take what they were given and reach for the next level. There was intense preparation, practice, and perfecting of different components of the production.

Rehearsal phase three. During phase three of the production the students were piecing the show together to get ready for the performances. The various small groups that had been working on different scenes were brought together as the show began to take form. For some students it was the first time they saw other parts of the show. As students were able to sit and watch the show come together they were an audience as well as performers. During one such rehearsal the orphans performed the number *It's a Hard Knock Life* in front of the rest of the cast for the first time. When the number was finished the rest of the cast, which consisted of elementary, middle, and high school students, broke out in applause and cheering. It was a sign of appreciation and recognition for the hard work that the orphans had done. When the orphans heard the applause they were quite surprised and began looking around, smiling. The faces of the orphans showed a sense of pride and self-fulfillment. The numerous rehearsals and hard work they had been spent on the number was worth it. The feeling of accomplishment on their

faces was incredibly fulfilling for the director, music director, children's choir director, and choreographer.

Phase three of the process was a time when everyone in the cast had a sense of urgency to do their best to pull the production together. The positive environment continued and the excitement began to rise as the cast prepared for the opening performance of the show. During this time, when not on stage, actors spent time rehearsing their parts with each other. There was a clear purpose for these rehearsals and each individual in the cast was expected to contribute their best for the success of the show. The adults continued to support and challenge the students to improve their performance.

As Act I and Act II were rehearsed, weak points in the show became apparent. The actors involved in these scenes recognized the work that needed to be done and because of the ensemble feeling of trust that had been established throughout the course of the production process, they realized that the rest of the cast was relying on them to come through with their contribution and to make it one of quality. As the technical elements of costumes, lighting, sets, props, and make-up were added the excitement continued to rise. The orchestra arrived for the last dress rehearsals as the cast put everything together in preparation for the opening of the show.

Throughout each phase of the production process, rehearsals began and ended with a cast meeting. Important notes were given to the cast members and technical crew. As issues arose cast members volunteered to help one another solve the problems.

As the opening of the show drew near the actors' excitement grew. They looked forward to having an audience. The air of camaraderie grew stronger. When opening night arrived it was the ultimate culminating experience. Everyone involved in the production had worked hard. In

the enthusiastic response of the audience, there was acknowledgment and appreciation of all the hard work that had been done. There was individual recognition, there was group recognition, and there was a mutual feeling of having accomplished something truly worthwhile, purposeful, and significant.

Involvement in the production process as an observer/choreographer allowed the researcher an inside look at the many different components that went into putting on the production. The process began with an initial setting of a trusting environment, led to the fulfillment of individual responsibilities, and ultimately resulted in whole group success. The sense of purpose, the amount of trust, and the dedicated group of individuals that worked together as an ensemble contributed to the creation of an inspiring learning environment and ultimately a successful production.

Phase 2, step 1: student interviews. The student interviews were conducted with each of the seven participants at the end of the production. After each interview was conducted the data was organized. Each interview was audio taped. Audio recording the interviews allowed the researcher to interact with the words of the participants as fully and accurately as possible (Seidman, 1991). Audio files were saved on the researcher's password protected laptop. The interview questions served as a guide to steer the interview. The interviewees often elaborated and discussed experiences that were not directly prompted by a question from the researcher.

The purpose of the interviews was to gather in depth information about the participants' thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and motivations; to understand the experience of these students and the meaning they made of that experience (Seidman, 1991). The interviews provided a deeply personal view of the students' experiences (Christenson and Johnson, 2008).

The in-depth, phenomenological approach to interviewing was used by the researcher. In this approach open-ended questions were used to allow the participant to reflect on and reconstruct their experiences (Seidman, 1991). A modified form of the three interview series designed by Solbeare and Schuman was used for this interview process. Each student participant was asked questions that focused on one of three areas: the life history of the participant, the details of the experience, and a reflection of the experience (Seidman, 1991). The researcher utilized an active listening model of interviewing by building on what the participant shared during the course of the interview.

Phase 2, step 2: teacher questionnaires. The director, music director, and children's choir director were given the questionnaire at the end of the production. Included on the questionnaire was a brief summary of the purpose of the study as well as definitions for the key components of social and emotional learning.

Data Analysis Procedures

The three data sets: student interviews, teacher questionnaires, and production process observations, were then analyzed by the researcher. The researcher looked specifically for patterns in the data among and between students and teachers using constant comparison analysis techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Student interviews. The first step in data analysis was to examine each of the student interviews by reducing and examining the text to mark the passages of interest. Marking important sections of a text created an opportunity to respond meaningfully to significant parts of the transcript (Seidman, 1991). The identified important sections of each interview were then used to create a profile for each participant. The profiles were organized using four categories: background information, self-management and responsible decision making, social awareness

and relationship management, and self-awareness. Categories were determined based on the key SEL competencies. A composite description of the student participants was then formulated after an analysis of the similarities and differences among the student participants.

Teacher questionnaires. An analysis of the teacher questionnaires was completed. Similarities were identified and organized into three categories: 1) Social Skills, 2) Self-Management Skills, 3) Self-Awareness Skills.

Data triangulation. The student profiles, teacher questionnaires, and production process notes were analyzed and synthesized based on the SEL competencies defined in Chapter Two and again below:

- Self Awareness - self identity, self-efficacy, recognizing strengths, identifying emotions
- Social Awareness - empathy, perspective taking, appreciating diversity, respect
- Responsible Decision Making - problem solving, reflecting, responsibility
- Self-Management - impulse control and stress management, discipline, organization
- Relationship Management - communication, relationship building, working cooperatively

(Zins et al., 2004)

A summary of how each data set supported the SEL competencies was followed by an analysis of the ways in which the environment of the production supported positive growth in SEL.

Results

The purpose of this research study was to examine the impact of involvement in a musical theatre production on students' social and emotional learning. The results in this chapter are reported in the following sections: student participant profiles; participant composite description; teacher questionnaires; and SEL and the musical theatre experience.

Student Participant Profiles

In this section each of the seven student participants is profiled based on their responses to the interview questions. The participant profiles are organized using the following categories: social awareness and relationship management, self-management and responsible decision-making, and self-awareness. These categories were formed based on the key SEL competencies.

Karen. At the time of her interview Karen was eight years old and in the third grade. Karen was doing well in school having made the Principal's list for all three trimesters of third grade. Her favorite subjects in school were art, computer, PE, music, and reading. Karen first became involved in the performing arts when she started dancing hula at the age of four. Karen also took piano lessons and was a member of the school's children's choir. In *Annie*, Karen played an orphan who shared a close relationship with the main character.

Social awareness and relationship management. During the production Karen “had fun” socializing during rehearsals. She got along with others in the musical and considered them to be her friends. She especially liked that there were “a lot of older kids” in the production that she was able to befriend. Karen described the rehearsal environment as being “friendly and humorous.” Throughout the course of the production Karen felt she could be herself as she worked closely with other people. She considered it be a supportive environment.

Self-management and responsible decision-making. During the first performance Karen thought it was “a little scary” being onstage. She had never had that big of a role before. There were a number of challenges that Karen faced during the course of the production. Sometimes there were lines that she had trouble saying or remembering. She was able to overcome the challenges by having the director and music director help her. Karen formed a special bond with the children's choir director who would visit her before each show and give her a pep talk. One of Karen's favorite parts of rehearsal was “making mistakes because sometimes it was funny.” She also loved watching how the production came together from rehearsals in classes to moving to the real stage, adding costumes and make-up, and then performing. Through her participation in the show, Karen learned the importance of being prepared on time for the things that she needed to do. Karen was glad that she memorized her lines early.

Self-awareness. During the course of the show Karen loved being on stage and being in character. She respected and looked up to the high school student who was playing the part of Ms. Hannigan. Karen was excited about being in costume and felt “important” putting on make-up. The production made Karen feel like she "accomplished something super huge." She felt proud of her contribution because it was the first time she had participated in a musical on that scale. Karen's character opened the show with a scream. One of the most challenging tasks for Karen was doing the scream. She was very nervous at first because she had to be loud and she wasn't used to doing that. Another challenge for Karen was when there were last minute changes that had to be done. Overall, she felt that the effort and time that she put into the production was worth it.

(Personal Communication, May 2011)

Sarah. Sarah was a nine-year-old third grader at the time of her interview. She had been dancing hula and ballet since kindergarten and was a member of the children's choir at school. Sarah enjoyed school, her favorite activities being music, computer, writing, and drawing. Outside of school Sarah enjoyed singing, dancing hula, and acting. Sarah was doing well in school and loved that she got to participate in the performing arts as part of her school experience.

Social awareness and relationship management. Sarah played the lead role of Annie in the show. Some of Sarah's favorite moments in the show were being backstage with the other cast members, dressing up in her costumes, putting on makeup, putting on costumes, and acting like "a real actor." She got along well with everyone in the show and had "loads of fun" during rehearsals. The people in the show became her friends. There were older kids in the show that she "got to hang out with and they were nice to her." One of the most challenging things for Sarah was in one of the scenes with high school students. Sometimes if the high school students forgot their lines or movements she wanted to show it to them, but she didn't. There was one time during a performance that an actor forgot his line and Sarah was waiting for someone to say it or cover for him. She was saying in her head "Someone say it, anyone say it.... I guess I'm the someone" and then she covered the actor's line.

Self-management and responsible decision-making. One of the most challenging aspects of the show was when Sarah had to act with the older students and adults. She had to kiss the actor playing the president on the cheek and she was very shy about doing that at first. She knew that a lot of people were counting on her because she was in so many scenes and had so much of the show riding on her shoulders. Sarah prepared ahead of time by memorizing her script in two days. Many people in the cast told her how impressive that was.

Self-awareness. Sarah wanted to be in *Annie* because she thought it would be a good opportunity to be with friends and to act, dance, and perform. After hearing that she had gotten the role of Annie, Sarah was grateful. Sarah's mom and dad were instrumental in her successful performance. They helped her practice and gave her advice. Sarah loved seeing the crowds cheering and clapping during the performances. On the last performance she started crying and "wanted to hug everybody because it was so emotional." Being in the show was an amazing experience for her. Many of Sarah's friends and family thought she did an "awesome" job; she even got an offer from the football coach to sing the *Star Spangled Banner* during football games. Sarah felt that all the hard work in the show was worth it. She would "do anything to be up there" performing on that stage. One important lesson that Sarah learned from being in the show was self-confidence. She gained the confidence to stand up and believe in herself.

(Personal Communication, May 2011)

Laura. Laura was twelve years old and in the sixth grade at the time of her interview. From a young age Laura danced hula and had experience performing in public. In third grade she started participating in school plays and productions. Her part in *Annie* was the biggest part she had so far. Laura liked school, especially the social aspects of it. She liked being around her friends and talking to them. Her favorite subject was social studies because she got to learn about the world.

Social awareness and relationship management. Laura played the part of one of the main orphans in the show. Throughout the course of the production Laura made new friends. This was one of the things that she liked about being in the production. Most of all, though, she liked being on stage in front of an audience. Laura's part in the show was very different from her

personality in real life so Laura found it interesting to be friends with people offstage but have to fight with them on stage.

Self-management and responsible decision-making. Laura looked forward to the final product throughout the course of the production. She had to work really hard on a few different aspects of her role, including the dancing and the singing. Some of the notes she sang were very high and she had to practice hitting those notes. One of the most challenging things for Laura was staying in character when she was on stage. There were times when something funny would happen and it was “hard for her not to laugh.” Laura dedicated herself to doing her best to learn all the choreography, songs, and blocking, and she tried her best during each rehearsal. She knew if she did that, the performances would be her best work.

Self-awareness. Laura felt very good about herself during rehearsals. When she made a mistake she knew it was okay but she tried hard not to make the same mistake again. Laura was excited about the reaction from her friends and family. One of her friends parents came up to her at the end of one of the performances and said they were so impressed because the person she was onstage was so different from who she was in real life. Her friends thought she was very funny and her parents thought she did a wonderful job. All the comments she received made her feel good. Laura had no doubt that all the hard work and rehearsing was worth it. An important thing that Laura learned was that when she got nervous it helped if she breathed. Laura also appreciated all the things she learned about acting, dancing, and singing.

(Personal Communication, May 2011)

Sandra. Sandra, a high school senior, began dancing hula at the age of four. In seventh grade she began acting when she started taking theatre classes in school. She loved dancing and

had taken jazz and tap dancing in the past. She wanted to be in *Annie* because she had never been in a play where she had to act with so many younger students before.

Social awareness and relationship management. Sandra had fun acting with the younger cast members. The joy that she saw in the eyes of the younger students knowing that they were going to be able to keep participating in these kinds of productions as they got older was amazing for Sandra to see. According to Sandra the whole point of putting on the production was the bonding with others that occurred. Sandra got along very well with the other people in the production. She said that when "everyone was working hard to accomplish the same goal" it was not hard to get along. Sandra had fun during the course of the production, watching the growth in the performers, eating, bonding, and laughing. One of the challenges for Sandra was when her fellow actors were not there. Part of acting is relating to the other people you are on stage with, so, when actors were not there, it was hard for Sandra to do her best. Another minor challenge for Sandra was working with the young children. Sometimes they weren't quiet when they were supposed to be, but all in all she was impressed with them because they did a really good job knowing all their lines and cues. According to Sandra, putting on the production was all about working hard, participating, and helping out no matter who you were or what part you had.

Self-management and responsible decision-making. Sandra knew that to give her best performance she was going to have to "give 130% at rehearsals." She fulfilled her responsibilities to the best of her ability because she knew that other people on stage were counting on her to know her part. Sandra knew that part of being in the musical was being aware of what was going on at all times. There were many things to be aware of when she was on stage: the other people; the music; cue lines; where to go and when. It was very challenging,

especially with a live orchestra. Sandra knew that she had to be constantly aware of what was happening. Everyone up on that stage contributed to the success of the production.

Self-awareness. Sandra loved being on stage and performing for an audience. She enjoyed making people “feel” something. During the production the younger students looked up to her, which made her feel special. Sandra identified one of her main passions as performing arts. She felt at home on stage. Her family and friends enjoyed the production and she loved having them attend because a lot of the people in her family were not often exposed to live musical theatre. Sandra also considered this production to be a humbling experience. The lead role was a little girl and there were times when Sandra had to take a second seat to her. This was unusual because Sandra had the lead part in the past two school productions. To experience someone else getting most of the accolades was a humbling experience. Sandra’s passion was and will always be theatre. She was very grateful that she was able to attend a school that supported her growth in this area. She noted that she could not imagine what it would have been like if she hadn't had the opportunity to participate in and learn how much she loved the performing arts.

(Personal communication, May 2011)

Marie. Marie was a senior in high school at the time of her interview. She had been dancing since the age of three and participated in theatrical productions and theatre classes at school since sixth grade. She decided to audition for *Annie* because she really enjoyed being in musical theatre productions in the past. She was also interested in the technical aspects of theatre and was thinking of going into set design and inter-media arts in college. Marie was doing excellent in school and was the valedictorian of her senior class. She was grateful that her school supported the performing arts. She did not have the opportunity to participate in theatre

activities outside of school. Marie would have never known how passionate she was about the arts if it was not for the experiences she was involved in through school.

Social awareness and relationship management. Marie played one of the lead female roles in the production. She had fun during rehearsals both on stage and off stage. One of the most important lessons that Marie learned was “people skills.” During the production one had to deal with different types of people, peers who were stage managers and were telling you what to do, teachers giving you directions, and people on stage of all ages that you had to work together with.

Self-management and responsible decision-making. One of the most challenging things for Marie was managing her time. There were many things going on during the time of the production so she had to be organized. Marie knew that if she was prepared ahead of time that would make it easier for her and for the other people that she acted with on stage. She memorized her lines right away and was always working on her singing and choreography. She and the other two actors that she performed with would get together and practice on their own. In the end, all that hard work led to “a great experience.”

Self-awareness. Marie loved being in *Annie* because she got to act like someone that she wasn't in real life. One of the most challenging things was trying to pull off a New Jersey accent. She loved being able to chew gum on stage. Her family and friends were very supportive and told her she did a great job.

(Personal Communication, May 2011)

Holly. At the time of her interview Holly was a senior in high school. Holly danced hula when she was a little girl and had her first performance in the third grade. But after that she was not involved in the performing arts until her sophomore year of high school when all she had to

do was walk on stage and hand someone a piece of paper. The following year she had a bigger role; she sang a song with a group of people. In her senior year she took a theatre class. Her favorite subjects in school were English, theatre, and choir. She decided to audition for *Annie* because she liked to sing and she wanted to try something exciting since it was her senior year.

Social awareness and relationship management. Holly's favorite part of being in the musical was that she got to play a “really fun character.” She got to boss around the little kids and got to sing, in her opinion, the “best songs in the whole show.” She enjoyed getting closer to the little kids. She had a strong connection with all the people in the play. One of her favorite parts of rehearsals was “standing offstage and joking around or being with other members of the cast.” She was very supportive of her fellow cast members and when one of them was getting nervous she told them “Don't worry. I'm up there with you. I got your back!” One of the biggest challenges in the beginning was having confidence that the little kids were going to do what they were supposed to. Holly had many scenes with the elementary students. She knew she had to trust and rely on them and they ended up doing a wonderful job.

Self-management and responsible decision-making. Holly described the rehearsals as having a positive atmosphere. She felt comfortable taking risks and making mistakes. Rehearsals were an opportunity to practice and get better. Holly realized that, when it came down to it, the directors and choreographer could prepare their best, but it was really up to each individual cast member to give it their best as well. Everyone was relying on each other. Another challenge for Holly was working with an actor who was out for a week of rehearsals. It was stressful with him not there because he was such an important component. It emphasized to Holly how much one relies on others during a production. One of the biggest lessons that Holly learned was time management. The people who were prepared ahead of time with their lines and

knew their songs, blocking, and choreography were not as “stressed out” as the people who did not prepare early.

Self-awareness. Holly was “really nervous” on opening night and she told herself that if she just stayed in character, even if she made a mistake, then no one in the audience would know and she could trust the other actors to help her out onstage. The production “ended up being an awesome experience. She liked being backstage and being a “crazy lady” on stage, getting to do things she would never do in real life. This was her first lead role and her family was surprised that she did so well. Her mom didn't know she could act. The whole experience was worth it because she had “so much fun.”

(Personal Communication, May 2011)

James. James was a senior in high school. He had been involved in performing arts activities since elementary school. His favorite classes in school were concert glee and theatre performance. He loved to sing and act. His hobbies included writing songs and poetry. He appreciated the fact that he had the opportunity to participate in musical theatre productions in school. At the previous school he was at there was nothing like acting or choir offered. James was incredibly grateful to be at a school that supported his pursuit of the subjects he was passionate about.

Social awareness and relationship management. James played a lead male role in the show. His favorite part of being in the show was getting close to all the cast members, especially those that were younger than him. He got along really well with all the people in the musical.

Self-management and responsible decision-making. James had “fun” during the production and felt a strong sense of responsibility to his fellow cast members. He wasn't just doing the part for himself; he was doing it for everyone. One of the most challenging things for

James was portraying a character on stage that was very different than his normal personality. His character was supposed to be sleazy and kind of evil. At times at the beginning of the production, James felt uncomfortable about portraying such an unlikeable character. But the more he realized that people were impressed with what he was doing, the harder he wanted to try. James was glad that everyone involved worked really hard to make sure the show was successful. One of the most important things that James learned from being in the show was responsibility. He knew that he had to do his best because there were so many other people trying their best, especially the younger students.

Self-awareness. One of the highlights of being in the show for James was “having fun onstage.” Once he got into the mindset of the character he was able to let loose and really perform. In order to do that, he had to overcome a little stage fright and self-doubt. Being able to be someone else ended up being one of his favorite parts of being in the show.

(Personal Communication, May 2011)

Participant Composite Description

In the following section the participant profiles are synthesized. A comparison of the participant profiles led the researcher to identify common themes and topics. A synthesis of the background information for each participant is discussed followed by a composite description of the individual participant profiles.

Background information. Each of the seven participants had been involved in performing arts activities before their performance in *Annie*. All six female participants had taken dance classes at some point in their childhood. The five middle and high school participants had all been involved in previous school productions, and two of the high school seniors, James and Susan, had been involved in community theatre productions. When asked

their reasons for wanting to be involved in *Annie*, six of the participants voiced their desire and enjoyment for performing and the fun that was involved in being in a show. For five of the participants their role in *Annie* was the biggest that they had taken on. When asked about their favorite aspects of school, six of the participants identified one or more classes in the performing arts as being on their list of favorites. In general, all of the applicants reported doing very well in school, with one elementary student being on the principal's list and one high school student being the valedictorian. All seven participants reported that they were organized, especially when it came to school.

Description of experience. There were multiple commonalities among the participant descriptions of their involvement in the musical theatre production. Six of these common themes will be discussed below: social connections; age awareness; supportive atmosphere; personal challenges; musical theatre skills and process; and key realizations. The researcher identified these themes as the data was analyzed and commonalities arose.

Social connections. All seven participants discussed their enjoyment of their fellow cast-members. During the course of the production the large amount of social interaction both on and off the stage provided opportunities for the students to get to know one another. Some of Sarah's "favorite moments from the show" were the times when she would be off stage with other cast members socializing. Susan said that she loved socializing with the other cast members. James' favorite part of being in the show was getting close to the other cast members. All of the participants identified social interaction as one of the highlights of their participation in the show.

Age awareness. The production involved students ranging from third grade through twelfth grade. The two elementary school participants liked the fact that there were so many

older kids in the show that they were able to get to know. Karen really respected and looked up to the high school student with whom she worked closely. Sarah enjoyed being with the older students but she was frustrated at times because some of them didn't know their lines as well as she did. She liked that she got to be around kids of different ages. Sandra could see joy "in the eyes of the younger kids" and it made her feel like the kids looked up to her. Marie noted that one of the unique things about this production was there were people on stage of all different ages working together. Holly felt that she had a strong connection with everyone in the cast, from the third graders all the way up to the adults. One of the special things about the production for James was getting to know all the people in the show. For him, it was awesome to see "everyone, especially the younger students, working hard together and trying their best."

Supportive atmosphere. All seven participants discussed different aspects of the production that allowed them to feel supported and able to grow. Karen described the environment as being "friendly and humorous." She was able to be herself and be comfortable working closely with other people. She liked that it was acceptable to make mistakes during rehearsals. She knew that the director, music director, and choreographer were there to help her if she needed it. Sarah and Laura described the atmosphere as one of fun and friendship. Throughout rehearsals they felt good about the contribution they and others were making. Susan noted that because "everyone was working hard to accomplish the same goal" it was not hard to get along. Everyone contributed to the success of the production. Holly noted that the supportiveness of the cast members was amazing. During one rehearsal one of the cast members was nervous about messing up one of her lines and Holly told her not to worry because "I'm up there with you. I got your back!" James recognized that because of his sense of community with the other cast members he wasn't just working hard for himself, he was doing it for everyone.

All the participants felt that they belonged to a close group of people that supported and cared for each other.

Personal challenges. The participants described challenges that they faced during the course of the production. Karen had never had such a big role before and had to overcome stage fright. She had to work hard at memorizing her lines, which was a challenge for her. Sarah found it challenging to do so many scenes with adults and high school students. Sandra discussed the challenges of putting on a production and all the things that one has to be aware of when on stage; from acting with other people, to knowing your cue lines, singing your songs, knowing your choreography, and singing with a live orchestra. The whole experience was challenging and so, as Sandra noted, the people involved had to always be aware of what was going on. For Marie a challenge that she had to overcome was time management. She had to make sure that she was very organized during the course of the production because she didn't want to let anyone in the cast down. Holly was challenged when one of the actors that she had many scenes with was out for a number of rehearsals. The most challenging thing for James was portraying a character on stage that was completely different than his real personality. He had to overcome his insecurities. Each of the participants was able to identify and overcome a personal challenge that arose during the course of the production.

Musical theatre skills and process. A key component of the production was the learning that took place about musical theatre skills and the process of putting on a production. Karen loved watching how the production came together from "rehearsals in classrooms, moving to the real stage, adding costumes and make-up, and then performing." She loved being a part of the whole process and most of all, enjoyed being on stage and being in character. The costumes and make-up excited her. The whole process made her feel important. Sarah enjoyed getting into

costume and make-up and then going onstage and being "a real actor." She learned a lot about acting on stage including blocking, covering for someone if they forgot a line, and how important it was to have one's lines memorized. She loved being able to act and sing. Seeing the crowd cheering and clapping after the performances made her overjoyed. Laura enjoyed being on stage in front of an audience. She learned about dancing and singing and had to work really hard on those aspects of the production. She also learned about the importance of staying in character. Putting all the work into the show and watching it come together made Laura feel happy. Susan knew that she had to give her best at rehearsals because other people on stage were counting on her to know her part. Marie knew that it was important for her to memorize her lines right away. She loved playing a challenging character and enjoyed figuring out the nuances of that character. Holly's favorite part of being in the show was the fun character that she got to play. James also enjoyed portraying an interesting character and learning how to make his character come across on stage. Every participant described musical theatre skills that were fine-tuned throughout the course of the production.

Key realizations. The seven participants had many opportunities for reflection and growth during the production that led to the learning of important lessons. Karen realized that it was important to be prepared on time for things that one is responsible for. She memorized her lines early and didn't have to struggle towards the end. Sarah learned that it is important to stand up for yourself. Being in the show gave her more confidence to believe in herself. Susan realized that putting on a production is all about helping out, no matter who you are or what part you have. Marie said that one of the most important things she learned was people skills. During the production she had to work with a variety of different people and everyone had to contribute to make the production succeed. One of the biggest lessons that Holly learned was

time management. The people who were prepared ahead of time were more relaxed and ready for the performances. James learned the value of responsibility. He knew that he had to be prepared and had to do his best because other people were doing their best. Together everyone was working hard. All seven participants responded that the hard work and dedication that went into the show was worth it.

Teacher Questionnaires

The teacher questionnaires were given to the director, music director, and children's choir director. The director of the show was a drama and speech teacher at the school. The music director was the high school choral director. The children's choir director was the elementary school music teacher. The researcher asked the teachers their opinion on how involvement in the production may have impacted students' social skills, self-management skills, and self-awareness skills. The responses are reported below.

Social skills. The children's choir director noted that a unique experience occurred which was unlike many other experiences in school. In *Annie* there was a blending of students from many different grade levels. The opportunity that involvement in this production provided for the mentoring of younger students by older students was one of the few available throughout the course of the school year. During rehearsals she saw excellent behavior from the younger students because they were trying to show the older students that they could live up to the expectations placed on them. The older kids were aware of their responsibility to act as role models for the younger students. The music director of the show also recognized the significance of involving students of different ages. According to him, the success of a production "often hinges upon the cooperation and mutual support of each member of the performing company." The actors helped to inspire and support each other. The director

described how he explained at the very beginning of the production that taking the role that had been offered came with responsibilities. These included coming to rehearsals, carrying out one's role to the best of one's ability, memorizing lines, and contributing to the ensemble. If students did not live up to the responsibilities everyone would know it. Through this process the director explained, "We were basically asking them to be adults."

The director went on to mention that during *Annie* there was relationship building between elementary, middle, and high school students. Relationships were also made or nurtured between faculty, students, and parents. The production "was a great medium for relationship building because everyone was working toward one goal, and that made everyone equal, which allowed everyone to be his or herself."

Self-management skills. The children's choral director explained that the students in the production were expected to be organized and able to keep up with their schoolwork in addition to being in the show. The students knew that it was expected of them and they worked hard at managing their time well. Throughout the course of the production there were times when the actors had to sit and listen, follow directions, and work together. This took a tremendous amount of self-discipline and control. According to the music director time management was also key for the high school students. They were expected to maintain high performance levels in their academic classes. The students were required to practice songs and dances outside of rehearsals. The students in the production were expected to have a high level of self-control and determination in order to conduct themselves as was expected. The director of the show corroborated saying that during a show one must always act on faith that students will be there and live up to the expectations demanded of them. Living up to the expectations successfully required students to be responsible and respectful towards one another.

Self-awareness skills. According to the director, for some of the young students in the production, it was their first time being on stage in a "real" show. There was a "culture" that defined the performing arts experience and all students were stretched artistically with new skills, lines, staging, choreography, songs, timing, entrances, ensemble work, and individual skills. When all these were brought together an ensemble was created. With self-awareness and growth students saw how important their individual contribution was to the ensemble. The music director built upon this description by noting that a "successful individual performance made the actor, and the entire company feel good about their individual and collective efforts." He added that in this era of instant gratification, a production requires "old-fashioned hard work and commitment. There are no short cuts to arriving on stage, fully prepared to perform one's role well." When the actors accomplished that, it had an incredible impact on their life and future learning. The director explained that when a student found success during the course of the production, this contributed to their self-esteem. They felt a sense of pride. When students took their curtain call and had the immediate response of an intimate audience clapping and cheering it was an amazing, powerful feeling unlike any other. Parents and students recognized the growth that took place and many students experienced success and achievement who would have no other area that they could experience achievement in.

Many students who participated in the show approached the director and explained how much they had been challenged but also felt they had achieved something great. According to the director,

There are few experiences educationally more fearful than getting on stage and performing before a live audience. That's what I love about theatre. There is no multiple choice, essay, or fill-in the blank. As Rilke said, 'there is no place to hide.' For a student

performing, it is all about risk and for education, risk is that brave attempt at stepping through a threshold and saying I can do this; and when the student does, whether the performance wins an Oscar or not, the student comes out a changed person: more confident, more prideful, and most importantly, the knowledge that now he or she can go further. Take the next step. Every year I have worked in educational theatre I have seen this change. Parents, students, and teachers come up to me and remark how changed the student/actor has become. Even this year, on the last day of school I had a student, who approached me and said, 'I'm going to be in every production next year.' This student had never acted before this year. No other human endeavor transcends age and experience like a prodigy and I can't think of any reason more important than having arts in the school so that individuals can receive such recognition and respect.

Each of the teachers involved in the production corroborated on the notion that the process of putting on the musical theatre production provided an opportunity for positive social and emotional growth.

Social and Emotional Learning and the Musical Theatre Experience

In this section the participant profiles, teacher questionnaires, and rehearsal observations are compared and analyzed. Specific examples and descriptions of how the production promoted the five areas of Social and Emotional Learning (Zins et al., 2004) are outlined and described.

The key SEL competencies are defined as:

- Self Awareness - self identity, self-efficacy, recognizing strengths, identifying emotions
- Social Awareness - empathy, perspective taking, appreciating diversity, respect
- Responsible Decision Making - problem solving, reflecting, responsibility
- Self-Management - impulse control and stress management, discipline, organization

- Relationship Management - communication, relationship building, working cooperatively (Zins et al., 2004)

Self-awareness. The student participants each went through a process of becoming more self-aware during this production. The music director noted that the actual act of standing on the stage, in front of an audience, and “literally showing one’s talent” boosted the actors’ self-confidence. The successful performances made the actors and crew feel good about their individual and collective efforts. The director noted that the reason these students were in the musical was because of self-esteem. They participated because when they were successful it made them feel proud. At the end of the production there were students that approached the director and thanked him because they felt like they really achieved something. They participated in something that stretched their boundaries. The director noted that many students have gone from “mediocre to really being a performer and growing immensely because of the experience.” For many of these students this was their area to shine and achieve.

The student participants all mentioned their love and passion for being on stage. Involvement in the production resulted in an awareness about themselves that, in many cases had been there before, but in all cases had grown and been supported through participating in *Annie*. Each of the participants recognized that the performing arts were a significant part of who they were as human beings. Sandra experienced an important realization about herself which was a little humbling for her because for the first time she had to take a back row seat. She didn’t have the lead character. That taught her that you “don’t have to be number one to be recognized” or love what you are doing up on that stage. Laura also discussed her love of performing and being on stage. She felt good about herself throughout the rehearsal process and worked really hard. She challenged herself to do her best. Karen felt like she accomplished something “super huge”

and also mentioned her joy for being on stage. Sarah loved being in the show saying that she would “do anything to be up there” on the stage. Marie mentioned her passion for being a part of musical theatre and said it is something she will always love and want to be a part of. Holly and James both mentioned the fun they had being able to act on stage, and the good feeling that being a part of the production gave them.

Observations conducted during the production process confirmed the responses of both adult and student participants. Each participant in this study was confident in their abilities and knew why they were there. There was an obvious passion for musical theatre that was seen in the way they approached other actors, their parts, and their commitment to the production. None of the students were being forced to be there. They were there because of the love they felt for what they were doing, which was indeed challenging at times. From singing, to acting, to dancing there were many instances when the student participants had to put themselves outside of their comfort zones and take a risk. They truly had to believe in themselves. For example, the two youngest participants had to learn how to tap dance for the production. They had never before put on a pair of tap shoes.

Musical theatre involves the combination of singing, acting, and dancing. The performers had varying abilities in each of these areas. They were quick to recognize which areas they did well in and which they had to work harder in. Their ability to recognize weaknesses and their determination in rehearsing and practicing to overcome them was exceptional.

Social awareness. The impact that involvement in the production had on the positive growth in social awareness was mentioned by each of the student and teacher participants, and was a clearly observable component of rehearsals. As the music director noted, the production

included students ranging from third through twelfth grade. Such a “wide spread of ages resulted in a camaraderie that developed the esprit de corps, and strengthened the production.” The older students were aware that the younger students were working very hard; this inspired them to work hard as well. The children’s choir director explained that the presence of older students helped the younger students behave in a more positive way. With such a mix of age levels and varied social interactions the children’s choir director surmised that the production experience was like a “microcosm” of the real world, with people of all ages working together. Sandra stated that working with the little kids was one of the best things about being in the production. She loved seeing the “joy in their eyes.” Sandra also said that at the heart of putting on the musical theatre production was the knowledge that the people around you are going to help each other.

Laura noted that a positive part of the production was getting to know kids of different ages. One of her favorite parts of the production was working closely with all the different people. The younger participants expressed an awe for the older cast members. Having older students talking to them, treating them nicely, and hanging out with them backstage made them feel special. That kind of recognition is not something that children regularly experience in a normal school setting where students are usually taught in age level groupings.

Many occurrences of students of multiple ages working closely together to help each other learn a new step, perfect an ending pose, or help each other were observed by the researcher. Watching the interaction and appreciation of what each child brought to the production by other members of the cast, no matter what their age level or background, helped the researcher understand that a positive atmosphere in which students could empathize with one another had been achieved.

Responsible decision-making. Throughout the course of the production the student participants were expected to act in a responsible and mature way. Success in the production would have not been possible without a recognition of responsibility and fulfillment of that responsibility by each of the cast members. The director, music director, and children's choir director had very clear expectations. The students understood that there was no room for inappropriate behavior because in misbehaving, one would be letting the entire cast and crew down. For the members of the production, this was simply not an option. There was passion, and there was commitment.

The success of the show can partially be attributed to the fact that the director asked each member of the cast and crew to "be an adult." He emphasized that putting on a production was a serious endeavor, and only those who were going to take it seriously were going to find themselves succeeding at it. The student participants recognized the seriousness of their commitment to the production and the level to which they had to hold themselves. The participants knew that they had to live up to the task of learning their lines, choreography, songs, and blocking. As James said, he knew that he had to live up to the responsibility of being in the show because everyone out there was doing their best. Letting them down "wasn't an option."

Built into the production process were opportunities for self-reflection and problem solving. During each phase of the production the researcher noted multiple opportunities for actors to work together and solve an issue that had arisen in a scene or number. Groups of actors were asked to reflect on their performances and decide on ways they could improve. There was an air of open dialogue through which all members of the production could be approached to aid in the process of problem solving.

Self-management. Discipline, organization, and self-control were all important aspects of being involved in the production. The music director discussed the integral aspects of students' ability to manage their time and curricular responsibilities in order to retain high levels of performance in their classes and in the show. According to the director, without discipline and organization success would not have been possible.

The student participants clearly recognized the need for discipline and organization: participating in a variety of activities made it essential, as Holly explained in her interview. According to Holly, when one is involved in a variety of activities being disciplined and organized helps one to be more successful.

During the production process it was also essential for students to be self-disciplined. Memorizing lines, cues, choreography, singing, and blocking all required diligent self-management skills. As Sarah stated, "you really have to be there, ready to do your job." Karen, and a number of the other participants, noted the importance of being prepared and organized in advance. Students who were responsible, managed their time wisely, and used self-management skills, (as all the student participants did) achieved greater success and self-fulfillment. As the production neared the opening performance a greater need for self-management skills arose as the actors and crew members had to juggle the components that were being added to the production; i.e. lighting, props, staging, scene shifts, make-up, costumes, and finally audience members. As they successfully navigated these added components, a set of self-management skills was observed by the researcher in each of the seven student participants.

Relationship management. The production environment allowed for each student participant to engage in relationships with others in which they had to communicate and work cooperatively. At the beginning of the rehearsal process the director made it clear that each

person's individual contribution was essential to the success of the production as a whole. Positive communication among cast members grew from the relationship between the contribution of the individual and a successful ensemble production. The music director stated that an essential aspect of the ensemble was the mutual support and cooperation that each member of the company provided. It was an educational experience in which individual skills that had been practiced and finessed were brought together to create an ensemble. As the children's choir director stated, people were working together to create something better than they could individually.

An essential aspect of the relationship building that occurred between cast and crewmembers was the knowledge that everyone would know it if an individual did not live up to his or her responsibility. This created an opportunity for mutual support and trust, which further enhanced the positive relationships that were forged during the production. An underlying knowledge that was shared by all who were part of the production, and that was clearly seen during rehearsals, was the fact that everyone was there to accomplish the same goal. There was shared vision, which resulted in an atmosphere of friendliness, humor, and trust.

Being an actor on stage required an ability to cooperate with other people. Actors fed off each other, covered for each other, reacted to each other, and listened to each other throughout the course of the play. These "people skills" as Sandra called them, were an essential component to successful involvement in the production.

Summary

The results explained above were reported in the following sections: student participant profiles, participant composite description, teacher questionnaires, and SEL and the musical theatre experience. The data pieces were analyzed individually and then triangulated with the

researcher looking for specific examples of how the production supported SEL competencies and skills. The data pieces provided, individually and collectively, strong support that involvement in the musical theatre production contributed to positive social and emotional growth in each of the SEL competencies. The results will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the key findings of this research study, interpret the results, discuss insights gained by the researcher, and finally, to make recommendations for further research.

Summary of Results

Data collected during the course of the research study will be summarized below. Key points that show how involvement in the production of *Annie* impacted student participants' social and emotional learning will be discussed.

Participant profiles. Each of the participants identified ways in which their social awareness and relationship management skills, self-management and responsible decision-making skills, as well as self-awareness skills were impacted by involvement in the production. Particular themes appeared based on discussions during the participant interviews. The participants noted that *social connections* were an integral aspect of the environment of the production, creating an atmosphere of camaraderie and trust. All seven participants commented on the *age awareness* that developed during the production. The combination of different aged students working together was a unique educational experience that they greatly appreciated. A *supportive atmosphere* was described and highlighted by each participant, with numerous examples being given of how the cast, crew, and directors positively supported each other. This positive environment that was created during rehearsals allowed for creativity and risk-taking. Each of the participants described in detail *personal challenges* they had to overcome to be successful during the course of the production. These ranged from difficulty with time management to having to tap dance on stage when one had never tap danced before. A key theme that arose from the interview data was the fact that each of the participants was involved

in the production because they were passionate about the performing arts. They all agreed that putting on the show was hard work, but the experience of being on stage, in front of an audience, was unlike any other, and made all the hard work worth it. Throughout the production process they learned about *musical theatre processes and skills*. Each of the seven participants came to *key realizations* that helped them become better learners and performers. Responsibility, time management, and being prepared were three of the important life skills that were identified by the student participants and were required for successful participation in the production.

Teacher questionnaires. The director, music director, and children's choir director provided essential feedback in regards to ways in which the production process impacted students' social skills, self-management skills, and self-awareness skills. All three adults noted the unique multi-age positive social experience that involvement in the production provided. During rehearsals actors were expected to support and help each other. Relationship building was at the heart of the entire process. Each individual in the production had multiple expectations and responsibilities to live up to. As the directors guided the cast through the process of putting on the musical they saw immense growth and a growing sense of pride and accomplishment in all of the student participants.

Production Process Observations. Observations of the production process provided a third data set through which the researcher could observe instances of positive support of social and emotional learning. In each of the phases of the rehearsal process the researcher observed positive socialization, an appreciation of diversity, a respect for individual contributions, and celebrations of success. Observations throughout the course of the production clearly showed how hard each individual was working and the level of their commitment to the ensemble so that they could put on the best show possible.

The interviews, questionnaires, and observations together provided further support that participation in the production had a positive impact on the participants' social and emotional learning in numerous ways.

Social and Emotional Learning and the Musical Theatre Experience

Through analysis and comparison of the data pieces with the key social and emotional learning competencies, positive support and examples for each social and emotional competency were found and are summarized below.

Self-awareness. Throughout the course of the production there were multiple situations in which students had to be aware of their own emotions, recognize strengths and weaknesses, and believe in themselves. Multiple participants discussed the "character" they portrayed on stage as being different than their own personality. The development of these characters led to an increased understanding of one's self, as well as increased empathy towards others. The director spoke about the amount of courage and confidence that it took for the cast to be able to stand in front of an audience and perform. Participants recognized areas of strength, worked on areas of weakness, and believed that they could contribute something meaningful to the production.

Social awareness. At the heart of the environment that emerged during each rehearsal was the positive social interaction that occurred between students of different ages. The participants emphasized the importance of the social aspects of the production, with some of them explaining the various ways in which they enjoyed socializing with and getting to know the other actors. This positive socialization was possible because each and every person involved in the production was there to do their best job to ensure that the group succeeded. Through individual effort, there was group success. Each member of the ensemble was aware that his or

her contribution mattered and this contributed to a positive social atmosphere. When students realized the importance of each of their contributions, this led to an increase in their appreciation of and respect for one another.

Responsible decision-making. A sense of responsibility was an integral aspect to each participant's success in the production. The director emphasized during the course of the production process the importance of each person following through with his or her individual responsibilities. Time for reflection and problem solving was built into each rehearsal. Students were able to work together to solve problems that arose. They became role models for each other and wanted to be their most responsible selves so that everyone would succeed.

Self-management. All seven participants described moments during the course of the production process in which they had to manage various aspects of their lives in order to fully participate in *Annie*. Organization of time and resources was key, with all the participants realizing that staying disciplined and preparing early meant greater chances for success.

Relationship management. A key component during the production was the building and fostering of relationships. From the initial trust building and getting-to-know-you activities at the beginning of the production process to the performing of scenes and musical numbers, there was constant interactive communication and cooperation between actors, crewmembers, and the directors. All of the student and teacher participants discussed the essential skills of being able to interact with and work positively with others that had to be present in each actor for a successful production to evolve.

Interpretation of Results

The results of this study clearly identify ways in which students were positively supported in their social and emotional growth. However, it is the actual rehearsal environment

that contributed to the positive support of students' SEL. An analysis of the rehearsal environment follows and is discussed in the following categories: a whole person undertaking, individual opportunities, and active participation in a caring community.

A whole person undertaking. Meaningful learning is a whole person phenomenon (McCombs, 2004). The process that the student participants went through as they put on *Annie* was indeed a whole person undertaking. Schaps, Battistich, and Solomon (2004) described whole person learning as learning that is meaningful, engaging, and enjoyable (Schaps et al., 2004). All seven student participants described their immense enjoyment of the production process. In addition to working hard on specific acting, dancing, and singing skills, the students also worked on building trusting relationships with their fellow actors. The creation of new friendships was one positive outcome that many of the participants discussed. The socialization and bonding that occurred helped each child feel that they mattered and belonged. It was, in fact, the social and emotional components of the experience during the course of the production that transformed it into a whole person phenomenon.

The director's goal at the beginning of the production was to have everyone work together to put on a successful show. The musical theatre aspects of the show contributed to the success of the production, the acting, singing, and dancing. But, it was the social and emotional aspects of the learning environment during rehearsals that allowed for students to trust each other, feel like they could achieve wonderful things, and live up to the expectations of the directors. Chambers (2011) and Eisner (2002) described arts undertakings as social and emotional learning experiences because the arts help people to build relationships, self reflect, and expand their minds. They give people opportunities to engage in hard work, face challenges, reflect and achieve (Chambers, 2011; Eisner, 2002;). This was the case in the production of

Annie. Students were engaged in a process that required them to work hard, overcome challenges, take risks, and believe in themselves. One of Sarah's key realizations was that if she believed in herself she could do anything.

The music director, children's choir director, and director noted that the combination of hard work and commitment with a passion for the performing arts created a determination and dedication in the students that was necessary for such a successful production. The passion that each participant felt for musical theatre was clearly articulated by them. They loved what they were doing. As Karen said, she would "give anything to be up on that stage." Sir Ken Robinson (2009) wrote that if children are to grow up and live meaningful lives, they need to be supported in the areas they love. The students in *Annie* were supported in the area they loved. These students knew and recognized their passion for the performing arts and were truly grateful for the opportunity they had to develop that passion in a supportive and engaging environment.

Individual opportunities. An integral aspect of an environment in which SEL can be positively supported is the opportunity that students have for individual growth, contribution, and achievement (Schaps et al., 2004). However, with the standards movement that has swept across the United States, schools have turned into test prep, isolationist institutions (Wagner, 2008). Performing arts experiences, like musical theatre productions, can provide the ideal environment for individual contribution and success.

Elias (1997) described that in an environment that is supporting positive SEL growth, students feel a deep sense of belonging, fulfillment, and responsibility. They feel they can venture opinions and make mistakes (Elias, 1997). In the beginning of the production process of *Annie* the director clearly explained the expectations to which each individual was being held. Each person's contribution was essential to the success of the production. Each of the student

participants noted the importance of their individual achievement; they knew their hard work would lead to group success. There was an individual commitment to push onwards until the group vision had been achieved (Eisner, 2002). The more each individual worked, the greater the show would be. The students were stretched artistically, given lines, staging, dancing, singing and more. Individual self-awareness and success was made possible by the atmosphere of trust and respect, which allowed everyone to be his or herself. This mutual trust and respect created an environment in which students could continually reach beyond their current abilities.

In a positive SEL environment opportunities for self-direction and self-assessment exist (Schaps et al., 2004). Built into the rehearsal process were multiple moments of self-reflection and assessment. The director, music director, children's choir director, and choreographer gave constant feedback. Individuals were asked to think about areas in which they could improve and to practice outside of rehearsal time. In *Annie*, as in an ideal SEL environment, there were high standards and (Elias et al., 2004) opportunities for success (Zins et al., 2004). The cast members knew what was expected of them. The director, music director, and choreographer were there to continually challenge and push them to reach the next level. In this cycle of practice and growth the positive atmosphere described by the student participants led to moments of celebration and self-fulfillment. The director noted that in very few other areas can a person receive such a high level of recognition and respect. When the students stood on stage and acted they were taking a huge risk. When they succeeded they were confident, prideful, and most importantly, they knew they could do even more and go even further.

In a performing arts process individuals must go through a highly reflective process as they work on something until it achieves a state of quality (Eisner, 2002). In *Annie* this was evident. The teacher and student participants all discussed the sense of responsibility that each

individual felt towards the group. There was a dedication and commitment on the part of the cast and crew. Everyone wanted to do their individual best which led to a "coherent work towards quality" that is observable in many arts activities (Wolff, 1994, p. 94). The cast and crew worked hard, during rehearsals and outside of rehearsals. They recognized weak areas and took the initiative to practice and improve. When this was viewed by fellow cast members it was a time of self-recognition and accomplishment. It was recognition of the hard work that had been done and celebration of what that individual had achieved. McClennan (2008) studied the use of drama in the classroom and described how the theatre activities transformed the culture of his classroom and celebrated the accomplishments of individuals. During *Annie*, when times of individual recognition occurred, the individual knew he or she was participating in something truly purposeful and significant. The music director noted that there were times when it was clear that a student's success on stage had an incredible impact on their self-esteem.

The student participants all described ways in which they grew individually as a performer and person. Karen learned how to tap dance for the show. She spent hours outside of rehearsals practicing tap dancing. James knew that he really had to focus on portraying his character to the best of his ability because people were counting on him. Marie memorized her lines right away. Sandra gave "130%" during rehearsals. Each participant took their individual role in the production seriously. Because of their individual contribution and accomplishment they felt, as Sarah phrased it, like they had "accomplished something super huge." As in model SEL environments, these were key moments and opportunities for self-actualization (Johnson & Johnson, 2004).

Active participation in a caring community. The positive impact that was seen during this study on the students' SEL was due in large part to the way they were treated as members of

a caring community. A caring community can have a variety of components (Schaps et al., 2004). The following key components of the caring community that arose during the production of *Annie* are described below: supportive and positive atmosphere with caring relationships; feelings of accomplishment; and a shared purpose and set of values.

Supportive and positive atmosphere with caring relationships. In a supportive environment students feel that they can freely ask questions and make mistakes (Elias, 1997). Karen described the rehearsal environment of *Annie* as being "friendly and humorous." She enjoyed working closely with the other people in the show because it was a comfortable and supportive environment. When there is a sense of safety and belonging students are in the best kind of environment for positive promotion of SEL (Zins et al., 2004). During the rehearsal process one of Holly's key realizations was how much the cast members relied on and trusted one another. The director conducted relationship building activities in the first phase of the rehearsal process, making it easier for the actors to trust each other as time passed. The safety net had been established early on. Musical theatre productions provide a unique internal culture in which work and effort are celebrated; in which every person feels supported and knows they matter (Larson et al., 2008).

Arts experiences make it possible for students to engage in the building of meaningful, positive relationships as they feel they are taking part in something of significance (Chambers, 2011; Eisner, 2002). All of the student participants mentioned the "fun" that they had being with the other people involved in the production. There was a true sense of family. They trusted each other and enjoyed being around each other. Holly noted that she was very supportive of her fellow cast members because they were supportive of her. In a study, Brouillete (2010) found that arts activities fostered positive group collaboration. All of the participants in *Annie*

identified social interaction as one of the highlights of being involved in the production. The production neared performance time and the ensemble's feelings of trust and camaraderie grew stronger.

Feelings of accomplishment. Students involved in Pitts' (2007) study on the performing arts formed bonds with each other as well as faculty. This supported mutual respect and collective problem solving. They felt that together that had accomplished great feats (Pitts, 2007). All of the student participants in *Annie* described times in which they felt proud of themselves for the hard work they had put into the show. James described how his individual accomplishments translated to a bigger success when he realized that the better he did in his role, the better those around him did. He was working hard for himself, and for everyone else. There were multiple moments throughout the rehearsal process when students supported, cheered, and congratulated each other. The signs of appreciation that they gave each other resulted in pride and feelings of self-fulfillment. The final, most enthusiastic showing of appreciation was during the performances of the production. In the applause and cheering from the audience there was a significant feeling of purposeful accomplishment by the cast and crew.

Shared purpose and set of values. In a caring community shared purpose can encourage compassion and commitment through social bonding (Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997). An essential part of a caring community is a common purpose and set of ideals (Elias, et al, 2004). During her interview Sandra explained that because "everyone was working hard to accomplish the same goal" it was easy to get along with others. The director was very clear from the start of the rehearsal process about why each person was there. Duties and responsibilities were explained, and students chose to be there and participate because they agreed with and believed in the goal of putting on an extraordinary production. When people work together to create something of

higher quality it is a powerful experience (Eisner, 2002). The director believed deeply in the importance of the shared goal, it "made everyone equal, which allowed everyone to be his or herself." In this supportive atmosphere of equality, each person believed in the significance of the goal and was willing to work hard for the success of the ensemble.

Insights Gained by the Researcher

This study was undertaken as a way to validate the powerful experience that students have through involvement in musical theatre productions. At times, being a performing arts teacher can be challenging. Resources are often inadequate, and support from faculty and administration can be limited. It was the researchers hope to highlight the powerful ways in which being involved in the musical theatre production impacted students. The researcher chose to work with a small group of individuals to be sure that each person's story was told in depth. Educators need to step back and look at the multitude of ways in which people are impacted by arts experiences. The student interviews provided the researcher with opportunities to discuss the impact that the production had on students. This allowed the researcher to reflect on the type of meaningful work that was done in the designing of the musical theatre experience. The researcher learned ways that involvement in a musical can impact students' SEL, but most importantly the researcher realized that through the act of putting on a musical theatre production, the school was supporting passion in students and teachers. This passion is what drove the show to a successful culmination, and is what drove each and every person involved to achieve his or her very best, every day.

Recommendations for Future Research

Need for the study. Eisner (2002) identified many areas in which arts research is needed. He recommended that research studies be done that report about the social design of

performing arts experiences (Eisner, 2002). This research study sought to describe the ways in which students' social and emotional learning was impacted by involvement in a performing arts production. With the current dismal status of arts in America's public education system (Davis, 2008) studies that show the powerful ways in which students are impacted by performing arts experiences are needed. As time goes on, and resources are scarce, schools will need to make decisions about which programs will stay and which will be cut. Studies that provide evidence that support the importance of performing arts programs are going to be needed so that administrators and decision makers will realize the essential role that the arts play in educating students. In schools around Hawaii and the country, arts programs are being cut. It is this researcher's hope that more research will be done showing how the arts, like nothing else, can contribute something significant, meaningful, and indispensable to the education of young people.

Educational value of the study. In the schools in the community in which the researcher lives there are current talks to cut arts programs. Budgets are being cut and school leaders see arts programs as expendable. This study provides evidence, however, that there are students in our schools who are passionate about the performing arts. These are students who do not have opportunities outside of school to follow their passions. If public schools continue to treat arts programs as an add-on to a student's core education, there will be a large number of students that are not supported in the thing they love, the performing arts. As Sir Ken Robinson (2009) said, this will lead to people who "don't know who they really are." School administrators must recognize the importance of an individual's passion and the central role that passion plays in education. As this study has supported, with passion there is growth, commitment, determination, contentment, and powerful learning.

It is this researcher's hope that educational administrators and leaders will begin to expand their definition of what it means to educate a student. This study has described numerous examples of the important role SEL plays in a child's life and learning (Elias et al., 1997; Walberg et al., 2004; Goodman & Kuzmic, 1997). More schools need to attend to the social and emotional needs of their students. As can be seen through this study and others, performing arts activities can provide viable situations in which to do that (Chambers 2011; Eisner, 2002).

Limitations and further research. There were a number of limitations that made this study specific to the time and place that it was done. Similar studies, though, could be implemented. What follows are the limitations of this study and recommendations for future studies of a similar nature.

- This study was limited to a small group of students and teachers at a private school in a rural area. Similar studies done in more diverse areas would contribute to the body of knowledge in the topic.
- Participation in this study was a small purposeful sampling. Future studies that conduct random samplings with a larger number of students would contribute an additional perspective to the research.
- This study focused on the way that students' key SEL competencies were impacted by involvement in a musical theatre production. Future studies may want to look more in depth at specific SEL competencies.
- This study used a qualitative method of research. Future studies may want to incorporate quantitative research methods. Surveys given to all cast members with simple scales might help the researcher get a glimpse into a broader

knowledge base without having to do in depth interviews with all members of a cast.

- In this study the researcher was the choreographer. This provided the researcher with an in-depth knowledge of the people involved in the production as well as the production process. Other similar studies may want to separate these roles and have a researcher who is not directly involved in the production.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this research was to study the impact that being involved in a production would have on students' social and emotional learning. This paper began with a description of the dismal state of the arts in America's public school system (Eisner, 2007). Noted educators like Tony Wagner (2008), Sir Ken Robinson (2009), and Howard Gardner (1990) have all written about the multitudinous ways our education system is failing our students. Schools treat the arts as expendable components of their curriculum (Davis, 2008). Social and emotional learning is not seen as a useful or important component of the academic education of students (Elias et al., 1997).

However, numerous studies have proven the powerful experiences that can arise from involving students in the performing arts (Eisner, 2002; Burton et al., 2000; Kornfeld & Leydon, 2005; Otten et al., 2004; Wolff, 1999; Davey, 2010). Schools that have incorporated social and emotional learning into their curriculum have seen improvements in many areas of learning and educational interaction (Walberg et al., 2004). It has also been shown that performing arts experiences can provide an ideal environment in which to support positive growth in the social and emotional learning of students (Eisner, 2002).

The student participants in this study were clearly passionate about the performing arts. They devoted themselves to the production process and emerged from it feeling fulfilled and proud. The interview data shows numerous ways in which positive growth in all of the SEL competencies was supported through involvement in *Annie*. The responses to the teacher questionnaires from the director, music director, and children's choir director described a clear caring community that was purposefully designed to help students continually work and improve on their skills in an atmosphere of positive support. Observations served to corroborate these findings, as the researcher was able to view multiple instances of joy, positive social interaction, pride, confidence, determination, problem solving, and collaboration. The production of *Annie* had a profoundly positive impact on the social and emotional learning of each of the student participants.

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Appendix A - Student Interview Questions

Student interview questions:

- What is your previous experience in the performing arts?
- Do you like school?
- What are your favorite subjects/activities in school?
- Why did you want to be in the musical?
- What do you want to pursue when you are an adult?
- Do you generally get along well with other people?
- When you get angry about something what types of things do you do to calm down?
- Would you consider yourself to be an organized person?
- What kinds of things are you good at?
- When someone else feels sad or lonely do you understand why they feel that way?
- Are you good at helping other people solve problems?
- What were some of your favorite aspects of being in the musical?
- Did you get along well with the other people that were in the musical?
- Did you have fun during rehearsals?
- Did you feel good about yourself during rehearsals or when you are practicing for the show?
- What types of activities were you favorites during rehearsal?
- How are your other classes in school going?
- What is your favorite subject?
- How well do you get along with your classmates?
- Did you getting along better with the people in the show or with your classmates?

- Was there ever a time when you had to solve a problem during rehearsal?
- What were some things that you did with other people during rehearsals?
- How are you feeling now that the show is done?
- What was your favorite thing about being in the musical?
- What was the most challenging aspect of the production?
- Will you participate in future musical productions? Why?
- What did your parents, friends, and family say to you about your performance in the show?
- Do you think that it was a lot of hard work to put on this show?
- Do you feel that it was worth it?
- What is one "life lesson" that you learned from being in this production?

Appendix B: Teacher Questionnaire

- Please describe any opportunities that students may have had to build relationships with other people during the course of the production.
- In what ways do you feel that being involved in the production helped students with self-management skills.
- In what ways do you feel being involved in the production helped students with self awareness skills.
- Is there anything you would like to add that would show the impact that being involved in this production had on students' social and emotional learning?