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The Effect of Immersion in an Art Intervention on the Social Skills of At-Risk Students

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Abstract

Art advocates readily claim that art saves lives. State agencies, art organizations and at-risk youth art programs have collaborated extensively to conduct studies (both qualitative and quantitative) that evaluated the effectiveness of art programs in creating positive change in at-risk youth. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of participation in an art intervention at promoting positive social development and reducing delinquent behaviors in a 10th grade “at-risk” female student. The student participated in the Razzamataz Puppet Company’s internship program and was involved in the hands-on creation of a production as well as the development the script. The results of this study indicated a gradual increase in positive social skills and a decrease in negative behaviors throughout the six-week period of the intervention as measured by the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliot, 2006). The implications of this study suggest that art interventions do have a measurable positive effect on student social skills, and that the benefits of involvement in an intensive art-intervention can be observed relatively quickly.

The Effect of Immersion in an Art Intervention on the Social Skills of At-Risk Students

The capacity of the arts to be a powerful catalyst for positive change in the lives of at-risk students is readily testified to by the artists and educators involved in art-oriented community outreach programs. “Art advocates like to say that art saves lives, and, increasingly, those who work with at-risk youth are becoming believers. The arts give kids who are troubled or failing at school new ways to succeed and cope with problems” (Fisbaugh, 1998, p. 4). The arts are proven to provide a valuable outlet for visual-spatially oriented youth whose needs are all too often unmet within the public school environment (Fisbaugh, 1998).

Art programs can provide a refuge for creatively inclined at-risk students (Harvey & Seeley 1984). The creative opportunities that the arts provide allow these students to have successful experiences within the school environment. Academic success is a massive factor in student motivation (Harvey & Seeley). When art programs are cut from schools due to funding shortfalls and lack of resources, it creates a dangerous situation. The at-risk students who would benefit the most from these programs now have no positive creative outlet to motivate them and lend meaning and validity to their school experience (Silverman 2004). Art programs can motivate troubled students to stay in school, prevent delinquent behaviors, and help curb underachievement (Fisbaugh 1998). Art programs can provide emotional support for creatively gifted, students who possess high fluid intelligence, and are under-served in the public school environment (Silverman).

Young people who are at-risk of involvement in dangerous and destructive behaviors need to experience success and engross themselves in activities that they find enjoyable. It is also very important for them to experience the emotional support and rewards that come when their work

is appreciated by society. Involvement in the arts can provide these vital opportunities (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations 2001).

Creatively gifted, fluid thinkers need and deserve opportunities to develop and use their skills and talents in positive ways. Without these opportunities many creatively gifted students develop negative attitudes and become involved in dangerous, delinquent, and criminal behaviors (Silverman 2004). A disproportionate number of juvenile delinquents are creatively gifted and talented. The Arapahoe County juvenile court system recently conducted a study that showed that 15 percent of the incarcerated youth in their facilities scored in the top 3rd percentile on standard IQ tests (Harvey & Seeley 1984). There are some professionals who would place the number of incarcerated youth who are gifted at closer to 25% (Silverman). Even the low estimate of fifteen percent is “five times the number of intellectually gifted youth in juvenile hall than would be predicted by chance” (Silverman). The vast majority of these gifted delinquents demonstrate high levels of creativity, fluid intelligence, and a spatial learning style (Silverman). These are the students who do not excel in the academic areas that are built to test and develop the crystallized, sequential learning styles that are emphasized in public schools. Students who are creatively gifted are often overlooked because sequential teaching methods fail to reach them (Harvey & Seeley).

The need for serious art intervention programs in our public schools and for outside opportunities for at-risk students is a serious concern. Participation in the arts is an essential component of a complete education (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations 2001).

Several serious and detailed research studies conducted and published in the last few years that examine the quantitative effects of art programs on cognitive development, and academic and behavioral success. In 1998 the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) published The

YouthARTS handbook for educators as a result of an intensive three year nation-wide evaluation, the YouthARTS Development Project. This project was executed in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Justice, Americans for the Arts, and several regional and local arts councils. This program clearly showed the positive results of art programs on the behavior and academic success of at-risk youth (Farnum & Schaffer 1998). *YouthARTS* evaluated three successful art intervention programs for at-risk youth. The research studies were conducted in Fulton County, Georgia, where arts programs served truant "status offenders" 14 to 16 years of age; Portland, Oregon, where the program was designed for youth 14 to 17 who had been adjudicated for juvenile crimes; and San Antonio, Texas, where youth 11 to 13 were referred to after-school arts education programs by principals and teachers as a preventive measure (Farnum & Schaffer).

The evaluators who studied the art intervention programs involved in *YouthARTS* looked at juvenile court records and academic performance for a control group of same age students who were not treated with an art intervention. "Findings show that youth involved in arts programs significantly decreased their frequency of delinquent behavior and experienced fewer court referrals. Other benefits were increased communication skills and improved ability to stick with tasks from beginning to end" (North Carolina Arts Council 1999, p.1).

Arts interventions that are designed to meet the specific needs of these at-risk "visual-spatial" learners are an effective and powerful tool that can be used to provide these young people with the creative outlet that they desperately need in order to succeed. Art has the capacity to dramatically change people's lives. Young people, especially, can be completely transformed through immersion in creative activities. Children and adults who have bad self-concepts gain confidence when they have the opportunity to express themselves through the arts (Boom 2003).

The arts teach powerful and unique lessons. Eisner (2002) argues that involvement in the arts teaches students critical lessons. The arts play a vital role in cognitive and social development. The research provides evidence that the arts are a vital tool for promoting the development of complex and critically subtle aspects of the mind. The arts promote vital development of visual-spatial, fluid, and creative problem solving skills. These skills and types of mental development are necessary tools that are children need in order to successfully deal with the uncertainties of real-world problems (Silverman 2004). These fluid thinking skills are vastly more important and useful than the crystallized types of intelligence that are emphasized in today's public schools (Silverman).

Involvement in the arts teaches students to understand qualitative relationships (Eisner 2002). Unlike the majority of academic areas where chronology and sequential problem solving rules are emphasized, in the arts, discernment is more important than rules and laws (Eisner). The arts can show students that complex problems can have several solutions and that most questions have more than one correct answer (Eisner). One of the most important lessons that the arts teach is an appreciation for multiple perspectives (Arts Education Partnership 2004). There are several valid ways to see the world, and perspective (literally) is everything (Eisner).

Students who are involved in creative activities learn that in the more complex forms of creative problem solving, change becomes the only constant. Circumstance and opportunity play vital roles in creative problem solving (Arts Education Partnership 2004). Success in the arts requires students to learn the ability to surrender to the unanticipated possibilities of the work as it unfolds (Eisner 2002). The arts clearly demonstrate the incredible potential of human cognition and show that neither words in a literal sense nor number can fully express the limits of what humans can understand (Arts Education Partnership). Involvement in art programs can teach

students that seemingly insignificant differences can produce tremendous results. Students learn that subtleties are critically important and infect everything. Art students learn to traffic in images and symbols. Ideas can be expressed through artwork that cannot be spoken in other ways (Silverman 2004). The arts teach communication and expressive skills. Students learn to get in touch with their emotions through working in creative ways (Arts Education Partnership). The value that peers, teachers and parents place on their artwork makes students feel a sense of ownership and importance (Eisner).

In 1998, the California Arts Council published the findings of a large, integrated research project designed to examine the scientific evidence of the effectiveness of art interventions in promoting positive change in students that was conducted in the Los Angeles area. The findings of this study showed that the participation of professional fine artists-as-teachers was absolutely necessary in arts interventions in order to have a positive effect of the social behaviors of the students involved (Stone, Bikson, Moini & McArthur 1998). Art intervention programs are most effective when professional artists teach them. Artists are better able to promote risk-taking behaviors and support the students' discovery of the arts in fluid and natural ways (Stone et al). This is also supported by the findings of Armistead, "Teachers must move from interpreting and teaching art to the constructivist notion of supporting children's discovery of the arts" (1996, p. 3).

Art programs are especially vital for at-risk students in their teen-age years and have a direct relationship with positive social development (Silverman 2004). Involvement in the arts gives teenage students the chance to create objects of value and experience images in new ways that require the development of critical thinking skills (Art Education Partnership 2004). This opportunity can help students foster positive self worth in two important ways: first, these young

people are given an opportunity to imagine a positive, productive future for themselves (probably for the first time) and second, involvement in the arts allows them to foster an identity as individuals who can have a positive impact on society (Art Education Partnership). “Given the critical nature of identity formation and personality development that occurs in adolescence, it is especially important to understand these processes as they take place in middle school and high school arts settings” (Art Education Partnership 2004, p. 11).

The arts play a major role in effecting positive change in students’ social and personal development. The arts are form of expression in both the individual and the collective sense and can help create positive self-esteem and teamwork skills (Art Education Partnership 2004). Students who learn to deal with the inherent frustrations involved in the creative process develop resilience. Involvement in creative activities helps build vital social skills like tolerance, teamwork and empathy (Art Education Partnership).

Involvement in the arts teaches young people that they have the capacity to express themselves in positive ways and create objects of beauty (Appel 2004). This can have a powerful effect on their outlook and attitudes and can prevent them from expressing themselves in violent and destructive ways. By spending their time engaged in creative and positive activities, young people learn to appreciate their talents and abilities (Appel).

The *YouthARTS* Development Project (Farnum & Schaffer 1998) contains relevant models and best practices for the successful operation of at-risk youth art programs. This study found factors that were common to successful art intervention programs. The successful programs utilized art as a tool to engage the students in creative activities that increased their sense of self worth (Farnum & Schaffer). Artists, social workers, teachers, community outreach staff, and the student’s family operated the programs collaboratively. The youth involved also

played an active role in the programs. Community and family involvement was also a critical aspect of programs success (Farnum and Schaffer). Many of these programs operate in violent urban neighborhoods, so offering a refuge from violence and substance abuse was also a key factor (Farnum and Schaffer). Opportunities for hands-on learning, individualized attention, apprenticeship and internships opportunities and a public showing of the students work (gallery exhibitions, public concerts, performances, etc.) were all key elements of success for art intervention programs (Farnum and Schaffer).

In 2002, the Arts Education Partnership published *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development*. *Critical Links* is quite possibly the best contemporary report on arts and learning and contains a synthesis of 62 major research projects conducted over 3 years on the effectiveness of art programs in promoting cognitive, academic and pro-social development. The hard data provides vital evidence for the true power of art programs to provide a valuable tool to open up the potential of students, especially at-risk teens (Arts Education Partnership 2002). Traditional research methods are limited in their effectiveness and there are serious needs for improvement in the arts research infrastructure (Arts Education Partnership). There have been several new developments in our understanding of the cognitive process in the last decade and these findings need to be integrated into new research in art education (Arts Education Partnership).

In reviewing and summarizing the findings of *Critical Links*, Nick Rabkin (2002) stated, “connections are present between art and social and emotional development. Dance is connected to self-confidence and persistence; music to self-efficacy and self-concept; drama to concentration, comprehension, conflict resolution, and self-concept; multi-arts to achievement motivation, cognitive engagement, self-confidence, risk-taking, perseverance, and leadership.

Several studies show children become more engaged in their studies when the arts are integrated into their lessons. Others show that at-risk students often find pathways through the arts to broader academic successes” (p.1).

In 2004, the Arts Education Partnership published a follow-up report to *Critical Links* (2002) that contains valuable information on best practices in the field of at-risk youth art programs, as well as research recommendations based on recent fieldwork in the area of cognitive and social development. It also recommends approaches that can be used to place arts education research within the core of important research in the social sciences (Arts Education Partnership 2004). Models for continuing arts education research should be based on specific areas of interest, discussions about current research findings, and recommendations for new studies. According to this report there are four main areas that should be researched further: “(1) cognition and expression; (2) personal and social development; (3) community, democracy, and civil society; and (4) teaching and learning environments” (p. 1).

Review of the literature has shown that art interventions can be effective in promoting cognitive development and pro-social behaviors, especially in at-risk youth. Art interventions can also have a positive impact on other academic areas and reduce delinquent behaviors. The literature showed that further research is needed in several areas including the effect of art interventions on personal and social development, particularly positive social skills. This study was conducted to answer the question, “Does immersion in an art intervention that exposes at-risk students to new forms of creative expression have a positive effect on their social skills?” In other words, what is the effect of participation in a professional Razzamataz puppetry production (involving both creative writing exercises and the creation of art work) on measures of perceived social skills for a female student at-risk for behavioral problems?

Method

Participants

A 16-year old female student in the 10th grade at a large high school in the Mountain West was chosen to participate in this research project. This student was identified as “at-risk” prior to the initiation of this study and also showed high creative potential and visual-spatial inclination. “At-risk” is defined as students who are statistically more likely to fail both academically and socially because of pre-existing conditions including: socio-economic status, race, and family environment. The participant comes from a single-parent home and has a history of behavioral problems. The participant was referred to the Razzamataz Puppet Company by the FutureSelf program. FutureSelf is a Colorado Springs based organization that works with troubled youth ages 12 – 17, who are referred to the program by teen-court as a productive and potentially beneficial way to promote pro-social changes through the arts. The student was given a Razzamataz pre-program interview to determine areas of strength, interest, potential benefit, and problem areas. The interview suggested that the participant had high interest in being involved in this project. Informed consent and assent were obtained prior to the initiation of this study.

Setting

Production meetings and puppet building workshops were held at the Razzamataz production studio in Manitou Springs, CO. Rehearsals were held at the Smokebrush Gallery in Colorado Springs, and at the Business of Art Center in Manitou Springs. The finished production debuted at the Smokebrush Gallery, Nov 17, 18, and 19th. The participant worked as a part of team of 8 high-school age student interns, under the guidance of 3 adult supervisors, all of whom are professional artists.

Materials

The materials used in this project included: an initial interview form, the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliot 2006) test materials, a video camera that was used to record student behaviors during workshops, a television that was used to watch the recorded videos, a Social Skills Demonstration form used to record and track behaviors, a variety of building supplies (lumber, cloth, wire-mesh, PVC, hardware, etc.) and art supplies (glues and epoxies, paints, brushes, decorations, etc.), building tools (pliers, power tools, saws, sewing machines, etc.), print-outs of scripts and notebooks for revisions and brainstorming, and various sound, lighting, and special effects equipment.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable was the student's demonstration of social skills. The students' social skills were assessed using the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliot 2006), a standard assessment of social skills. A baseline measure of her social skills was taken prior to the beginning of the intervention and social skills were video recorded and tracked using a researcher created form designed to track three of the most important skills tested for by the *SSRS (Social Skills Rating System)*.

The social skills that were specifically measured during the intervention phase of this research project included: sharing materials, communicating clearly, and team participation. For the purpose of this study, "sharing materials" was defined as the ability to participate in art making activities with other students and share materials and supplies without conflict when sharing is required. "Communicating clearly" was defined as the ability to verbally express ideas and participate in creative exercises and brainstorming activities in a productive and engaged way. "Team participation" was defined as the ability to work with same ages peers and older

adult supervisors on a production team successfully by contributing to the ideas and hands-on building and development work of the team in a positive way.

Each of these three social skills was recorded on a researcher developed social skills tracking sheet. Each session with the participant was recorded using a video camera. The video was then evaluated to track whether the student displayed each of the three social skills, sharing materials, communicating clearly, and team participation.

The type of data collection used was permanent product recording on a videotape in a video camera. The video camera was plugged into a television set and watched the evening of each session. The evaluator watched for the three social skills being tracked. If the social skill was exhibited, then the evaluator put a “yes” next to the social skill on the tracking sheet. If the desired social skill was not exhibited the evaluator put a “no” on the tracking sheet next to the corresponding social skill. The raw data answers were then quantified using 5 points for a “yes” answer and zero points for a “no” answer.

At the end of the intervention the students’ total battery of social skills was once again assessed using the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliot 2006) to determine the effect of the intervention.

Independent Variables

The independent variable was the use of an art-intervention that exposed the “at-risk” student to new forms of creative expression. The art intervention that was used involved immersion in a professional puppetry/ experimental theatre company, Razzamataz Productions. The student participated in the creation, rehearsal, and performance of a work of contemporary puppet theatre. This was a multi-media experience that involved construction of puppets and props, the development and rehearsal of an original script, and all aspects of a professional

production including: lighting, sound, stage action, and special effects. This intervention involved participation in two alternating aspects of the development and production of a professional puppet show within the Razzamataz Puppet Company, ultimately created for public performance. The two alternating interventions were:

1. Creative writing: script/ story development.

The participant was part of a developmental production team and actively engaged in brainstorming, script, story, plot and character development. This activity involved detailed surveys of the entire script, characters, dialogue, and breaking the movement into essential scenes. This coincided with the development of blueprints and drawings of the puppets that were built and used in the performance of the show. An essential part of this intervention involved the creation of dialogue through techniques including: trying to imagine what each character would sound like, what sorts of words and phrasing they would sound natural using, and how to develop strong characterization thru the dialogue.

This involved experimentation by assigning different crewmembers different voices and discussing how the physical process of the performance would function. Group readings were critical to this phase of development. Each crewmember read the dialogue for their assigned character and I also read the movement cues that were to be used in the production (i.e. open curtains, up applause sign, etc.). We read thru the script slowly and tried to put the emphasis together correctly to carry the movement of the story. We studied our blueprints and pictures as we read. We also walked thru difficult and unclear sections until they became well understood. During this stage, I asked the students/ interns to summarize what they have just read to make sure that they have a clear understanding of the script and action. I also had them jot down notes for each of their characters and parts, including movements, positioning, stage directions, etc...

This part of the project was very similar to a rehearsal and helped to enforce a clear spatial understanding and comprehensive understanding of the script.

2. Hands-on art: creation of puppets and props.

This intervention involved full immersion in the universe of 3D design, functional sculpture, 2D prop and stage design, and careful engineering of the puppets to make them able to perform certain actions. The participant worked on a production team and was involved in various art activities including: painting, sewing, elaborate 3D design, wood-working, basic electronics, sculpting, working with resins, epoxies and mold making, the safe use power tools, soldering guns, and chemicals. Involvement in the puppetry arts allowed for the connection and integration of multiple art forms, techniques, and media. Each piece of artwork created was carefully planned and designed to perform specific functions as part of the show. Within this structure their still existed ample room for creative freedom and exploration.

To ensure that the exposure of the student to this intervention was a “new form of creative expression”, the student was given an entrance interview that evaluated her participation in these types of activities prior to the start of the intervention. Students are evaluated and chosen for this program based on interest, and demonstration of creative potential.

Design

This project was evaluated using an alternating treatment design. The participant was involved in alternating periods of creative writing/ script development activities and hands-on building activities (essentially multi-media sculpture). Demonstration of social skills was tracked and compared for each intervention to determine effects. When a treatment was determined to occasion the desired social skills at the highest level, that treatment condition was maintained throughout the remainder of the study.

The interventions were activated using the Alternating Treatment Design over the course of a 6-week period in 10 intensive sessions between October 23rd and November 17th, 2006. The sessions ranged in duration from 3 to 6 hours in length. Session 1 was three hours long and involved the creative writing intervention. Session 2 was five hours long and involved the creative writing intervention. Session 3 was six hours long and involved the hands-on art intervention. Session 4 was three hours long and involved the hands-on art intervention. Session 5 was four hours long and involved the creative writing intervention. Session 6 was six hours long and involved the hands-on art intervention. Session 7 was four hours long and involved the creative writing intervention. Session 8 was five hours long and involved the creative writing intervention. During session 8 the participant demonstrated all three of the desired social skills and so the creative writing intervention was maintained for the rest of the project. Thus, session 9 involved both the creative writing and the hands-on art interventions and was four hours long. Session 10 was five hours long and involved continued use of both the creative writing and hands-on art interventions.

The visual data was analyzed by plugging the video camera into a television set and watching it at the evaluator's home after each session. The evaluator watched for the three social skills being tracked. If the social skill was exhibited, then the evaluator put a "yes" next to the social skill on the tracking sheet. If the desired social skill was not exhibited the evaluator put a "no" on the tracking sheet next to the corresponding social skill. The raw data answers were then quantified using 5 points for a "yes" answer and zero points for a "no" answer.

Procedures

The participant was given a pre-program interview prior to involvement in the Razzamataz program to evaluate interests, potential benefits, and strengths. The guidelines used

to develop the Razzamataz pre-program interview were based on current national standards for identifying creatively gifted/ talented youth. The interview was designed to evaluate at-risk students for potential creative giftedness and looked for: 1. Students who are identified by his/her regular or special education teachers, as having artistic needs which are not being met in the school environment. 2. Students who possess measurable abilities that give clear evidence of unique talent in visual or performing arts or both. The student interview questions were:

1. Do you enjoy artistic activities (i.e. drawing, writing stories or poetry, making collages, painting, dancing, acting, sculpting, playing music, etc.)?
2. Do you spend class time drawing or writing for your own pleasure rather than engaging in the class activities?
3. What types of artistic activities have you participated in?
4. What types of artistic would you like to be able to participate in?
5. How do you think involvement in the Razzamataz Puppet Company could benefit you?

Prior to beginning the intervention the participant was evaluated using the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliot, 2006) to obtain a baseline of her social skills using the teacher and student evaluation forms.

The participant met for production meetings, development, and building workshops 3 – 4 times (approx 12 hrs) a week for the duration of the 6-week intervention. She worked in a group of 8 teen-age student interns under the supervision of 3 professional artist-educators. The interventions alternated between script development and the hands-on building of puppets and props. During the intervention phase, the student's behavior was recorded and analyzed using video recording.

Following the intervention phase, the participant took a post-test using the *Social Skills Rating System* (Gresham & Elliot 2006) in order to determine if the overall intervention had an effect on her social skills. Conclusions were drawn on the effectiveness of each of the alternating interventions based on the data available from the video recorded track of behavior throughout the intervention phase.

Reliability

The integrity of the data collected was maintained by using video recordings to evaluate the participant's behaviors throughout the research project. To ensure reliability and consistency the video recorded data was analyzed by two separate evaluators. Each evaluator looked for three specific social skills to be demonstrated during each meeting and workshop and recorded whether the behavior was demonstrated on the social skills tracking form that was specifically designed for this project. The data was evaluated at least one time per week by each evaluator. The observers strove for at least 85% agreement in their observations. The two evaluators achieved 100% reliability on 100% of the data sample and were 100% in agreement.

Results

Table 1 compares the pre-test and post-test results from the *Social Skills Rating System* student form (Gresham & Elliot 2006). This score comparison showed increases in every area of the participant's self-perceived social skills from the pre-test to the post-test (i.e. Cooperation, Assertion, Empathy, and Self-Control). The participant's total standard score and corresponding percentile ranking increased from 25th to 87th. This increase signifies an increase from the low end of the social skills ranking to the high end. This increasing positive trend is illustrated in Figure 1.

Table 2 compares the pre-test and post-test results from the *Social Skills Rating System* teacher form (Gresham & Elliot 2006). This score comparison also showed improvements in each area of the social skills rated from the time of the pre-test to that of the post-test (i.e. Cooperation, Assertion, and Self-Control). Figure 2 illustrates the increasing trend in student social skills. The student's social skills rating increased from the 9th percentile to the 34th.

The teacher form also rates Problem Behaviors and Academic Competence. On the pre-test the participant received a percentile ranking of 77th on the Problem Behavior scale, which indicates an average level of problem behaviors. On the post-test the participant received a percentile ranking of 16th, which indicated a low level of problem behaviors. These results are illustrated in Figure 3 and demonstrate a decreasing trend in the area of problem behaviors.

The student received an Academic Competence percentile ranking of 66th on both the pre-test and on the post-test. This score is illustrated in Figure 4 and represents no change in academic ratings during the intervention.

Table 3 represents the observations of student behavior throughout the six-week intervention in three key social skills areas: Sharing Materials, Communicating Clearly, and Team Participation. These behaviors were measured during 10 sessions. The two alternating interventions were tracked in separate sessions. During the first three sessions, the participant demonstrated only one of the targeted behaviors. During sessions 4, 5, 6, and 7, the participant demonstrated two of the targeted behaviors. During session 8 (a Creative Writing intervention) the participant demonstrated all of the targeted behaviors. The Creative Writing intervention was then maintained throughout the remainder of the project along with the Hands-on Art intervention. The participant continued to demonstrate all the targeted behaviors throughout the final two sessions.

Figure 5 represents a quantified view of the assessment intervention record. Student behavior was quantified by assigning a value of 5 points to each behavior that was exhibited during a session (as signified by a “Yes” on Table 3), and by assigning a value of Zero to each behavior that was not exhibited (as signified by a “No” on Table 3). Quantification of the assessment intervention record demonstrates a gradually increasing trend in positive social skills demonstration throughout the 6-week duration of the intervention, culminating in the maximum score of 15 for the last three sessions.

Tables 1 and 2 show perceived student improvement across all areas of the social skills rated by the SSRS. Table 3 demonstrates gradual improvement in the 3 targeted social skills areas throughout the intervention. The two evaluators achieved 100% reliability on 100% of the data sample and were 100% in agreement.

Discussion

This study was conducted to answer the question, “Does immersion in an art intervention that exposes at-risk students to new forms of creative expression have a positive effect on their social skills?” The results indicate that the answer to this question is a resounding, “yes”.

The results of this study indicate a direct relationship between student participation in an intensive art intervention and an increasing trend in perceived positive social skills over the 6-week period of the intervention. The results also clearly show a decrease in perceived problem behaviors from the pre-test to the post-test. This effect is noticeable on both the teacher and student forms of the SSRS (Gresham & Elliot 2006).

It is noteworthy that the participant and the evaluator had different perceptions of the types and levels of social skills and problem behavior changes. The participant began the project with social skills that they self rated as “Low”. By the culmination of the intervention the

participant self-rated their social skills as “High”. In comparison the evaluator rated the participants social skills as “Low” on the pre-test and although this behavior level improved significantly, the student still received a rating of “Low” on the post-test. However, the student’s ratings for problem behaviors improved dramatically from a “High” rating on the evaluators pre-test to “Low” on the post-test. These results imply that the student noticed high levels of personal growth in their own social skills, while the evaluator was more attuned to improvements in the student’s problem behaviors.

These findings have several key implications. Foremost, this intervention proved dramatically effective in improving the student’s perceived social skills and decreasing perceived problem behaviors. So why does the public education system not utilize these types of intensive hands-on art interventions more often? There are numerous reasons for the public education systems failure to utilize these types of interventions. These reasons include: funding priorities, public perceptions, social conditions, economic realities, and political interests.

The literature reviewed in this study provides a detailed body of evidence to support the integration of intensive arts programs in schools. The two most valuable key sources utilized in the literature review include *Critical Links* (Arts Education Partnership 2002) and *YouthARTS* (Farnum & Schaffer 1998).

Critical Links supports the findings of this research project regarding the role of the arts in effecting positive change in students’ social and personal development. The arts are form of expression in both the individual and the collective sense and can help create positive self-esteem and teamwork skills. Students who learn to deal with the inherent frustrations involved in the creative process develop resilience. Involvement in creative activities helps build vital social skills like tolerance, teamwork and empathy (Art Education Partnership 2004).

Another implication of the findings involves a correlation between the student's self-perceptions relative to their social skills. Through involvement in this integrated arts intervention, the participant achieved a sense of belonging and began to naturally display more positive social skills and fewer problem behaviors. The participant displayed a gradual improvement in their ability to be a "team player" and this correlated directly to their self-perception of their social skills. These findings collaborate the results of Elliot Eisner's work in the area of pro-social development through the arts discussed in *The Arts and Creation of Mind* (2002).

The results of this study have powerful potential applications in educational settings. First, general education teachers should attempt to integrate more hands-on art projects into their classrooms in order to engage students who are visual-kinesthetic learners. This can prevent these students from developing problem behaviors and give them an outlet to develop positive social skills. Second, students who display low levels of social skills and high levels of problem behaviors should be referred to hands-on art intervention programs in order to improve their behaviors. Third, schools should make a concerted effort to create extra-curricular programs (i.e. drama clubs, theatre troupes, etc.) and connect to existing programs in the community (i.e. Razzamataz Productions) in order to evaluate and refer students to programs that they can benefit from.

The participant in this research project demonstrated significant improvements in her levels of perceived social skills. This finding also collaborates the results of *Critical Links*, which suggest that the arts play a major role in effecting positive change in students' social and personal development. The arts are form of expression in both the individual and the collective sense and can help create positive self-esteem and teamwork skills. Students who learn to deal

with the inherent frustrations involved in the creative process develop resilience. “Involvement in creative activities helps build vital social skills like tolerance, teamwork and empathy” (Art Education Partnership 2004, p. 10).

The need for serious art intervention programs in our public schools and for outside opportunities for at-risk students is a serious concern. At-risk students need access to the arts in their curriculum. Integrated hands-on activities in the arts can help develop the intellect, provide unique learning opportunities, and connect students with profound works of human greatness. It also exposes them to multiple cultures, and gives them access to the lessons and contributions of all of recorded history. “Dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts are essential parts of a complete education” (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations 2001, p. 11).

The results of this research study in the area of significantly decreased problem behaviors are supported by the findings of *YouthARTS* which show that youth involved in arts programs significantly decreased their frequency of delinquent behavior and experienced fewer court referrals. The *YouthARTS* findings also suggested increased communication skills in participants and an improved ability to stick with tasks from beginning to end (Farnum & Schaffer 1998).

Conclusions are limited by the small amount of data points, which include assessments of only 10 sessions of student participation in the intervention. Although these sessions were quite long, with durations between 3 – 6 hours, this research project would have benefited from additional data points. Conclusions are also limited by constraints on methods for collecting data on social skills exhibited outside of the art intervention program. Questions exist as to the effectiveness of each of the alternating interventions on the participant’s social skills. The hands-on art component of the intervention and the creative writing component were used in conjunction. Would the results have been different if only one or the other had been used? For

the purposes of this project that was not feasible, but could have had a significantly different effect. This research project faced certain constraints because it was implemented into an already successful and established arts-intervention program.

Future research in the effectiveness of arts interventions is needed to determine exactly which types of interventions are most effective, and which produce the greatest benefits to students. Potential research questions include: 1. “Does participation in arts intervention programs produce long term benefits for at-risk students?” 2. “Do the positive behavioral results seen within an arts intervention program generalize into other areas of an at-risk student’s social life?” 3. “Do arts intervention programs produce positive academic development results in at-risk students?” 4. “If hands-on art activities are integrated into general education classrooms do they produce pro-social effects and social skills development in the entire class?” And 5. “If hands-on art activities are integrated into general education classrooms do they produce positive academic improvements in the students?” These studies could be conducted in general education classrooms and within group home settings. These research studies would provide results that could have important implications for policy makers, social scientists, and educators.

In conclusion, the results of this paper imply that arts-interventions are extremely effective at reducing problem behaviors and promoting positive social skills development in at-risk students. The importance of using art intervention programs to promote the positive changes in troubled young people cannot be ignored. Ideas about learning and teaching styles and approaches should be re-evaluated in public school settings. Arts interventions should be supported and utilized by schools, court programs, and social services organizations to provide at-risk students with a valuable and powerful means to achieve success.

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Table 1

Social Skills Rating System Student Score Comparison from Pre-Test and Post-Test

Pre-Test Score		Behavior Level
Cooperation	10	Low
Assertion	10	Average
Empathy	19	Average
Self-Control	9	Average
Total Raw Score	48	Average
Standard Score	90	
Percentile Rank	25	Low
Confidence Band	78 to 102	
Post-Test Score		Behavior Level
Cooperation	15	Average
Assertion	13	Average
Empathy	20	High
Self-Control	14	High
Total Raw Score	62	High
Standard Score	117	
Percentile Rank	87	High
Confidence Band	111 to 123	

Table 2

Social Skills Rating System Teacher Score Comparison from Pre-Test and Post-Test

Pre-Test Score		Behavior Level
Social Skills		
Cooperation	7	Low
Assertion	16	Average
Self-Control	8	Low
Total Raw Score	31	Low
Standard Score	80	
Percentile Rank	9	Low
Confidence Band	72 to 88	
Problem Behaviors		
Externalizing	3	Average
Internalizing	5	Average
Total Raw Score	8	Average
Standard Score	111	
Percentile Rank	77	Average
Confidence Band	108 to 114	
Academic Competence	40	Average
Standard Score	106	
Percentile Rank	66	

Post-Test Score		Behavior Level
Social Skills		
Cooperation	13	Low
Assertion	16	Average
Self-Control	12	Average
Total Raw Score	41	Average
Standard Score	94	
Percentile Rank	34	Low
Confidence Band	86 to 102	
Problem Behaviors		
Externalizing	0	Average
Internalizing	1	Average
Total Raw Score	1	Low
Standard Score	85	
Percentile Rank	16	Low
Confidence Band	74 to 96	
Academic Competence	40	Average
Standard Score	106	
Percentile Rank	66	

Table 3

Razzamataz Intervention Assessment Record

Date	Intervention Type	Social Skill	Observed
10/23	Creative Writing	Sharing Materials	No = 0
		Communicating Clearly	No = 0
		Team Participation	Yes = 5
10/26	Creative Writing	Sharing Materials	Yes = 5
		Communicating Clearly	No = 0
		Team Participation	No = 0
10/29	Hands-on Art	Sharing Materials	Yes = 5
		Communicating Clearly	No = 0
		Team Participation	No = 0
10/30	Hands-on Art	Sharing Materials	Yes = 5
		Communicating Clearly	Yes = 5
		Team Participation	No = 0
11/03	Creative Writing	Sharing Materials	No = 0
		Communicating Clearly	Yes = 5
		Team Participation	Yes = 5
11/04	Hands-on Art	Sharing Materials	Yes = 5
		Communicating Clearly	Yes = 5

		Team Participation	No = 0
11/06	Creative Writing	Sharing Materials	No = 0
		Communicating Clearly	Yes = 5
		Team Participation	Yes = 5
11/11	Creative Writing	Sharing Materials	Yes = 5
		Communicating Clearly	Yes = 5
		Team Participation	Yes = 5
11/13	Creative Writing & Hands-on Art	Sharing Materials	Yes = 5
		Communicating Clearly	Yes = 5
		Team Participation	Yes = 5
11/17	Creative Writing & Hands-on Art	Sharing Materials	Yes = 5
		Communicating Clearly	Yes = 5
		Team Participation	Yes = 5

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Illustrative results of student social skills self-rankings from pre and post test SSRS.

Figure 2. Illustrative results of student social skills rankings from teacher pre and post SSRS.

Figure 3. Illustrative results of student problem behaviors from teacher pre and post SSRS.

Figure 4. Illustrative results of teacher pre and post SSRS Academic Competence ratings.

Figure 5. Illustrative results of quantified intervention assessment record.

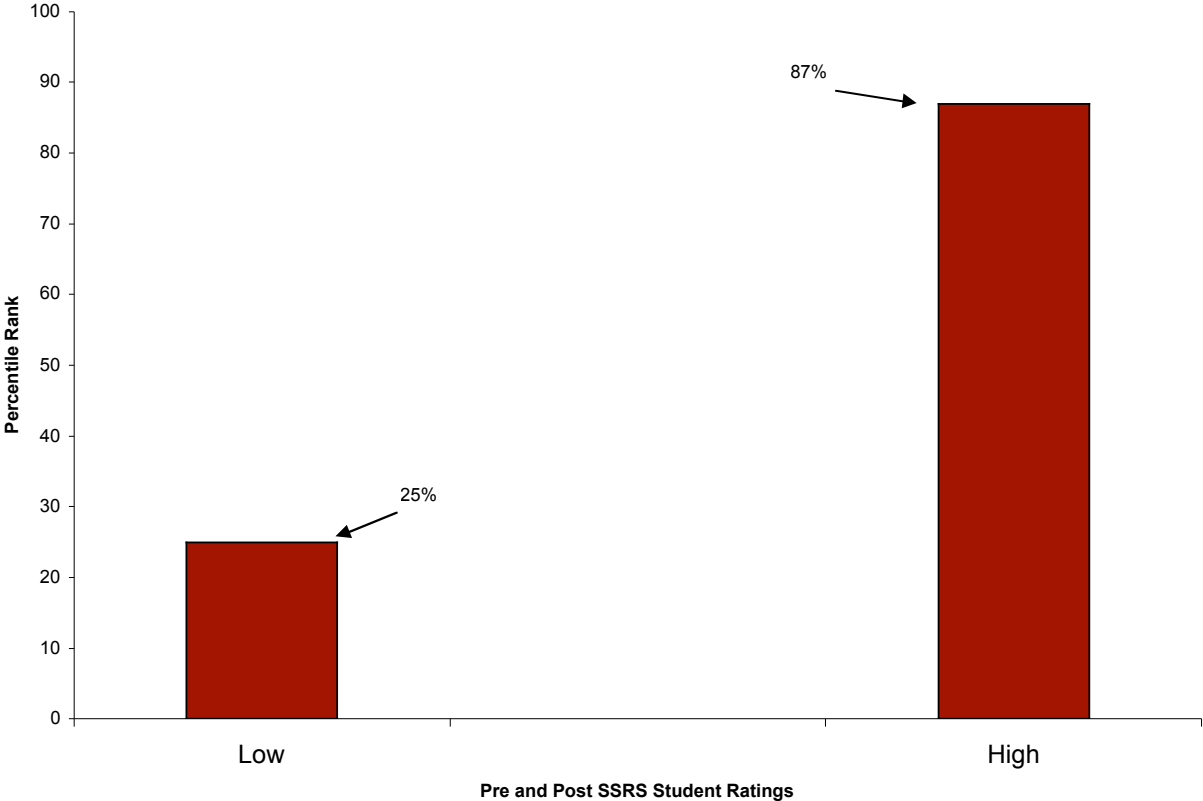


Figure 1.

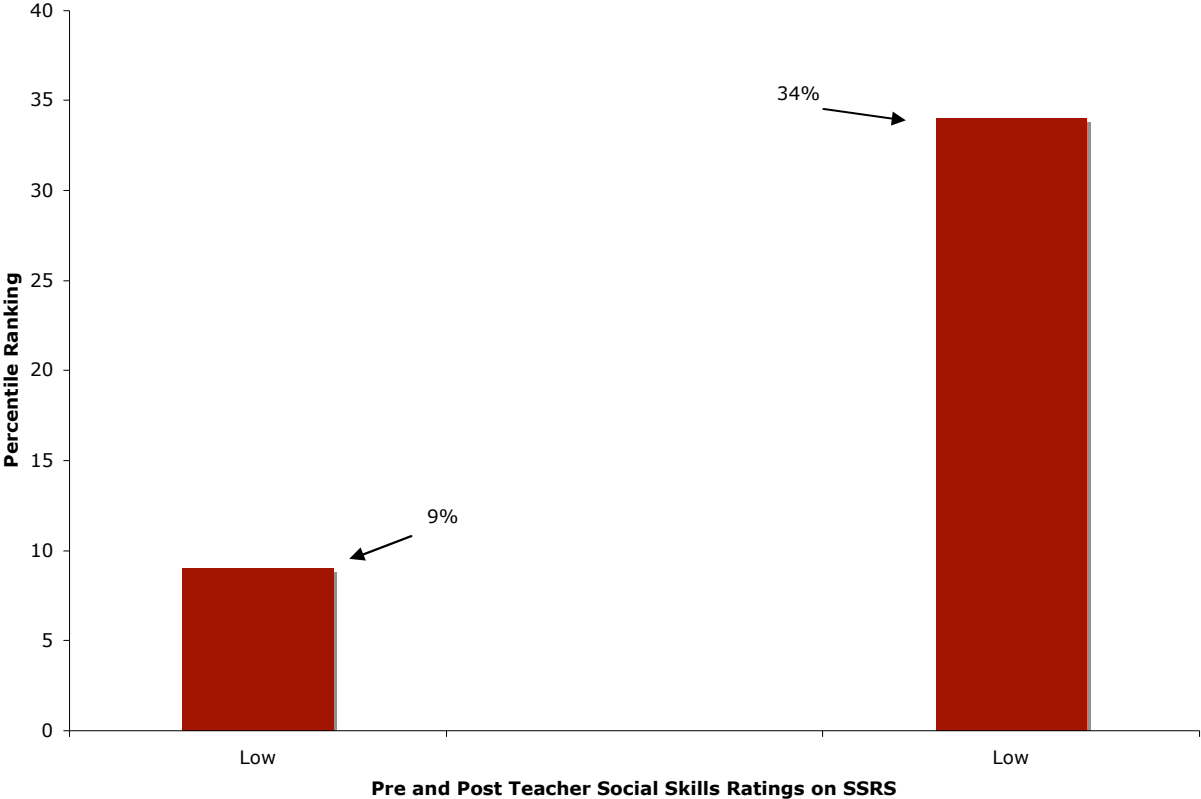


Figure 2

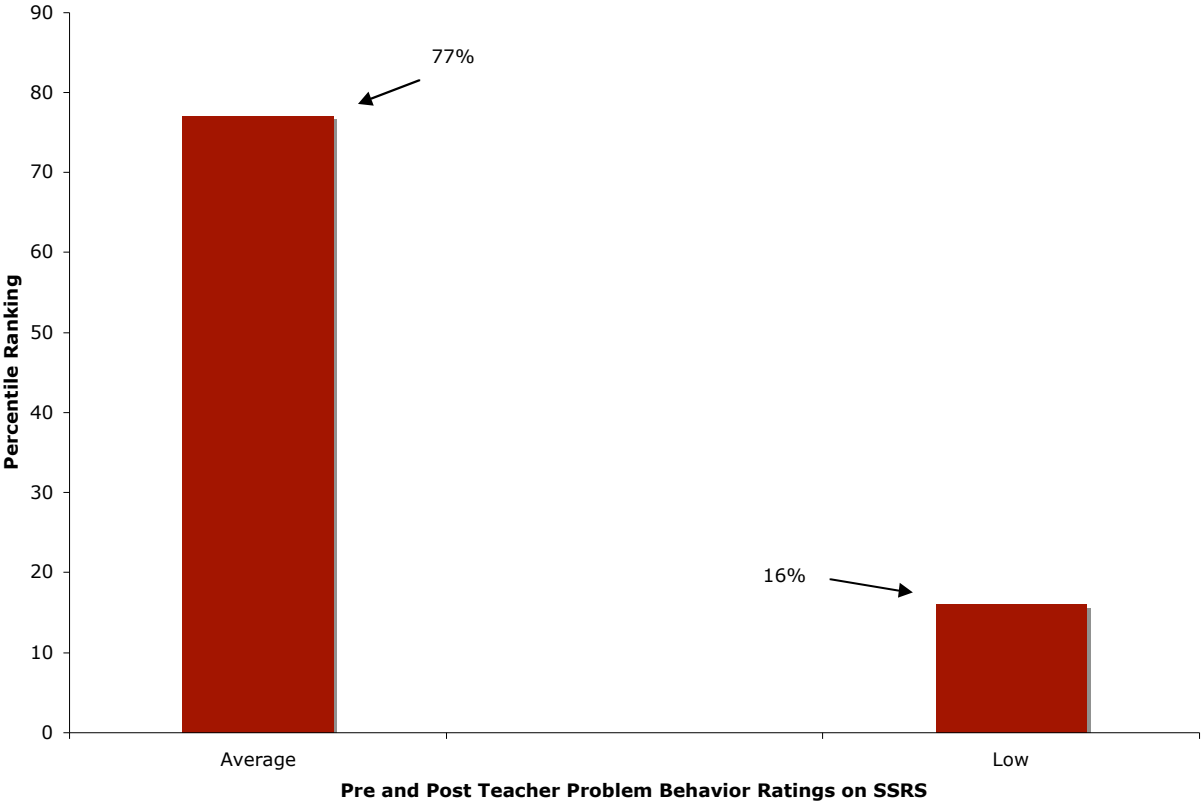


Figure 3

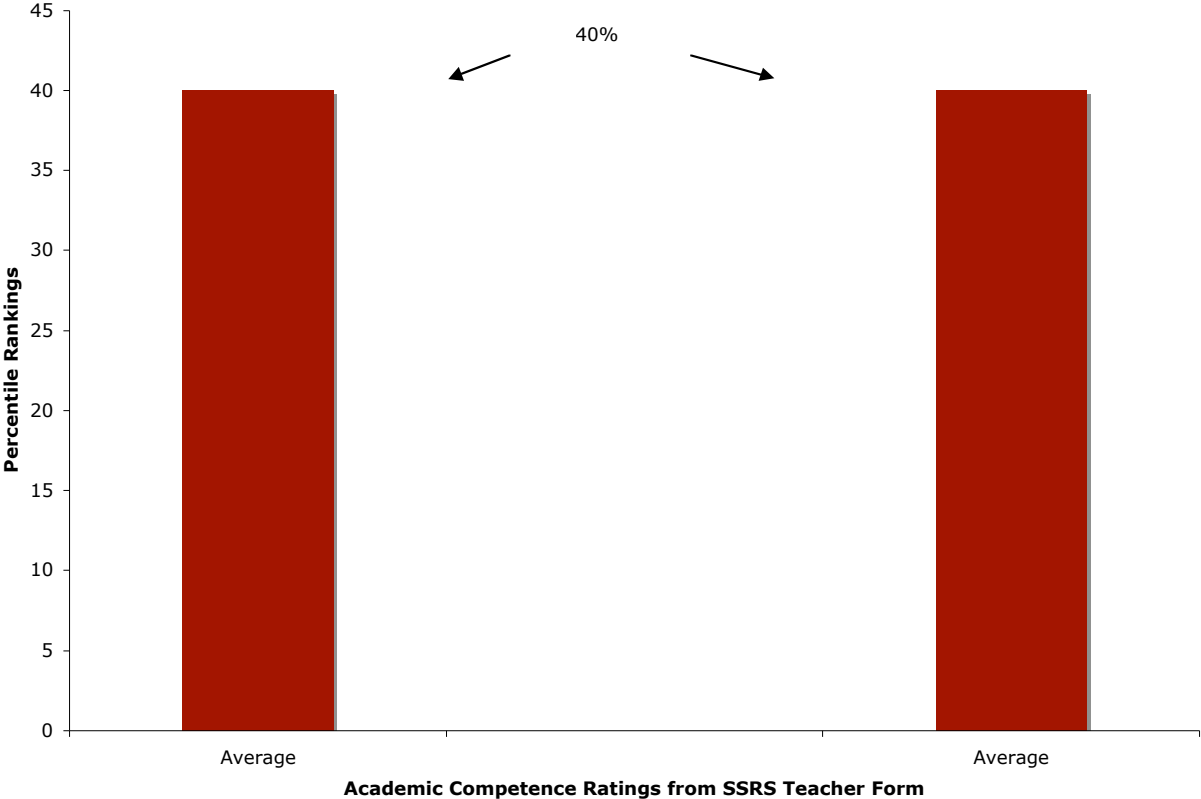


Figure 4

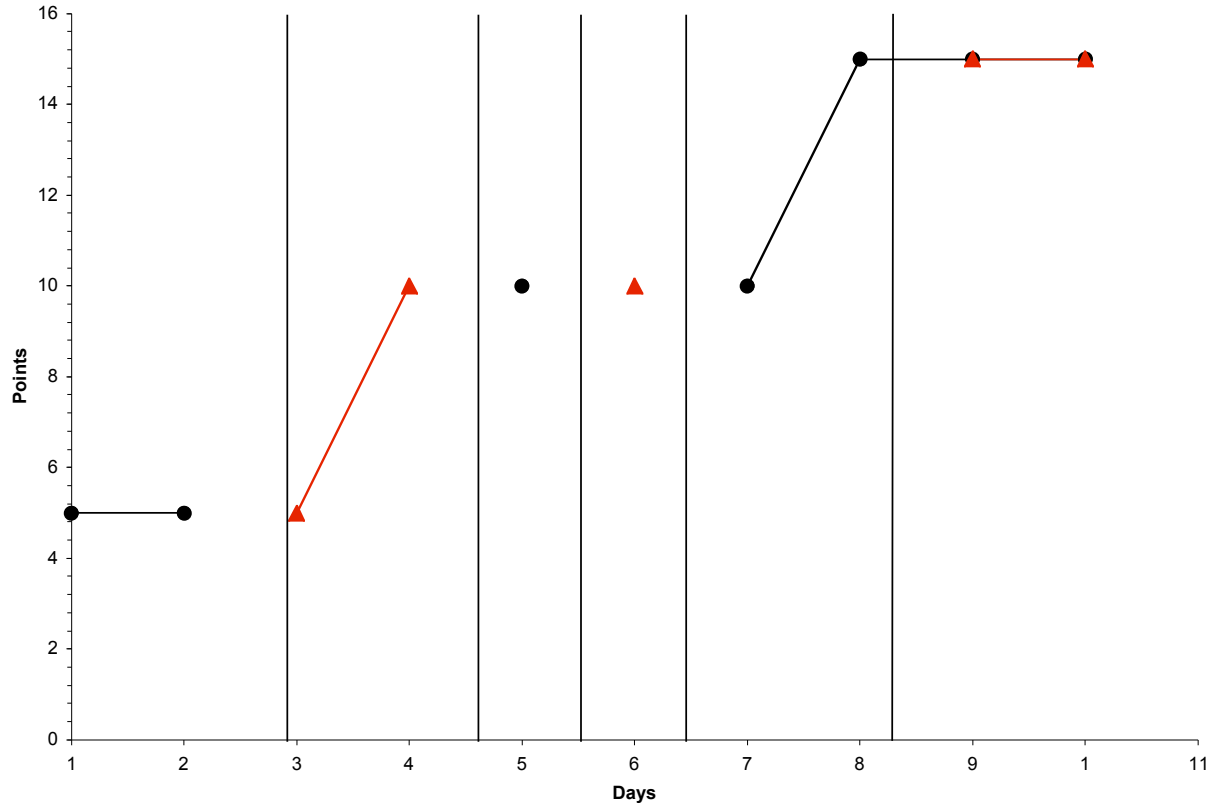


Figure 5

Appendix A

Razzamataz Pre-Program Interview

The guidelines used to develop the Razzamataz pre-program interview are based on current national standards for identifying creatively gifted/ talented youth. This form can be used by a teacher to informally evaluate and recommend a potentially creatively GT student to ANY arts intervention program.

Things to look for:

- His/her regular or special education teacher identifies a student as having artistic needs that are not being met in the school environment.
- The student possesses measurable abilities that give clear evidence of unique talent in visual or performing arts or both.
- Creative abilities in visual and/or performing arts grades K-12 must be demonstrated.

Student Interview Questions:

- Do you enjoy artistic activities (i.e. drawing, writing stories or poetry, making collages, painting, dancing, acting, sculpting, playing music, etc.)?
- Do you spend class time drawing or writing for your own pleasure rather than engaging in the class activities?
- What types of artistic activities have you participated in?
- What types of artistic would you like to be able to participate in?
- How do you think involvement in the Razzamataz Puppet Company could benefit you?

Appendix B

Razzamataz Social Skills Tracking Form

Evaluator:

Date:

Session Date, Time & Location (i.e. Smokebrush, Razzamataz Studios, BAC):

Type of Intervention (circle one):

- Creative writing: script/ story development
 - Hands-on art: creation of puppets and props
-

Social Skills:

Sharing Materials

Defined as the ability to participate in art making activities with other students and share materials and supplies without conflict.

Observed?

Communicating Clearly

Defined as the ability to verbally express ideas and participate in creative exercises and brainstorming activities in a productive and engaged way.

Observed?

Team Participation

Defined as the ability to work with same ages peers and older adult supervisors on a production team successfully by contributing to the ideas and hands-on building and development work of the team in a positive way.

Observed?