

**Arts and Arts Integration:  
Building Bridges Among  
Early Language, Social Studies, Science, and Dramatic Arts  
Literacies  
in the New York Public Elementary School Curriculum**

The Center for Arts Education (CAE) Arts and Language Learning (ALL) Initiative  
Second Year Report (2013-2014)

**Second Year ALL Program Report**

*Submitted to the Target Foundation by  
Dr. Lawrence Scripp, Consultant and Program Evaluator,  
Center for Music and the Arts in Education (CMAIE)*

With contributions from  
*Jerry James, Director of Education, Jacqueline Schiffer and Maia Collier, CAE ALL Program  
Managers  
Josh Gilbert, CMAIE Research Assistant*

*“This year [my teaching artist] introduced the children to theatre arts through literacy and the children had to use body and voice to express themselves and to share ideas. The theme this year was friendship and the children were participating as a group and then individually they were able to use body language, voice – silently and out-loud – to express scenes from stories, to show, rather work in partnerships and as a group and individually to show their feelings and it was a good experience for the children and it was another way for them to express themselves.” — A classroom teacher’s reflection on ALL and its impact on children’s social-emotional learning during the 2013-2014 academic year*

**Introduction**

With the help of Target Foundation Funding, the Center for Arts Education (CAE) continued to refine the Arts & Language Learning (ALL) program to explore the intersection among arts learning, language literacy skills, and social-emotional development in two New York City elementary schools.

In the second year of this project, school-based teams—including CAE staff coaches, teaching artists, and classroom teachers—worked together primarily to integrate National Core Arts Standards and the NYC Blueprint standards-based theater arts learning processes with classroom reading and writing assignments as a way to enhance early language literacy skill development. Following the new guidelines for artistic literacies, CAE teaching artists increased opportunities for student discussion, reflection, creativity, and performance as part of their unit lesson plans while the staff administered a more comprehensive documentation of performance assessment tasks designed to help monitoring the effectiveness of ALL teaching practices and evaluating the program impact on student learning.

In its first year of program implementation, ALL established a first step toward building a new model for Arts Plus Arts Integration CAE program development in NYC schools by emphasizing the need to balance arts and arts integrated teaching and learning into the K-1 classes in two NYC schools. In the second year of ALL, the CAE concentrated more on refining exemplary unit plans and collaborative teaching methods with guidance from coaches while the CAE staff research team systemically implemented student-teacher portfolio conference protocols to concentrate on the impact of one art form—drama—as a means for enhancing language literacy skills and their application to science and social studies content standards.

### **Preliminary Profile of Student Artist Skill Development**

Second year teacher professional development guidance provided by the CAE coaches and staff challenged teachers to observe, document, and rate first and second grade students' *artistic literacy skill development* aligned with three dimensions of drama learning and its application to science and social studies: (a) arts vocabulary and concepts, (b) artistic process, and (c) making meaning.

Figures 1-3 show how teachers rated student ALL arts and arts integration earning skill development at the midpoint of the first semester of the project.

As Figure 1 suggests, teachers discovered early on in the project that their students learned to use vocabulary appropriately, yet these children had much greater difficulty applying or explaining these concepts and their relationship to the subject area content studied in their classroom.

[figures on next page]

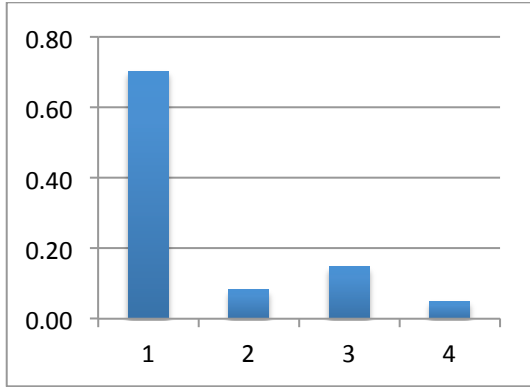


Figure 1

Observations of Students Using Arts Vocabulary and Concepts:

1. % (represented by decimals) Students Who Use Arts Vocabulary Correctly
2. % Students Who Apply Arts Concepts Across Disciplines
3. % Students Who Explain Arts Vocabulary
4. % Students Research Interests Related to Content

Figure 2 shows that, while students were able to follow instructions and become willing participants in class discussions, they experienced greater difficulties adapting their new skills and concepts to their creative working processes.

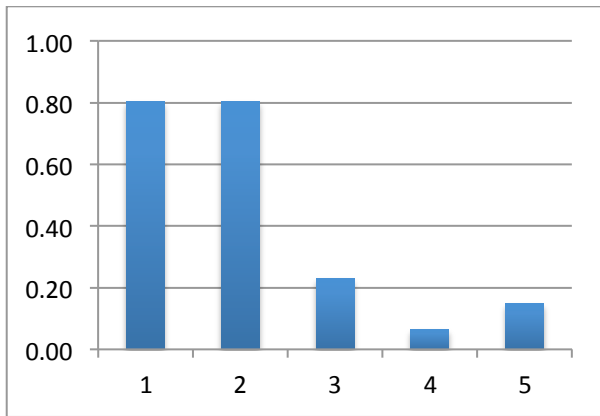


Figure 2

Observations of Student Understanding of Artistic Process:

1. % (represented by decimals) Students Who Follow instructions
2. % Students Actively Participating in Class Discussions
3. % Students Who Adapt Modeled Skill to Original Works
4. % Students Who Revise Own Work
5. % Students Who Describe Choices Made

Figure 3 reveals that, though students had difficulty finding ways to explore concepts and artistic media on their own, they were better able to explain the connection of academic content to their work once they were able to complete their first drama unit:

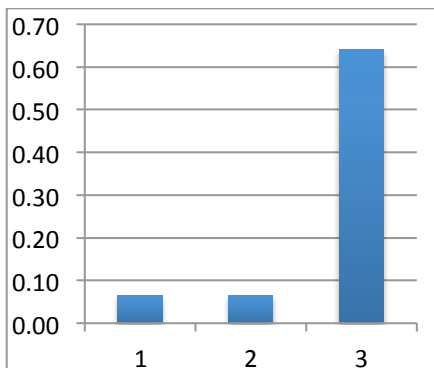


Figure 3

Observations of Students Making Meaning:

1. % (represented by decimals) Students Who independently Explore Artistic Concepts
2. % Students Who Explore Artistic Medium with Intent to Communicate
3. % Students Who Can Explain How Content Knowledge Connects to their Work

Taken together, these findings allowed teachers to focus the rest of the year on strengthening the weaknesses displayed in the student profiles through their individual and collaborative abilities to *dramatize* (enact) their understanding of structure and concepts of their science, language arts, and social studies. As the artistic literacy goals of the project became a major focus of the second semester, the ALL teachers continued to maximize the power of the dramatic arts to bolster their students' social-emotional development as a primary strategy for supporting their academic progress. Evidence for the positive effect emerged from documentation and reflection on the ALL teacher-student portfolio conferences administered in the ALL schools.

### **Assessing Impact of Dramatic Arts Literacy on Grade 1-2 Academic Learning**

#### *The ALL Student-Teacher Portfolio Conference Protocol*

Results show that the grades 1-2 pre-post Student-Teacher Portfolio Conference Protocol administered during and after each ALL unit provided consistently positive indications of arts integrated teaching and learning practices. The protocol, administered mid-semester and at the end of the year, was structured into three sections:

- Section I (5 minutes): Teacher Understanding of ALL Program: Teachers are asked to articulate their understanding of program definition, goals, and how drama teaching artists provided new opportunities to engage student learning in their classroom aligned with Common Core and National Core Arts Standards.
- Section II (30 minutes): Student Demonstration and Reflection on Dramatic Arts Integrated Learning: Small-group student discussion and performance assessment tasks (observed by Teachers who were required to observe but not comment on student behavior and responses) challenged first and second graders to:
  - a) Describe their dramatic arts experiences with ALL teaching artists in their classroom.
  - b) Discuss their ALL portfolio “best work” products (drawings, reflections, and story writing drawn from their teaching artist activities) and elaborate on how their work demonstrates “how and what they learned” throughout the dramatic arts integration unit.
  - c) Take part in interactive performance assessments that require the young students to create dialog and act out their understanding of science and story telling according to

the expert facilitator's questions about particular aspects of the ALL student work documentation collected during the ALL units.

- Section III (10 minutes): Teacher Reflection on Evidence of Student Learning Throughout The Portfolio Conference: After students have gone back to their classroom, the teachers were challenged to:
  - a) Describe evidence of individual learning based on the quality of student work and participation throughout the portfolio conference;
  - b) Articulate the value of ALL approach to CAE's "Arts Plus Arts Integration" teaching and learning units in their classroom and its contribution to student cognitive, social-emotional, and academic development in their classroom;
  - c) Give reasons as to what extent they intended to continue to support ALL practices during the next academic year.

### **ALL Teacher-Student Program Outcomes**

As discussed previously, classroom observation protocols alerted teachers to the early impact of the ALL in terms of correct use of vocabulary, active participation, and the ability to explain how their acting drama applied to their ability to explain content knowledge. These observations also revealed that the students were less able to apply arts literacy concepts to other disciplines, describe their choices, revise their work, explore new ideas independently, or communicate arts concepts.

Nonetheless, by the end of the year, the teachers and students interviewed for the Portfolio Conferences clearly articulated the impact of the ALL project. The most powerful effects can be organized into four categories:

- I. Social-Emotional Development
- II. Connected, Integrated, and Engaging Curriculum
- III. Teacher and Program Growth
- IV. Deeper Student Understanding

Evidence for teaching understanding and student growth and accomplishment in these four areas are revealed by key phrases in italics excerpted from the interview transcripts.

## **I. Social Emotional Development**

Both teachers and students felt that the use of dramaturgy teaching techniques were empowering and beneficial for social, emotional, and empathetic qualities and skills. For example, teachers and students came to the conclusion during the ALL units that engaged learning is a process that can be eagerly anticipated, challenging, and enjoyable at the same time:

*“They look forward to it every week, they can’t wait.”* — ALL classroom teacher commenting on the impact of the teaching artist and the arts integration unit on their students throughout the school year.

*“We’re learning stuff, and having fun at the same time.”* — ALL second grader comment on the quality of participation in relation to learning during the drama integration unit.

In the context of group discussion doing during the portfolio conference, this same student also made clear that he valued the growth of interpersonal skills through acting:

*“And we learned that it’s very good to have a good experience like [drama], because we can learn more things like writing or action things. We can actually learn how to face each other and concentrate on what they’re saying.”*

For other students, thoughtful, enactive interpretation of the books they read in school creates empathy with the lives of important characters in American history. Many students describing in detail the value of the value of “dramatizing” historical events and figures in the classroom:

*“So I think about the acting, when we act, it’s acted out, and when we act like Theodore Roosevelt, we see what feelings he has, and what he’s mad about, and all the different kinds of things that we learn from the book.”*

Teachers who listened carefully to what students had to say came to appreciate how the ALL project created new opportunities for students to grow more comfortable with their ability to reflect on and share their learning with others in theater exercises, improvisation, and story writing tasks. And as students felt more comfortable and safe trying something new in their classroom with the teaching artist, teachers noticed that social-emotional dimensions of theater arts integration helps students to understand better the process of becoming a more successful learner:

*“... in the beginning they’re a little reluctant, a little shy, but then once they do it, then they feel more comfortable and they can share and they’re more relaxed. ...I really do think from the experiences that we have had with this program, it helped the students feel comfortable, feel more safe. In the beginning they’re always going to be more shy and reluctant, but once they get up there they can, you know, succeed.”*

Another teacher noted that the collaborative experiences intrinsic to acting were beneficial for student expression individually and as part of a group:

*“This year she introduced the children to theatre arts through literacy and the children had to use body and voice to express themselves and to share ideas. The theme this year was friendship and the children were participating as a group and then individually they were able to use body language, voice – silently and out-loud – to express scenes from stories, to show, rather work in partnerships and as a group and individually to show their feelings and it was a good experience for the children and it was another way for them to express themselves.”*

## **II. Connected, Integrated, and Engaging Curriculum**

The teachers in particular felt that the Center for Arts Education ALL Arts Plus Arts Integration program helped to create a more connected curricular experience for the students. Making more links to academic learning convinced these teachers that arts integration in particular contributes to more well-rounded student learning:

*“I feel that these [ALL units] are really beneficial for the children, because as a teacher, we focus primarily on academic work, and we neglect a lot of the arts, because we’re so busy with our curriculum. So having this truly was an asset, because ... we integrated arts into our curriculum with the Center for Arts Education. Which was fabulous.”*

Many ALL teachers were extremely enthusiastic about integration, because of the cohesion it created in their curriculum:

*“It worked out wonderfully because it was nice to really link [drama] – I mean, art is wonderful for art’s sake as well ... so it was really nice to have a literacy connection and the students took [integration] even a step further because the characters that they*

*created are based on the Mean Jean text; and because there was a piece in the Ready Jet Literacy Program where the children had to write fictional narratives. So we used those characters, created a fictional narrative, then [the students] had to write – it was like a really nice connection. I felt like it was very connected this year; really, really connected.”*

Similarly, another teacher felt that the students were highly engaged with drama related to their reading assignments and that acting was an effective way for students to connect enthusiastically with their overall English Language Arts curriculum:

*“The biggest rewards? Well...the kids love it: they have fun, something for them to look forward to whether it be once a week or twice a week and we want school to be fun, obviously. But in addition to that it is directly linked to our ELA, directly to the student program- the program is new to us – linked to Mean Jean [a classroom text], linked to the reading and writing.”*

### **III. Teacher Growth**

Several teachers pointed out how the program had impacted their own personal teaching styles. In both of the next two portfolio conference interviews, teachers described how their collaborative relationship with the CAE teaching artists brought forth more freedom and creativity in their teaching:

*“...I really feel like my teaching has changed this year to be a little but more creative, a little bit more fun - especially when you’re teaching younger kids, it’s important...”*

This teacher reflected on their newfound flexibility with teaching methods:

*“It [the ALL program] allowed me to be more free, not so rigid. ... seeing [how] the children respond well to [Teaching Artist C], you know, her approach to handling certain situations, helped me alter or modify some of things I would do or wouldn’t do during the day.”*

Most importantly, the program suggested to teachers that dramatic literacies promote a deeper understanding of their historical, scientific, and cultural studies.



#### IV. Evidence of Deeper Student Understanding and Developmental Growth

At the conclusion of the final portfolio conference interviews in the spring of 2013, teachers marveled about the many ways the ALL program provided evidence of unanticipated levels of student understanding of curricular content through a progressively sophisticated grasp of artistic literacy. As far as these teachers could tell, the more authentic and artful their students' theater skills became, the more comprehensive was their understanding of the curricular content.

Portfolio conference facilitator: *"So, what indication did you have that it really worked?"*

First Grade Teacher: *"From observations. I saw the growth. Because we started with a few students doing the role playing, and a lot of them were very shy [at first], and they weren't passionate. But as the year progressed, they became more comfortable speaking, acting in front of the group. They were acting well, and they made us laugh, right during the scenes, ... because it [the historical content] was very true. It was authentic acting."*

In general, most classroom teachers felt that the ALL teaching artists contributed both drama expertise and highly developed teaching skills that resulted in unanticipated levels of student development as evidenced by this comment in the final reflection section of the portfolio conference:

*"She [the teaching artist] was very compassionate with the children who had a difficult time in the beginning, speaking and performing. She was very patient, and we would construct them in a very positive way, to make them feel more comfortable. And you could see an improvement. I had children in the beginning of the year who would cry when they first had to speak. They would get very emotional and very scared. But now, towards the end, those students, some of them are the ones that wanted to participate first. So they would raise their hand first, and ask to perform first, which was nice."* —  
Second grade ALL teacher

When asked how the ALL program impacted academic achievement, this same teacher described how acting helped students to connect with literature in ways that 'dramatically' benefitted their writing skills:

Portfolio conference facilitator: *“What evidence do you have of that, outside of their acting? In other words, once the acting is done, how did it manifest on their academic performance?”*

Second grade teacher: *“With literary writing. We had the students write responses to literature, like ‘how the character felt during that scene,’ or questions like ‘why do you think the character did that,’ and ‘what information from the text can support your response.’ And I really feel like doing the [drama] work with Charlotte’s Web helped them really understand and become connected with the book, in a way that I might not be able to articulate to you. But I really saw that the kids were very involved. They felt the story like the story was- it came alive in our classroom. And I got evidence of that from their essays.”*

And another teacher claims that further residue of dramatic arts integration is increased vocabulary:

*“I noticed the vocabulary that they were using, that maybe we would have never taught them that vocabulary last year but I think they remembered it because of all the movement and all the fun games we played along with it. If you just sat there and read it to them - like the program wanted us to do - I think they would just forget it.”*

Another teacher attributes the deeper understanding of academic content and improved academic skills to students’ high engagement with artistic processes that provided a spark of creativity and interconnectivity that enabled the teachers to go beyond the normal parameters of academic teaching available to young elementary school students. The classroom teacher below describes the symbiotic impact of the ALL program with high quality classroom teaching focused on the value of interconnected, highly engaged arts-integrated teaching and learning:

*“ I think it came – I think your program [ALL] and our listening and learning came at just the right time because we’re approaching this new program and it’s hard for us to try to teach kids at this age about the human body or astronomy, the stars, it’s very difficult, the vocabulary is above them. So to add this art with it, this fun aspect to it, they kind of really enjoy...I think they’re [now] understanding it a lot more. Just us sitting reading to them, maybe half of them would get it. But then adding this element of art into it, it’s really kind of fun. It kind of just came at the right time – this new program and your program, I think they work perfectly together.”*

A particularly strong example of embodied scientific concepts came from first-graders who were ready and willing to demonstrate a high level of understanding abstract scientific concepts necessary to explain the “phases of the moon:”

Portfolio conference facilitator addressing three first graders: *I just want you to think for a second – does the moon really change shape or does it just look like it changes shape? What do you think?*

This inquiry led to all three students leaving their seats in order to enact the phases of the moon by way of representing the movements of the sun, the rotation of planet earth, and the orbit of the moon. As one six year old student summarizes the demonstration:

Student A: *“Something is like making the moon to do those shapes. And when its new and something is blocking it, in the night time, and sometimes it’s a crescent moon – like a banana – or a crescent moon and a full moon, that means like nothing is blocking it, it’s just a full moon.”*

In another area of inquiry, the facilitator looks at a drawing of an astronaut and poses the question:

*“Ok, and I see there’s a suit here – you called this a suit, right? Why does the astronaut need a suit?”*

And this same student answers:

*“Because there’s no gravity in space and that helmet is so you can breathe in space because there’s no air.”*

For this elementary student, the willingness to expound on scientific concepts such as how gravity works or doesn’t work in space or the chemical composition of the atmosphere was grounded in the dramatization of scientific phenomena in their drama activities.

## **Summary**

During the course of the final facilitated portfolio conferences, students astonished their teachers by demonstrating greater memory of concepts, use of sophisticated vocabulary, and a precociousness in the ability to explain and demonstrate curriculum content knowledge in the context of their ALL dramatic arts integration projects.

Analysis of reflections by the teaching artists were instrumental in establishing the dimensions of student learning that emerged during the initial year of the ALL project: (1) *cognitive and academic skills*, as indicated in the quotation above, and (2) *social-emotional skills*, as summarized below:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Evidence of Multiple Literacy Skills Encompassing Drama, Language, and Science</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Evidence of Growing Social-Emotional Development</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The ability to identify structural elements both fiction and non fiction reading</li> <li>▪ Dramatic acting (performance) skills directed toward demonstration, explanation, and problem solving related of student learning units aligned with science, social studies and language arts content standards</li> <li>▪ Awareness of elements of English vocabulary, grammar and syntax in performances of their own speech, reflections, and creative work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Willingness to engage fully in group learning activities.</li> <li>▪ The ability to make choices and reflect on the nature of those choices.</li> <li>▪ The ability to identify and embody complex human emotion in characters, action, character, setting, mood and other details embedded in the story.</li> <li>▪ Awareness of staging factors that influence the perception of human emotions.</li> <li>▪ The ability to detect human emotions contained in the stories and relation to their life circumstances.</li> </ul>

**Reflections on ALL Second Year Program**

This project demonstrates how CAE Drama Teaching Artists have benefitted both teachers and students in NYC elementary school. This project also demonstrates the value of aligning arts literacy processes as a principal means of enhancing young childrens’ cognitive and academic skills through arts integrated drama units in collaboration with the teaching artists:

*Creating and Constructing:* Conceiving and developing new dramatic ideas and work.

*Performing and Producing:* Realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation of artist ideas and work.

*Responding:* Interacting with and reflecting on drama integration ideas to develop understanding of other subject areas.

*Connecting:* Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and contextual knowledge.

*Investigation:* To use inquiry methods to observe, study, and assess through exploration or examination problem solving skills across disciplines.

*Reflection:* To think deeply or carefully about the learning process through documentation and explanation of academic and artistic content.