ABSTRACT

Title of Document: EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF ART-BASED EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: A CASE STUDY OF ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

Golnar Abedin, Doctor of Philosophy, 2010

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The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits of arts-based education for adolescents with learning disabilities (LD) placed in an inclusion program. The goal was to examine the potential of arts education as an inclusive curricular component that enhances students' engagement in learning. The study is framed within the education policy context in which many LD adolescents are at risk of dropping out of school due to the large gap between their basic skills and the expectations of standards-based curriculum.

A quality arts program at a public charter school was chosen as the site for this case study that involved investigating seven LD adolescents' engagement in their music and drama classes during an eight-week curriculum unit through qualitative research methods. Based on the application of the social-constructivist theoretical

framework, students' individual learning profiles, as well as environmental aspects of learning in the arts such as teachers' pedagogical styles and the classroom context informed the findings of this study. Students' narrative accounts regarding their experiences in arts education classrooms served as the primary source of information for the themes in the findings. Interviews with parents, teachers, and the school director were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' strengths and weaknesses in learning and to gain insights into the place of the arts in their overall educational opportunities.

Qualitative methods of analysis were used to derive three over-arching themes based on students' experiences learning in the arts. The themes included 1.) "It feels like you open up to yourself," (The Importance of Nonverbal, Embodied Engagement in Learning); 2.) "You get to create what's your own;" "it has some thought part of it centered near you," (Student Ownership of the Learning Process); 3.) "In arts there is no wrong answer;" "it's a safer social environment," (Social and Environmental Context of Learning). These themes showed the importance of successful learning experiences for adolescents with LD within a diverse school curriculum that offers them multiple modes of engagement and expression. Participation in arts education classes enhanced LD students' self-efficacy beliefs and motivation, providing them with inclusive and meaningful educational opportunities.

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF ART-BASED EDUCATION FOR ADOLESCENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES:

A CASE STUDY OF ENGAGEMENT IN LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my son, Kayvaan Carrillo, whose unique perception and inclination toward the arts deepened my understanding of this research, my father, Ali Abedin, who enriched my life with arts-based experiences through his own passion for the arts, Davood Afshar, my piano teacher who gave me the gift of music, Dr. Stanley Greenspan who recently passed away, leaving us with a deepened understanding of the importance of engagement for children with neurological differences, Julie Blum who has taught me the meaning of lived experiences and supported me through mine, to all my students whose struggles and creative minds led to this study, to Ashton Conklin, Joanna Lewton, and Karen Dresden for their supportive contributions, and the wonderful students, parents and school staff who participated in this research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> Operationalism and measurement have focused so heavily on behavior that the quality of the student's experience has been generally ignored or seriously neglected. (Eisner, 2002, p. 366)

Alarming reports regarding the increasing number of high school dropouts fill the news, yet little is known about the nature of students' experiences within American schools that lead to their unfortunate exit from the education system at a young age. Today's education policy framework places overwhelming emphasis on the importance of academic outcomes measured by standardized test scores. This focus overshadows the complexity and importance of educational inputs that shape students' opportunities to learn. The dominant policy discourse frames the problem of the education system as the "achievement gap" between sub-groups of students categorized into various labels emphasizing a range of characteristics, from race and ethnicity to presumed notions about their abilities to learn. The assumption is that if all subgroups of students are held to a clear set of curricular standards their academic achievement will improve. According to this theory, proficient test scores on standardized tests serve as evidence of student learning. The validity of the indicators used to assess achievement, as well as students lived experiences within schools, is largely ignored in the outcome-focused view of educational opportunity promoted within the current policy context.

In a report titled *"The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Drop Outs,"* Bridgeland et al. (2006) explain that the high school dropout rate in America has not improved during the last few decades of standards-based curriculum and testing. They found that students' decisions to drop out resulted from a slow process

of disengagement from school. Respondents included a lack of connection to the school environment, a perception that school is boring, feeling unmotivated, academic challenges and the weight of real world events as their reasons for dropping out (Bridgeland, 2006). The top reason students gave for dropping out was that classes were not interesting; 69% were not motivated or inspired to work hard; and 35% said that failing in school was a major factor in their decision. Bridgeland et al. call on educators, policymakers and leaders from various sectors to address the high school dropout epidemic as a top national priority and emphasize the importance of hearing the voices of young people who dropped out as an important part of the process.

Of particular interest to my research are adolescents with "learning disabilities" (LD) who are considered at high risk of disengagement and eventual school dropout. The National Center for Learning Disabilities reports that LD students' rate of graduation with a regular diploma in 2004-2005 was 57.4%—as compared to 87.6% for the overall student population (NCLD, 2008). LD students make up 57% of all the students receiving special education services (EPE Research Center, 2008). The majority of students with LD are placed in inclusion settings (defined as general education classrooms with their same-age peers) with some degree of remedial help either in their classes or in separate locations.

My interest in LD adolescents' educational opportunities is based on my experience as a special education teacher in New York City public schools between1999-2003. During this time I witnessed the implementation of inclusion within the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) policy framework. The emphasis on drills

that were thought to increase their standardized test scores increasingly limited LD students' opportunities to learn by narrowing the school curriculum to focus on standards and test preparation. In this context, teachers who had little to no preparation to teach students with LD were responsible for teaching them grade-level curriculum standards. In some cases students in the sixth to eighth grade who were "included" in general education classes did not have basic reading and writing skills; as a result they struggled and experienced failure regardless of their efforts. Even for LD students who conceptually understood the material taught, their difficulties with writing, calculation, and organizational skills led to low grades in almost every class.

Despite the laudable goals of inclusion, these students were in fact excluded from meaningful learning experiences and from success in school, with detrimental effects on their motivation and self-efficacy beliefs. In addition, the students' future educational opportunities were limited because of the high stakes attached to their test scores. In addition to grades and attendance, test scores were used as criteria for promotion and graduation decisions. High schools also focused on students' scores as they made admissions decisions, leaving behind many of my low-scoring students from admission to small choice schools in NYC that required an application process.

I was perplexed by the contradiction between NCLBA's stated goals and the policy's negative effects on students with LD. The lack of consideration for LD adolescents' unique academic challenges and individual learning needs is a large gap in the rationale for standards-based curriculum and testing as an equity-based reform. The contradiction between the educational needs of LD adolescents supported by research, and the requirements of the NCLBA motivated me to study education

policy. Based on my understanding, policies are not planned according to a bottom-up perspective of the needs of students, but rather through the convergence of various agendas (explained further in subsequent sections). Given my greater goal to improve educational opportunities for students with special needs, in this study I focus on adolescents with LD who I have had most experience with, and who are at the greatest risk for dropping out of school within the current policy context.

In this study I aimed to combine my academic and practical knowledge in the process of examining the potential benefits of arts education to enhance inclusive learning opportunities in public schools. My goal was to investigate whether and how arts education improves LD adolescents' engagement through the enhancement of the affective domains of learning. The premise for the design of my study is that prevailing standards-based curriculum and testing requirements narrow LD students' opportunity to learn by emphasizing instruction in subject areas that will be tested (reading, math, and science). In this context, a large part of the day for LD students (especially at the middle and high school levels) is spent learning in classrooms that rely on their areas of weakness. LD students' difficulties in reading and math leave them at a great disadvantage not only in these academic subjects, but also in any other area that requires verbal and mathematical reasoning, or written work. Most classroom assessments require reading and writing as measures of academic achievement and as tools for further learning. By the time LD students reach adolescence, there is a large gap between their basic skills and the curriculum standards of secondary schools (Swanson & Deshler, 2003). The widening gap

eventually lowers LD adolescents' motivation to learn or participate in school (Swanson & Deshler, 2003).

In order to prevent school dropouts, Bridgeland et al. (2006) recommend research and dissemination of information regarding innovative and successful programs that can enhance students' engagement in school. Existing research on the effects of arts education shows that the arts have the potential to enhance students' engagement in learning in ways that lead to improved educational opportunities, especially for students who are at risk of academic failure (Baum et al., 1997; Catterall, 2002; Ingram & Seashore, 2003). The arts shed light on the importance of an enriched school curriculum that does not focus only on areas of LD students' academic weaknesses in the provision of opportunities to learn. Attention to affective and cognitive enhancements through the arts broadens the concept of the opportunity to learn beyond what is assessed by standardized tests. The arts also offer LD adolescents the choice to engage through various modes (i.e., visual, kinesthetic, auditory) that may offer them occasions to participate in learning without relying on language-based skills, thereby increasing the chance for positive experiences. Successful learning experiences are needed to improve LD adolescents' self-efficacy beliefs and motivation to remain engaged in school.

Since prior findings regarding the general student population show arts-based benefits that are in line with the needs of adolescents with LD, I intended to extend arts education research to focus on this student population in particular. Second, I wanted to further investigate the processes in students' engagement in arts education as they relate to possible improvements of affective aspects of learning. This

perspective opens a way for looking closely at the importance of students' engagement and interest in learning, areas that are less measureable and less studied. Studying LD adolescents engaged in learning within an arts-based classroom offered a unique chance to investigate their opportunities to learn in a setting where instruction is not limited to verbal and mathematical skills required in most middle and high school classrooms. Given the increasingly difficult curriculum standards in their academic classes with its negative effects on LD adolescents' ability to participate in learning, programs that have the potential to enhance LD adolescents' engagement and motivation adds to knowledge required for interventions that improve their school-based experiences.

In the subsequent sections, I first explain the problematic assumptions of education policies that shape the way public schools currently implement inclusion to provide the context and basis for this study. In the next section I lay out the social constructivist theoretical framework of inclusive education that guided the application of qualitative research methods and reporting. Subsequently I describe the rationale for an exploratory study of the benefits of arts-based education for adolescents with LD and provide an overview of the research methodology.

The Boundaries of Educational Opportunity for Students with Learning Disabilities (LD): the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

> The views of what counts educationally have an extraordinarily important bearing on the kinds of learning opportunities that are created in the curriculum. (Eisner, 2002, p.139)

My study is situated in and is in response to the negative affects of the macro-level education policies on the implementation of inclusion for LD students, especially at the secondary level. The philosophy of education embedded in policy frameworks is an influential environmental factor that shapes learning opportunities within schools and classrooms. In the context of the NCLBA, policy influence is greater than ever because of the high stakes attached to the failure to meet its requirements. Since ideological principles within the current education policy context contribute to LD students' disengagement from learning, it is important to analyze its underlying problematic assumptions.

The academic challenges of adolescents with specific learning disabilities (LD) are greater than ever in the current context of outcome-based education policy (Swanson & Deshler, 2003). These challenges are exacerbated by the inherent conflicts between the fundamental purposes of special education and the general education policies affecting students' experiences within schools. The education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) 1975, subsequently reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is the federal law indicating the educational requirements of students with disabilities. Key concepts of the law are a) the right to free and appropriate public education; b) an individualized education program (IEP) for every student diagnosed with a disability; and c) placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Swanson, 2008). During the last three decades, LRE (also referred to as mainstreaming and inclusion) has been the core principle of special education policy implementation, requiring the education of students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers to the extent possible (Swanson, 2008).

As a result, a study by the EPE Research Center (2006) shows that 55 % of all students with disabilities are in general education classrooms 80% or more of the time; students with "specific learning disabilities" (LD) make up 57% of all students with disabilities and are more likely to be included in general education settings.

The idea embedded in LRE is a laudable goal based on principles of inclusive education that point to the importance of diversity. However, once placed in general education classrooms, LD students and their teachers are also held to curriculum and testing requirements of the NCLBA, without consideration of the inherent conflict between the individualized education goals of a student based on his/her IEP, and the obligation to meet grade level expectations. The NCLBA holds schools accountable for meeting assigned benchmarks based on standardized test results of students as a whole, as well as for specific sub-groups, including students with LD (Swanson, 2008). As a result, schools have an incentive to narrow the curriculum and spend instructional time on those areas covered by the tests. This normative approach brushes over the complexities of LD students' educational needs indicated on their IEP's, and completely ignores their different styles and rates of learning. Kenneth Howe (1997) explains the implicit reductionism in our current education policies and practices is reflected in normalization, assimilation, and the deficit model, without regard to whether the implementation of equalizing principles really leads to achieving equality. Linda Darling-Hammond (2004) supports this critique, arguing that in the accountability measures of the NCLBA, there is no policy requirement for schools or states to show progress toward equitable and adequate "opportunity to learn" (Darling-Hammond, 2004, p. 8).

Currently LD students spend up to 80% of their time in general education where instruction and assessments are not designed based on their individual needs; grades and test scores are based on a normal curve, leaving LD students as the bottom performing group. Academic failure leads to negative consequences in motivation and engagement of LD adolescents as their teachers struggle to keep them in school (Bridgeland, 2006; Swanson & Deshler, 2003). The high stakes attached to test scores, such as graduation and promotion, diminish these students' future educational opportunities and life chances.

Fuchs and Deshler (2007) found that class participation as well as reading and mathematics test scores of adolescents with LD placed in inclusion classrooms were much lower than that of their non-disabled peers, with scores in the bottom quartile of nationally representative high-school students. Based on these findings, for many LD adolescents at the secondary level, inclusion has mainly translated into placement in the general education setting and participation in norm-referenced standardized test scores with tragic results. Deshler's (2003) research findings indicate that the discrepancy between LD adolescents' academic skills and the challenging requirements of standards-based curriculum and testing decrease their motivation to learn. Based on these findings, he highlights students' motivational and cognitive engagement in learning as the greatest areas of concern for students with LD at the secondary level (Deshler, 1989, 2003, 2006).

My own experiences as a special education teacher and inclusion specialist run parallel to the mentioned research findings. The problems I encountered at two public middle schools in New York City, from just prior to the passage of the NCLBA (1999)

until 2003, gave me firsthand experience with the current conceptualization of equity under the NCLBA. Students with LD in these schools were assigned to my "resource room" for 45 minutes a day (approximately 15% of their school day) and some received up to an hour of speech therapy during the week to compensate for their difficulties in learning. Most of the students' reading, writing and mathematical skills were assessed to be between third and fifth grade levels. They spent 85% of their school day in standards-based curriculum classes that relied heavily on verbal, written and mathematical skills at the junior high school level. The general education teachers I worked with had little to no understanding of the problems of LD students and did not know how they were to include them in classrooms of thirty or more students. They were faced with the conflict between the goals of special education regarding individualized education plans that require the assessment of a student's progress against his past performance, and the general education normative standards of instruction and assessment. As a result, teachers often graded LD students based on normative standards which did not validate these students' effort and progress towards their individualized education goals. The most tragic consequence of this context was the overwhelming sense of failure experienced by my students regardless of their individual gains or their hard work.

Even more devastating was the consequence of attaching high stakes such as graduation and admission requirements to standardized test scores, creating further limitations on my students' future learning opportunities in high schools and beyond. Many of them ended up in the worst schools, which coincidently served large numbers of low-performing students, with the excuse that these schools were better equipped to offer special education services. Bridgeland et al. also found that if schools are only rewarded

for raising test scores, the law could have the unintended effect of giving schools an incentive to "push out" low-performing students whose test scores would bring down school averages (2006, p.vi), hence, decreasing their educational opportunities.

In sum, the current context of LD adolescents' education shaped by standards-based policy and testing has a negative influence on the affective domains of learning, such as students' motivation and engagement. Research shows that students' motivational beliefs influence their use of learning strategies, and that these motivational beliefs and use of learning strategies are in turn related to students' academic achievement (Schunk & Zimmerman, in Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003, p. 4). Therefore, for inclusive education to be successful, policies and programs should take into account the importance of affective as well as cognitive variables in the learning process (Deshler, 1978, 2003, 2007). In their chapter on designing inclusive classrooms, Cooper and Valli (1996) emphasized the importance of studying the differentiated effects of today's school reforms on LD students. Without this information and the necessary training for teachers and students, the authors warned that students with LD would not be served well by inclusion (p. 153).

Bridgeland et al.'s study of the perspectives of high school dropouts shows that failing grades was one of the top reasons the respondents identified for leaving school; almost half of them said their previous schooling had not prepared them for high school. The authors suggest that many of these students likely fell behind in elementary and middle school and were not able to make up the necessary grounds. More than half of the respondents reported that the high school requirements for graduating were too difficult (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Given these findings regarding dropouts in general, it is logical

that the difficulties faced by LD adolescents are even greater due to the discrepancy between their learning needs and the schools' curricular standards and testing requirements. Contrary to the narrow view of academic achievement embedded in the described policies, research findings show the important influences of social and individual factors on the implementation of inclusive education.

The Social-Constructivist Perspective of Inclusive Education

> Educational needs are the products of judgments about what counts in educational matters. (Eisner, 2002; p. 177)

The social-constructivist view of education holds that knowledge acquisition requires engagement of various aspects of the learning process, and that individuals are affected by the social aspects of their educational environment (Stone & Reid, 1994). M. C. O'Conner (1998) describes constructivism as the following: "Learners are active creators of their knowledge, not passive receptacles into which performed knowledge can be placed. In this theoretical domain, a 'construction…' is the building up, piece by piece of an internal mental structure" (O'Conner, 1998; p. 34). Mallory and New (1994) explain inclusive practice based on the concepts of "classrooms as communities, learning as socially mediated, curriculum as contextually relevant and problem based, and assessment as authentic and personally meaningful" (p. 322). In the application of the social-constructivist theory to education, the social context of classrooms including teachers, peers, and the curriculum, can enhance or impede learning in various ways and lead to alterable educational outcomes. This dynamic theory of education sheds light on the complexities of teaching and learning within a social environment. Focus is on the process rather than the product of learning. According to Eisner (2002), "Those who

emphasize process tend to formulate learning opportunities that stimulate children to active inquiry… to think, to act, and in the process to learn;" in this context, the task of the teacher is to facilitate the interests and goals that students develop as a result of their engagement in learning (p. 139).

Studies of effective inclusion point to the various dimensions of education embedded in the social-constructivist theory of learning. Wang (1997) found that motivational and cognitive learning processes have to do with the combination of individual characteristics and the learning environment. Cooper and Valli (1996) suggest that in inclusive classrooms, students are actively involved in the "construction and interpretation of the cognitive and social aspects of that environment" (p. 143).Trent, Artiles, and Englert (1998) also explain the importance of social-constructivist principles for inclusion in secondary schools and redesigning educational contexts in ways that engage students in the necessary intellectual activities of learning. They describe four basic principles of social constructivist theory based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), as a tool to guide the application of the central concepts of this perspective to inclusive education: a.) apprenticeship in applied settings, b.) access to empowering modes of discourse, c.) guided instruction that leads to self-regulated learning, and d.) learning in cultural historical contexts (Trent et al., 1998, p. 285).

Research-based interventions recommended for adolescents with LD are supported by a social-constructivist view of inclusive education. According to Deshler (1988), a theory of learning must address the importance of providing inclusive educational opportunities for the enhancement of LD students' cognitive and motivational engagement in learning. Torgesen (1989) points out that though

some aspects of cognitive and motivational difficulties in LD adolescents are "consequences rather than causes of their learning disability, these secondary traits are no less important for understanding their instructional requirements than primary or specific characteristics, because once acquired, they can act causally in further limiting the child's ability to acquire new information and skills" (p. 167). Torgesen (1989) suggests that effective special education for students with reading disabilities has a greater impact on their secondary characteristics (p. 167). Wang's (1997) study of the factors that most influence inclusive education also suggests that effective implementation of innovative programs focusing on alterable variables has the greatest direct influence on student learning. Based on these findings, arts education can enhance inclusive learning opportunities for adolescents with LD by influencing alterable variables such as students' cognitive and motivational engagement.

The social-constructivist framework links the benefits attributed to arts education with the requirements of inclusive education for LD adolescents. The individual and environmental aspects of learning emphasized in the theory shed light on the processes inherent in arts-based education. This alignment led me to apply the social constructivist perspective as a theoretical lens to capture information regarding the benefits of arts-based education for LD adolescents.

The Potential of Arts-Based Education for Adolescents with LD

> The educational imagination must come into play in order to transform goals and content into the kinds of events that will have educational consequences for students. (Eisner, 2002, p.138)

Based on prior research findings, the arts have the potential to provide an inclusive instructional context by creating a learner-centered environment for

adolescents with LD that addresses cognitive and motivational aspects of their learning requirements. In this section I review related research in arts education and explain the rationale for extending this research to explore possible benefits for adolescents with LD.

Prior research shows that arts education (music, dance, visual arts, and theater) and arts integration in the academic curriculum offer unique opportunities for students to engage in the learning processes that lead to motivational and cognitive enhancements in learning; these gains were found to be greater for students who are at academic risk (Baum et al., 1997; Catterall, 2002; Ingram & Seashore, 2003). Stevenson and Deasy (2005) explain that through arts education, students are included in lessons and classroom activities for which they may otherwise lack the basic skills required for participation. The philosophy embedded in arts education incorporates Howard Gardner's (1995) theory of multiple intelligences, as well as other theories of intelligence and recent brain research (Burnaford et al., 2007, p. 33). Accordingly, including the arts in education provides a medium for the engagement of students who struggle in academic areas such as math, reading and writing, allowing them different ways to learn that may be more in line with their areas of strength. The arts in education are also reported to increase students' motivation to learn (Deasy, 2002). Newman (2000) attributes motivational gains to the authentic intellectual learning in the arts that replaces knowledge reproduction (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006).

In addition to individual gains, prior research shows environmental benefits associated with the integration of the arts in the school curriculum. Stevenson and

Deasy (2005) report that the arts create a learning context that offers active participation, higher order thinking, variety, collaborative activities, and meaningful connections to students' cultures and lives outside of school. Research shows that interactive learning environments in which the goal is to enhance students' conceptual understanding of material covered and expose the meaning of procedures, produce more insightful intentional learners (Campione, 1989).

The arts also offer hands on activities that were found to increase students' motivation and self-regulation (Baum et al., 1997). Thousand et al. (1997) refer to the extensive documentation of the relationship between learner motivation and achievement in the literature (Flavey & Grenot-Scheyer, 1995). According to the authors, student motivation is enhanced when teachers promote active learning strategies (such as those offered in the arts) as opposed to whole-class lectures that relegate students to being passive learners. They define active learning to include hands-on activities and student-to-student teaching, sharing, and collaborating to direct the course of learning under the guidance and support of the teacher.

Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) discuss the importance of self-efficacy (a motivational construct defined as students' beliefs about their own capabilities) for behavioral, cognitive and motivational engagement in learning that lead to self-regulation and academic achievement. They report that self-efficacy is inherently changeable and sensitive to contextual features of the classroom; instead of insincere praise to develop self-esteem, they recommend that teachers provide students with meaningful learning opportunities that will foster the development of self-efficacy.

Based on the described benefits of the arts for general education students, and the alignment of these positive gains with the requirements of inclusive education for students with disabilities, this study looked specifically at the relevance of arts education to the learning needs of LD adolescents. The study was based on the premise that if the arts provide similar gains in cognitive and motivational engagement, they can benefit LD adolescents in these important aspects of learning that are left out of the current focus on academic standards as the ultimate goal of education. Theoretical and applied work has strongly suggested that students' cognitive, motivational, and behavioral deficits influence one another over time and affect classroom performance (Sideridis et al., 2006, p. 216). According to this view, specific but developmentally limited cognitive deficits may lead children to struggle with acquiring key academic skills; this in turn leads to decreased motivation, more task avoidant behavior, and, eventually more generalized sets of deficits (Sideridis et al., 2006, p. 216). Therefore, interventions or programs that help enhance students' engagement in positive experiences in school can increase their educational opportunities by improving their motivation to learn.

Based on the aforementioned parallel between the benefits of learning in the arts with the cognitive and motivational learning requirements of LD adolescents, this study was designed to investigate the potential of the arts for this student group in particular. My goal was to research the nature of LD adolescents' engagement in the arts through a social constructivist framework that highlights the influence of affective domains on learning. Processes that take place in the social context of classrooms are important influences on students' learning opportunities. Knowledge

of these less measureable constructs such as student motivation and engagement using qualitative research methods adds to knowledge required to improve the implementation of inclusive educational opportunities.

Research Overview: A Case Study of LD Adolescents' Engaged in the Arts

> One could argue that…a significant proportion of [students] are denied equal educational opportunity… [when] certain modes of presentation and forms of response deny them the opportunity to display what they have learned in the forms that most suit their aptitudes. (Eisner, 2002, p.148)

Purpose, Significance, and Theoretical Framework

Findings from prior research attribute cognitive and motivational gains to arts education and arts integration in the school curriculum. This study looked at whether and how the benefits of the arts apply to LD adolescents' educational requirements with focus on students' affective and cognitive engagement in learning; these important prerequisites to gaining knowledge or skills are understudied. Today's education policy discourse is mainly focused on academic standards and outcomes measured by standardized tests without attention to educational inputs or students' opportunities to learn. Part of the goal of this study is to point to these less measureable constructs related to learning in schools that have a strong affect on students' self-efficacy and motivation to engage in learning. For policies to have their intended effect (assuming they aim to improve equity in educational opportunities), a social constructivist perspective of education is needed to take into consideration various influential factors on students' lived experiences in schools.

The social-constructivist framework takes into account that learning takes place in the social context of classrooms and knowledge is constructed by individuals.

According to this perspective, students are not passive recipients of information. Individual sensory processing systems, personal characteristics, prior experiences, and self-efficacy beliefs are some of the factors that play into whether and how a student learns. Linnenbrink and Pintrich's (2003) work in particular relates to the importance of students' self-efficacy as it affects their cognitive, behavioral, and motivational engagement in learning. Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences brings attention to various abilities (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, musical…); instead of intelligence as a single construct generally attributed to language-based knowledge or ability, Gardner's theory points to various areas of possible strength.

With respect to the social component of the social-constructivist perspective, the social aspects of learning are influenced by teachers' pedagogical styles, student-teacher relationships, the classroom climate, and the expectations that interact with individual student characteristics to make learning a positive or negative experience. Therefore, part of the goal of this study is to bring to light the complex and multidimensional aspects of education that influence students' learning opportunities, because a holistic understanding of students' lived experiences within schools is missing from debates regarding academic achievement. A comprehensive look at various factors that influence learning is also missing in education research. Most studies investigate a single phenomenon without taking into account the various influential factors that come into play in the social and dynamic processes of learning in schools. In other words, education policy and a large portion of education research are limited by monocular perspectives of measurable constructs. In contrast, this

study is based on the premise that there are important aspects of education that are not measureable; learning is influenced by the confluence of individual and social factors.

The social constructivist perspective provides a lens for the analysis of the processes and interactions within the social and environmental context of learning in the arts that can be conducive to inclusive education for adolescents with LD. The study also addresses the call for further research in arts education regarding teaching and learning processes to determine how and why the arts provide a motivational entry point for students that supports improvement (Brunaford et. al, 2007).

Knowledge gained from this study is relevant to various lines of research. First, the findings add to knowledge regarding the affective domains (engagement, interest, self-efficacy, and motivation) of LD adolescents in learning. Qualitative research methods provide ways of collecting detailed, descriptive accounts of students' engagement in the arts. Therefore, the study adds students' voices, often left out of education research, as an important source of information regarding their experiences. The in-depth analysis of LD adolescents' engagement in the arts extends arts education research to this particular student group. The social constructivist perspective also provides a tool for aligning the benefits of the arts with the requirements of inclusive education. Therefore the findings regarding factors that influence LD adolescents' engagement in learning can be used to inform other programs designed to take into account their educational needs. Finally, the information provides insights that are useful for preventing LD adolescents from dropping out of school.

Given the discrepancy between their educational needs and the negative effects of the NCLBA's policy provisions, these students are at a greater risk than ever for disengagement from learning. Bridgeland et al.'s (2003) study of high school dropouts concludes that instead of the usual "one-size fits all," school districts should develop options for students and teachers should try different approaches to motivate students to learn. They suggest a school curriculum that connects what students are learning in the classroom with real life experiences, smaller learning communities with more individualized instruction, and alternative schools that offer specialized programs to engage students at-risk of dropping out. The information found in this study helps the design of alternative schools and/or specialized programs for LD students that might enhance their educational opportunities by increasing their motivation to learn. This information can also be used by districts, schools, and teachers who seek to improve LD students' engagement in learning in general.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study is: What are the processes involved in an arts education settings and how do these processes affect LD adolescents' engagement in learning?

More specific questions that inform the broader research question are:

1. What is the nature of teaching and learning in an arts-based classroom?
2. How do the arts affect student engagement in learning?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions of their own teaching and how do they perceive LD adolescents' learning and performance within each art form?
4. What are the students' perceptions of their involvement in the arts and what experiences do they value?

5. What are parents' perceptions of their children's engagement in the arts and their overall strengths and weaknesses in learning?

These questions are intended to highlight the complex individual and social processes involved in learning in the arts in order to analyze the extent to which arts-based education can provide an inclusive setting that meets the particular needs of LD adolescents. Through narrative interviews and observations within a case study design, I investigated the individual and environmental processes of arts-based instruction. My goal was to analyze the relationship between the particular nature of teaching and learning that takes place in the arts with regard to the educational needs of LD adolescents. Students' accounts of their experiences in learning are the primary source of the study's findings, while teachers' and parents' explanations served to contextualize the place of arts-based education within students' overall learning opportunities.

Overview of Methodology

An exploratory case study using qualitative research methods was applied to answer the research questions regarding LD adolescents' engagement in arts-based classrooms. Information was collected through classroom observations in music and drama, and interviews with students, teachers, parents, and the school director. Detailed, narrative accounts collected through interviews were analyzed and organized into three chapters: Chapter 4, Social Educational Setting; Chapter 5, Student Profiles; and Chapter 6, Thematic Construction of the Benefits of the Arts.

Chapter 4 includes detailed descriptions of the school and classroom settings. The information was collected through observations and interviews, and reported in

the form of classroom vignettes and teachers' narrative accounts, in order to give the reader the context for the findings presented in Chapter 6. Chapter 5 contains student participants' individual profiles collected through observations, and interviews with arts teachers, the humanities teacher, the inclusion teacher, and parents who were available to participate in the study. In addition, students' Individualized Education Plans (IEP's) and educational evaluations were reviewed to gain an understanding of their perceived disabilities, their characteristics as learners, and the reason they were receiving special education services. The detailed profiles serve to provide a holistic picture of each student participant to contextualize the place of the arts in their education. The subsequent sections of this chapter explain the boundaries of the case study, methods for data collection and analysis, as well as considerations regarding validity, naturalistic generalizations, limitations, and ethical concerns.

Case Study Design, Data Collection and Analysis of the Findings

I applied an exploratory case study design to investigate the nature of LD adolescents' engagement in learning. The case was bound by time and place: observations and interviews were conducted during an eight-week curriculum unit on the arts of Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in music and drama classes at an inclusion public charter school. Given the social-constructivist underpinnings of the research questions, qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were most appropriate for exploring the complex nature of teaching and learning that takes place in an arts-based setting. In order to maximize what can be learned through a single study, I selected an instrumental case: a public charter school implementing a quality arts program. An instrumental study of LD students engaged in the arts provides an

in-depth view of a single case and meets the criteria for capturing the complex interplay of the individual and environmental processes in the knowledge acquisition process (Yin, 2003).

The school's multi-grade program combines 7th and 8th graders in the same classroom. Beginning in the fifth grade, students choose the art forms they want to participate in and are usually placed in their first or second choice class. The arts classes are scheduled simultaneously from Wednesday to Friday for an hour each day.

During the academic year of this study, two of the arts curriculum units were taught in collaboration with academic classroom teachers and the other two were only taught in the arts. The MENA unit was unrelated to students' academic work and was taught in drama, music, and visual arts. Combining scheduling considerations and my goal to gain an understanding of at least two art forms (as they address different areas of learning), I observed the seventh and eighth-grade music and drama classes during alternating weeks. The drama class was chosen because the teacher was also the arts coordinator and had twenty years of teaching experience that could inform this study. The music class was chosen because my own experience playing the piano, and the viola in youth orchestras allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of students' engagement in this particular art form. Due to the simultaneous offering of the three art forms in the schedule, I did not observe the visual arts classroom as it would have shortened my time in the other two classes. However, the visual arts teacher participated in an informative interview that served to contrast the teaching

methods of the drama and music teachers and offered a broad spectrum of pedagogical styles in the arts that are worth considering in planning arts programs.

I used Merriam's (1998) protocol for data collection in a qualitative case study: interviewing, field observations, and document analysis. Information from observations and teacher interviews show the context of the drama and music classes (presented in the form of vignettes and teachers' narrative accounts in Chapter 4). Student, parent, and teacher interviews, as well as document analysis of students' IEPs served to construct student profiles (portrayed in Chapter 5). This information served to construct what Eisner (2002) calls "an educational landscape" (p. 191) that contextualizes findings regarding LD adolescents' engagement in the arts. The social-constructivist theoretical lens guided and framed the collection of data regarding both individual and environmental aspects of learning as important sources of information.

Inductive processes of data analysis applied in qualitative research methods allowed for emerging themes (Merriam, 1998). I analyzed students' narrative accounts of their engagement in the arts to assess the benefits they attributed to this experience. I used information presented by their teachers and parents to gain a fuller understanding of the place of the arts in the students' overall educational experiences. According to Stake (1995), the constructivist paradigm holds that knowledge and meaning is constructed rather than discovered (p. 99). Applied to this study, the themes of the findings are constructed by highlighting students' experiences against the backdrop of information provided by teachers and collected through my own observations. My goal was to highlight the multiple social and individual processes

that influenced students' engagement in the arts prior to constructing the thematic findings in Chapter 6. Narrative and interpretive approaches provided the means for presenting "education as a process" within the "lived experiences" of the students (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). The narrative approach also allowed for the presentation of students' experiences through their own words (Merriam, 1998). The qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis enabled me to capture a holistic portrayal of LD adolescents' engagement in learning.

Validity, Reliability, and Naturalistic Generalizations

I applied Merriam's criteria for internal validity, reliability, and naturalistic generalizations. According to Merriam (1998), "Rigor in qualitative research derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description" (p.151).

Merriam explains that internal validity "deals with the question of how research findings match reality:" "Do the findings capture what is really there?" (p.201). Given the subjective nature of reality, what is being observed and presented in this research are "people's constructions of reality" according to "how they understand the world" (p. 203). Therefore, the internal validity of this study is based on the reader's perception of my ability to uncover the complexity of the research phenomenon within the applied theoretical framework. The information collected serves to answer the research questions based on a social-constructivist paradigm that provides a holistic portrayal of what happened in the course of the study. Merriam's strategies (triangulation, member-checking, peer-examination, participatory forms of

research, and disclosure of researcher's biases) were used to strengthen the validity of the study's findings. Multiple sources of data (observations, student, teacher, and parent interviews, as well as document analysis) were triangulated to enhance the validity of the themes in the findings. Conversations with teachers and colleagues throughout the data collection and analyses processes served as member checks and peer examination. The participatory mode of research conducted by including the voices of the study's participants also added to the validity of the findings. Finally, my biases are disclosed throughout the research report implicitly through the particular framing of the study, and explicitly by explaining my prior experiences as a teacher and my position as a parent of a child with special needs; these factors contribute to my standpoint and shape my perception throughout the research process.

Regarding the reliability of the research findings, I apply Lincoln and Guba's (1985) notions of "dependability" or "consistency" as they are more applicable to qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, p. 288). Consistency and dependability relate to "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 206). To enhance the dependability of my research findings I included Merriam's recommendations: the disclosure of the investigator's assumptions and theory, triangulation of multiple methods of data collection and analysis, as well as an explanation of how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made through the inquiry. Therefore, rather than reliability (the possibility of reproducing the same results through the repetition of the study) which is based on a construct from a positivist paradigm, the reader can determine the dependability of the findings based on the detailed information presented.

External validity, also known as generalizability, depends on the extent to which findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998, p. 207). Given the goal of qualitative case studies to understand and explain a phenomenon, the degree to which the information can be generalized to other events or places depends on the extent to which the reader can relate the findings to his/her situation or understanding of the context (called *naturalistic generalizations*) (Stake, 1995). Narrative descriptions of observations and interviews in this study provide detailed information to enable the reader to make naturalistic generalizations. Rich, thick description of the context for the findings and establishing the uniqueness of the case enables the reader to make naturalistic generalizations (Merriam, 1998; Eisner, 2002). A more comprehensive explanation of the research design and methodology is offered in Chapter 3.

Summary

Prior research demonstrates that various individual characteristics and the social context of learning influence educational outcomes for LD students. This study applies the social constructivist perspective to gain knowledge of the different components of LD adolescents' learning in the arts. The study was designed based on the potential of arts education to meet the requirements of inclusive education for LD adolescents. The social constructivist perspective called for qualitative research methods to capture the complex dynamics of teaching and learning that affect students' engagement in the arts. The students' own accounts of their experiences were used as the main source for the derivation of the themes in the findings.

This research contributes to literature on the remediation of LD adolescents' motivational difficulties that stand in the way of optimal learning experiences (Deshler, 2001). A holistic understanding of LD adolescents' educational needs informs programs designed to lower their high drop-out rates and has the promise to enhance the implementation of inclusion by taking into consideration less measurable aspects of learning that are prerequisites for academic achievement. Understanding LD adolescents' concerns and the context of their educational opportunities provides insights on ways of improving their engagement in learning. The proposed research will also extend existing arts education literature to include the specific experiences of LD adolescents engaged in the arts within an inclusion setting.

In the subsequent chapter, (The Literature Review), I further explain prior research in various related fields that influenced the framework for my research questions and methodology. I summarize literature on existing education policies, the arts in education, characteristics of adolescents with learning disabilities, the social constructivist view of inclusive education, and the social-cognitive theory of learning. The information presented in Chapter 2 provides the context and rationale for my research and situates this study in prior knowledge of the areas described.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

> Implementing equalizing principles do not necessarily translate into achieving equality. (Howe, 1997)

The themes in this chapter represent the theoretical foundations for exploring the potential of arts-based education for adolescents with learning disabilities (LD) placed in inclusion settings. The literature review situates the study in the context of prior research on the following topics: education policy; characteristics of adolescents with LD; the social-constructivist perspective of inclusive education; and arts education. The policy environment described shows the broad context of special education in public schools and points to gaps in the current implementation of inclusion. The review of literature on adolescents with LD shows their educational requirements, including the importance of their engagement and motivation in the learning process. The review of arts-based literature points to the importance of investigating the potential benefits of the arts to promote cognitive and motivational engagement in learning, especially for at-risk students. Findings regarding both individual and environmental influences of the arts from prior research provide the basis for my study, extending research in this area to include adolescents with LD placed in inclusion schools. Research shows that individual characteristics, teaching and learning processes and the social learning environment are all important considerations in designing inclusive learning environments. I applied the social constructivist perspective as a lens to capture these various influences on students' engagement in the arts to determine whether and how the arts provide inclusive learning opportunities for adolescents with LD.

The literature review shows the rationale for my study, based on the premise that the implementation of inclusion in the current policy context has translated into mere placement of students with LD in the general education setting without adequate opportunities to learn based on their individual needs. LD students' educational opportunities are adversely affected by the inherent conflict between special education policy provisions for individualized goals and education plans to enhance students' areas of weakness, and the standards-based curriculum and testing in general education classes requiring LD students to learn and perform based on the same curriculum and benchmarks as their non-disabled peers. Research shows that in addition to problems with basic reading, writing or math, adolescents with LD are facing secondary difficulties in the areas of engagement and motivation because of the large gaps between their academic skills and the requirements of standards-based curriculum and testing. The inadequacy of the described educational context for adolescents with LD is evidenced by the students' lower levels of participation in class, low test scores, and high dropout rates.

The various bodies of literature discussed in this chapter show the basis for the application of a social-constructivist lens to investigate the potential benefits of the arts for adolescents with learning disabilities. The theory provides a comprehensive perspective of multiple and dynamic influences of individual and social processes on students' opportunities to learn. The social-constructivist perspective also provides the basis for guiding the research questions and case selection criteria (further discussed in Chapter 3). Based on this framework, various educational components such as affective and interactive aspects of learning are

important for gaining an in-depth understanding of the processes involved in arts education and its potentials for adolescents with LD.

The Educational Context of Adolescents with LD

The two over-arching policies shaping the educational context of adolescents with LD are the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In this section I analyze the historical trends that have influenced the current policy requirements to explain how the merging of general and special education policies in the United States has shifted the focus of interventions for students with disabilities away from their individual needs to emphasize high standards and outcomes for all students. The aims of these policies are idealistic, but the lack of information on the educational processes required to reach the prescribed goals can lead to detrimental consequences for students with special needs (i.e., those with learning disabilities) placed in inclusion classrooms, especially as they transition from elementary to secondary schools. In the following paragraphs I discuss the ways in which current policies limit inclusive educational opportunities for adolescents with LD. The first problem is related to the narrow and challenging standards-based curriculum, especially at the secondary school level that does not address students' cognitive and motivational requirements. The second problem is the limitations on their future opportunities by the use of test scores for admission, promotion, and graduation requirements.

The ideology embedded in current education reforms both shape and constrain the implementation of inclusion. Based on the social-constructivist perspective, "ideas, institutions, and practices that come to seem natural and unquestionable are in fact conventions that are solidified by various means" (O'Conner, 1998, p. 27); these means

are important to understand as they have shaped the framework for inclusion policy and practice. This analysis will shed light on the ideology behind the current requirements of the aforementioned laws. Applying the social-constructivist lens, education policy is an environmental factor that influences students' learning opportunities within schools. It is important to examine the macro-level policies' affects in order to explain the problems of the education system with respect to adolescents with LD and their academic underachievement.

NCLB, IDEA, and Inclusion

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2001 revises the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), first enacted in 1965 which is reauthorized periodically. The most important aspect of ESEA is Title I, which represents the largest financial contribution of the federal government to schools, intended to assist disadvantaged students. During the 1994 reauthorization of Title I, the Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) (Goals 2000) was passed by President Clinton and Congress. Goals 2000 was based on the premise that students will reach higher levels of achievement when more is expected of them. Goals 2000 established a framework to identify world-class academic standards, measure student progress, and provide the support that students may need to meet the standards; as a result, Title I funding was tied to the core ideas of standards-based reform (Ryan, 2003). Standard-based reform requires states to set challenging standards and test all students to monitor their progress towards those benchmarks. Focus on high standards was a consequence of alarming reports on the status of America's public schools, the most important published as *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983. In this context, with the passage of IASA (1994), the purpose of

Title I was fundamentally changed from funding programs to assist disadvantaged students to meeting standards for all students.

In 2001, President Bush and Congress passed the NCLBA, adding school accountability to standards-based reform. The stated goal of the NCLBA (2001) is to raise academic achievement for all students through standard-based assessments and accountability. The Act requires that states set achievement goals and show a continuously increasing percentage of students demonstrating proficiency in furtherance of those goals. All students' learning is measured by standardized tests each year, and 100% of students must score in the proficient level within twelve years (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). States are required to implement annual tests in reading, math, and science in Grades 3 through 8 and high school. Assessment results must be disaggregated and reported by state, district, and schools by gender, race/ ethnicity, English language proficiency, migrant status, low-income status, and *special education status* (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003).

Along with standards-based assessment, school accountability is a major component of the NCLBA. Schools that receive federal funding and fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) are identified as "in need of improvement" and this information is made available to the public. The first year schools fail, they are supposed to receive "technical assistance." After two years of school failure, the students are allowed to choose another school in the same district. After three years of the school failing to meet AYP, students are allowed to receive tutoring services from an outside private or public provider at public expense. If a school fails for four consecutive years, the school staff needs to be replaced, and after five years, the school is turned over to the

state government, which can reopen the school as a charter school, turn over the management to a private company, or take over the school itself (Ryan, 2003). Given that students with disabilities are in the lowest-scoring subgroup, the NCLB accountability model provides an incentive for choice or magnet programs to close their doors to students with LD who may impede schools from meeting AYP requirements, further depriving these students of inclusive educational opportunities.

In addition to the NCLBA, IDEA (initially passed in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and periodically reauthorized) shapes the educational opportunities of students with disabilities. The law requires that students with disabilities receive free and appropriate public education (FAPE). A student who is experiencing academic failure is referred by a teacher or parent for an initial evaluation to determine whether he or she has a disability. Upon the completion of psycho-educational testing, a meeting is held with the students' parents or legal guardians, the general education teacher(s), and the assessment team. If it is determined that a child has a learning disability and the parent agrees to the provision of special education services, an individualized education program (IEP) is designed by the team with the goal of educating the student in the least restrictive environment (LRE). An IEP is a legal document that outlines the student's educational needs, the services that will be provided, his/her annual academic goals, and test accommodations. The following are the specific contents of an IEP: 1.) A statement of the child's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance; 2.) A statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals designed to a.) Meet the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable

the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum; and b.) Meet each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability; 3.) A statement of the special education and related services, and supplementary aids and services; 4.) A statement of any individual appropriate accommodations that are necessary to measure the academic achievement and functional performance of the child on State and district-wide assessments. The IEP Team determines that the child must take an alternate assessment instead of a particular regular State or district-wide assessment of student achievement, a statement of why the child cannot participate in the regular assessment and why the particular alternate assessment selected is appropriate for the child (U. S. Department of Education website, 2007).

Unlike the principles of the NCLBA which require equal outcomes for all students, IDEA originally emphasized differences in instruction and assessment based on the individual needs of students with disabilities. Until the recent changes brought about by the NCLBA and the reauthorization of IDEA (2004), holding schools accountable for the academic achievement of students with disabilities through standardized testing, the IEP was the primary legal accountability tool for ensuring that students receive their educational entitlement (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). Parents of students with disabilities have filed lawsuits against schools or districts that did not provide adequate educational opportunities for their children. In this context, students' academic achievement was assessed based on progress on their IEP goals. For example, if a student was not making progress on his or her individualized goals, the state could be required to pay for his/her placement in a private specialized school.

During the last two decades, the convergence of general and special education policy requirements has changed the nature of the provision of special education services from segregating students into separate classrooms to placement in the general education program with their non-disabled peers. The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision of IDEA requires that to the extent possible, schools include students with disabilities in general education classes with their same-age peers and provide them with appropriate supports referred to as "supplementary aids and services." In addition to inclusion in the general education setting, since the reauthorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) in 1997, states and districts are required to include students with disabilities in local and statewide assessments (McLaughlin &Thurlow, 2003). The NCLBA holds schools accountable for these students' academic performance based on their scores on standardized tests, which are reported on school's adequate yearly progress reports.

Inclusion as a policy movement is aligned with the Regular Education Initiative which began in the late 1980's (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). The three goals of the Initiative were: 1.) merge special and general education into one inclusive system; 2.) dramatically increase the number of children with disabilities in mainstream classrooms by use of large-scale, full-time mainstreaming; and 3.) strengthen the academic achievement of students with high-incidence disabilities, as well as of low-achievers without disabilities (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). In fact, the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA gives 15 percent of special education monies to strengthen the general education program as a preventive measure (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising that the latest reauthorization of IDEA (2004) is aligned with the outcome-based goals of the NCLBA,

requiring students with mild to moderate disabilities to meet the same academic standards as their non-disabled peers.

Proponents of the existing system argue that in order to keep schools accountable for the academic progress of students with disabilities, they have to be included in statewide standardized testing. In their article on educational accountability and students with disabilities, McLaughlin and Thurlow (2003) explain the cornerstones of change that resulted in the current form of general and special education policies:

> In 1989, the presidentially appointed National Council on Disability (NCD) suggested that it was time to shift the focus in special education from access to education to the quality of education and student outcomes. Several years later, a National Research Council (NCR) study (McDonell et al., 1997) examined how students with disabilities were to be included in standards-based reforms. The NRC endorsed two principles regarding students with disabilities and standards-based reform: (a) All students should have access to challenging standards, and (b) policy makers and educators should be held publicly accountable for every student's performance. (p. 438)

While the NCD advocated for a shift in focus to the quality of education and student outcomes, the measures recommended by the NRC only ensure access without considering students' educational opportunities; the focus on outcomes has narrowed instruction in measurable areas. In the current implementation of inclusion, access has mainly translated to the mere placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, with a part-time special education teacher. The special education instructor either provides remedial instruction by pulling students out of regular instruction or by co-teaching with the general education teacher. However, neither IDEA nor the NCLBA provide additional resources to train or support general education and special education teachers to collaborate, nor does the NCLBA require that general education teachers be qualified to teach students with disabilities.

At the middle and high school levels, students with disabilities who are placed in general education settings are required to meet demanding standards in curriculum and testing. The demands presented by secondary school curricula (e.g. the abstractness and complexity of the curriculum, the quantity of information covered, assumed background knowledge by the students) place tremendous pressures on LD students and their teachers who struggle to keep them in school and engaged in the learning process (Deshler, 2003). Studies indicate that students with LD placed in the general education classroom often fail to receive individualized instruction that enables them to benefit from the curriculum content being covered as well as to master the skills and strategies they are lacking (Zigmond & Baker, 1995 in Deshler 1998). Deshler explains that the mere placement of these students within the general education classroom is no guarantee that their unique needs will be understood and incorporated into the instructional plan.

Studies conducted subsequent to the passage of the NCLBA show that class participation as well as reading and mathematics test scores of students with learning disabilities placed in inclusion classrooms were much lower than that of their non-disabled peers, with scores in the bottom quartile of nationally representative high-school students (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Based on research conducted by Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, and Marder (2003), subsequent to the passage of the NCLBA in 2001-2002, class participation of students with disabilities in inclusion classes was much lower than that of their non-disabled peers, and their average percentile scores on the passage comprehension and math calculation subtests were at the 20th and 28th percentiles, respectively (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). For passage comprehension, 77 percent of the nationally representative high-school students with learning disabilities performed in the

bottom quartile, and for math calculations 53 percent were in the bottom quartile (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). These negative consequences of the NCLBA are likely to increase already high dropout rates of students with LD, assessed by Thurlow et al., (2002) to be twice that of the general education population.

Under the NCLBA accountability system, admissions, promotions, and graduation requirements, are also highly influenced by scores on standardized tests. While standardized tests are not constructed for students with disabilities and are not valid measures of their academic progress, they are used as the most consequential indicator of their achievement (Campione, 1989; Pullin, 2002). For example, since a majority of adolescents with learning disabilities experience difficulties in reading, they are at a greater disadvantage when confronted by standardized tests that are divorced from the context of reading large segments of text for meaning (Campione, 1989). Pullin (2002) lists the concepts of fairness that affect testing according to the National Research Council's Committee on Appropriate Test Use: 1) absence of bias in the test; 2) equitable treatment of individuals taking the test; 3) opportunity for those being tested to learn material covered by the test (Pullin, 2002). Clearly, the standardized tests administered to secondary students with disabilities fail to meet the first and last requirements of fairness outlined.

Attaching high stakes to test scores used as requirements for admission, promotion, and graduation can have an adverse effect on future educational opportunities for students with disabilities because of their low scores. For example, in many schools in Maryland, up to 90% of students in special education are scoring below the proficient level (McLaughlin & Thurlow, 2003). Yet test scores are increasingly being used for

promotion from grade to grade and as “exit” exams required for the receipt of a high school diploma. While statistics on special education students’ dropout rates subsequent to the passage of the NCLBA are not available, even before the increased challenges of curricular and testing requirements, Lipsky and Gartner report that based on the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (Fifteenth Annual Report, 1993), fewer than half of the students with disabilities (45.7 %) exited the educational system with a regular diploma; of those 51.7% were diagnosed with learning disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1994). The additional challenges posed by greater emphasis on standardized test score requirements are bound to decrease the number of special education students’ receipt of a high school diploma.

The analysis of the consequences of the NCLBA and the changes in IDEA (2004) that reinforce accountability for students’ academic outcomes based on test scores is important for assessing the educational opportunities of LD adolescents in inclusion schools. As Kenneth Howe predicted, rigorous testing regimens come at the expense of disadvantaged students; implementing equalizing principles does not necessarily translate into achieving equality (Howe, 1997), especially in the absence of equal opportunities to learn.

Deshler (1998) described the negative consequences of the failure to differentiate between inclusion and inclusive teaching for adolescents with learning disabilities. He defined inclusion as the mere placement of students in the general education classroom without ensuring inclusive education, defined as instructional conditions that must be present so that all students within an academically diverse class can master both the required academic skills and content expected of students at that grade level (Deshler,

1998, p.33). Deshler (1984) identified motivation as the most important component of a comprehensive intervention model for the inclusion of adolescents with learning disabilities:

> Given the long history of failure that most adolescents have endured, it is important that an intervention be concerned with the motivation of these students to learn new skills. Thus, the motivation component is seen as playing a major role in the intervention model to insure maximum involvement by the student in both the acquisition and generalization phases of the learning process. (Deshler, 1984; p. 109)

There are clear conflicts between the priorities emphasized by the incentive structure of outcome-based policy requirements and interventions that meet the educational needs of adolescents with disabilities. The goals dictated by the NCLBA do not provide incentives for schools to build inclusive educational programs, especially at the secondary level where emphasis is on covering large tracts of standards-based curriculum to prepare students for state and city-wide tests. When teachers' priorities are so dictated there is little attention to the processes involved in learning (Campione, 1989). A preset curriculum that guides selection of instructional goals and content does not take into account individual differences in learning rate or style; focus is on covering the curriculum rather than on student progress (Campione, 1989). The result of school accountability based on test scores is an increasingly narrow secondary school curriculum that emphasizes instruction in those areas that are tested with standardized assessments, reducing instructional time in other areas such as the arts (Center for Education Policy, 2008).

Characteristics of Adolescents with Learning Disabilities

The following is the federal definition of learning disabilities:

> The term 'specific learning disability' means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.
> Such term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
> Such term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (United States Code. (20 U.S.C. §1401 [30])

There is controversy around various definitions of learning disabilities in the literature. However, the above definition in IDEA (2004) is most widely used by schools as a diagnostic guideline. I will not discuss the differing perspectives regarding the causes of learning disabilities or the controversies around whether there are specific impairments in these students. Studies of adolescents with learning disabilities show common traits among students who have been diagnosed with LD at the secondary level regardless of the criteria used for their diagnosis; the characteristics discussed in the literature are not differentiated based on specific areas of learning disabilities (Pressley et al., 1992; in Deshler, 2007; Campione, 1989; Wagner et al. 1993; Schumaker, 1992, Sideridis et al., 2006). Research on adolescents with mild to moderate LD placed in inclusion schools points to difficulties in cognitive and motivational engagement (Pressley et al., 1992; in Deshler, 2007; Campione, 1989; Wagner et al., 1993; Schumaker, 1992, Sideridis et al., 2006).Though the characteristics emphasized in the literature on adolescents (i.e., low self-concept, lack of motivation, deficits in cognitive strategies) are consequences rather than causes of their learning disability, these secondary traits act causally in further limiting the child’s ability to acquire new information and skills (Torgesen, 1989, p. 167).

Previous research on adolescents with LD show that these students experience considerable difficulty with actively manipulating or transforming information, organizing content information, differentiating major ideas from supporting information, comparing and contrasting information, reading and understanding large amounts of content information, relating their background knowledge to new information, holding large quantities of information in memory, and expressing information on tests and in papers (Deshler et al., 2001; Pressley et al., 1992, in Deshler, 2007, p.121). Adolescents with LD also evidence a broad array of performance and adjustment problems, including higher rates of absenteeism, lower grade point averages, higher course failure rates, more prevalent feelings of low self-esteem (Wagner et al., 1993) and higher rates of inappropriate social behaviors (Schumaker, 1992) than the student population at large (in Swanson & Deshler, 2003).

In addition to deficits in basic reading, writing and mathematical skills attributed to either a specific disability in these areas or the lack of appropriate educational opportunities, by the time students reach adolescence, their academic underachievement is attributed to cognitive and motivational deficits (Wagner et al., 1993; Schumaker, 1992; Sideridis et al., 2006). By the middle and high school levels, students who have experienced a long history of failure in meeting curricular demands often demonstrate lowered motivation and engagement in the instructional process (Deshler, 1998). Theoretical and applied work has strongly suggested that students' cognitive, motivational, and behavioral deficits influence one another over time and negatively affect classroom performance (Sideridis et al., 2006; p. 216).

Stanovich (1986) even hypothesized that LD may result from negative Matthew effects or "the behavioral/cognitive/ motivational spinoffs" (p. 389) of early academic failure (p. 389). According to his view, specific but developmentally limited cognitive deficits may lead children to struggle with acquiring key academic skills; this in turn leads to decreased motivation, more task avoidant behavior, and, eventually more generalized set of deficits (Sideridis et al., 2006, p. 216).

Torgesen (1989) suggests that based on several long-term follow-up studies (Horn, O'Donnell, & Vitulano, 1983), effective special education for students with severe reading disabilities may have its major impact on these secondary characteristics, while the primary, and specific, disability is less affected (Torgesen, 1989, p. 167). Based on her study of the factors that most influence inclusive education, Wang (1997) states that her findings "diminish the value of remote dispositional analyses, such as those finding discrepancies between IQ and achievement or hypothesizing about 'underlying process deficits;" "effective implementation of innovative programs focusing on alterable variables that have the greatest direct influence has proved to be both feasible and productive for improving student learning" (Wang, 1997, p. 24).

Therefore, while LD students may vary in their specific areas of weakness, by the time they reach secondary school, these adolescents struggle with cognitive strategies and motivation required for academic progress. In the next two sections I discuss the cognitive and motivational problems of adolescents with LD in the social context of schools before summarizing the importance of engagement in learning as a prerequisite for academic achievement. In the third section I discuss important aspects of inclusive

education with regards to the needs of adolescents with LD. The analysis of the interaction between the student and the context of learning sheds light on areas most in need of intervention for adolescents with LD. Therefore, these cognitive, social, and behavioral dimensions defined in the literature will inform the focus of my study of the potential of arts education for LD adolescents based on a social constructivist perspective.

Cognitive Difficulties: Strategy use, Metacognition, and Self-regulation

Students with LD suffer from problems in two main arenas: their knowledge of the domains (e.g., reading, writing, calculation) is faulty, and they experience particular difficulties in monitoring and regulating their learning and problem-solving efforts, leading to problems in metacognition (Campione, 1989). Flavell (1976) and Brown (1975, 1978), explain metacognition based on their studies. They distinguish between knowledge (cognition), and the understanding of knowledge (metacognition) (in Hresko & Reid, 1981, p. 239). Flavell (1976) has described metacongition as one's knowledge about one's own cognitive processes and products and anything related to them (Hresko & Reid, 1981, p. 239). Metacognitive variables are necessary skills used in academic activities such as reading and include predicting, planning, checking, and monitoring one's work (Hresko & Reid, 1981). In their study of predictors of LD, Sideridis et al. (2006) dichotomized students' metacognitions as either surface-level strategies (i.e., monitoring, rehearsal or planning), and deep processing strategies (i.e., elaboration and decoding); they found that problems in deep processing strategies were significantly more accurate in predicting LD (Sideridis et al., 2006).

Academic self-regulation refers to the process by which learners maintain cognition, affect, and behavior in order to achieve personal goals (Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003). Self-regulation includes appropriate strategy use and knowledge regarding one's own needs; learning often requires levels of self-regulation that depend on the depth of reflection and on reorganization of learning (Stone & Reid, 1994, p. 81). According to Zimmerman's cyclical model of self-regulation, learners set goals, monitor their progress, and reflect about their performance interactively (Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003).

Stone and Reid (1994) state that demonstration, explanation, and other regulation are steps involved in the improvement of cognitive functioning that would lead to self-regulation for LD students (Stone and Reid, 1994, p. 197). Since demonstration and explanation are obvious aspects of learning, the authors explain "other-regulation" based on Vygotsky's (1978) notion of processes leading to "self-regulation:" other-regulation is a concept that is based on the fact that the student can go through behaviors involved in a problem-solving strategy before fully understanding the significance of these behaviors (Ibid, 1994, p. 197). They suggest that carrying out the problem-solving behaviors is the best way for the student to develop or reinforce his understanding of why they are appropriate and how they contribute to reaching a goal: "This means that, rather than first developing self-regulative abilities and then carrying out strategic behaviors, the student often carries out strategic behaviors through other regulation and then develops self-regulative abilities" (Ibid, 1994 p. 197).

Motivation: Affective, Behavioral, and Social Concerns

Due to the accumulation of years of academic difficulties, increased demands for performance, and the need to plan and prepare for future goals, adolescents with LD have a more negative self-concept than their peers (Raviv & Stone, 1991, p. 602). Low self-concept results from: 1.) factors related to school failure (Deshler, 1978; Swayze, 1980; Wylie, 1979); 2.) factors related to being different, singled out, or labeled (Coleman, 1983; Parish, Baker, Arheart, & Adamchak, 1980); and 3.) factors inherent in the learning disabilities syndrome (Raviv & Stone, 1991, p. 602).

In prior research regarding the multi-dimensionality of motivation, Sideridis et al. (2006) used students' levels of self-efficacy, motivational force, task avoidance, goal commitment, and self-concept, as measures of their motivation; their research found that these affective dimensions that are related to learning were highly accurate in classifying students with or at risk for LD (Sideridis et al., 2006). Of the various variables that affected motivation, the researchers found that self-efficacy or self-concept measures were most significantly related to classification for LD (Sideridis et al., 2006, p. 224).

Raviv and Stone (1991) conducted a study comparing adolescents with LD and a comparable sample of normally achieving students with regards to their self-concepts. They treated self-concept as a multi-dimensional entity, tapping into students' self image with respect to a variety of constructs such as impulse control, body and self image, social and family relationships, educational goals and mastery of external world. They found that adolescents with LD had a lower self image on items that were beyond academic self-perception. They reported that adolescents with LD

"present a picture of relative passivity, perceived helplessness, dependency, lack of confidence both academically and socially, and a sense of inferiority and low self-worth;" in addition, they "tended to report more feelings of insecurity, confusion, sadness and depression, tension and difficulty with impulse controls" (Raviv & Stone, 1991, p. 606).

Social experiences are of major importance in the adolescent years. Some adolescents with LD rely more on social life in order to compensate for their academic frustrations (Raviv & Stone, 1991). Fleming et al.'s (2002) research on the influences of social contexts on the reading achievement of urban middle schoolers with LD found that of various influencing social factors, peer group climate ratings emerged as a significant predictor of rates of change in reading achievement (Fleming et al., 2002, p. 60). The authors also found that students with LD reported feeling more personally anonymous in school in terms of not knowing other students or feeling left out. In addition, these students reported significantly lower levels of personal valuing of education. The authors suggest that these findings may be related to students with LD feeling less well liked and more anonymous than other students in school since their values and competencies were not in line with skills they perceived to be important to their schoolmates (Fleming et al. 2002; p. 59). They concluded that the increasing influence of peer context may serve to exacerbate the 'risk' of learning disability and result in even poorer academic achievement for adolescence in particular (Fleming et al. 2002, p. 48).

Fleming et al. (2002) also found significantly higher levels of involvement with negative peers for students with LD than those without. (p. 56). The authors

suggest that adolescents with LD whose social status is somewhat marginal and who feel less well known and more left out at school than other kids, may be more susceptible to the influence of peers involved in misbehavior due to a desire to feel more accepted (Fleming et al., 2002, p. 60). They recommend involving students with LD in intellectually oriented activities with peers through cooperative learning or after-school programs as a way of reducing their feelings of anonymity (p. 62).

Interrelationships among Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Areas of Learning

While literature on adolescents with LD shows that their disability impacts cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of learning, most studies look at one area in isolation from others, without taking into account the social context and environmental influences on these means of engagement. The social-constructivist perspective applied in this research captured the various components related to students' learning opportunities, such as the classroom climate, student-teacher interactions, teaching and learning processes, types of activities involved in each class, and students' overall areas of strength and weakness as they related to their engagement in the arts. The findings resulting from a holistic view of students' learning in the arts highlighted the organic and inseparable modes of engagement (cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral) in the arts. I referred back to theoretical perspectives in the literature to interpret and to explain why and how the arts benefit students with LD (and other disabilities). In particular, I sought to understand enhanced student engagement related to including the body and multiple senses in learning in the arts. I also looked for explanations on the important role of affect in learning. The perspectives presented in the subsequent paragraphs show the

relationship between students' cognitive, motivational, and behavioral engagement; they show that these aspects of learning are interconnected.

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999) …. "our conceptual systems grow out of our bodies… meaning is grounded in and through our bodies" (p. 6). The authors' theoretical framework is based on research in cognitive science and cognitive linguistics; they define the term *cognitive* as visual processing, auditory processing, memory and attention, and all aspects of thought and language conscious or unconscious (p. 11) included in learning. Based on this theory:

> Reason is not disembodied, as the tradition has largely held, but arises from the nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience…the very structure of reason itself comes from the details of our embodiment. The same neural and cognitive mechanisms (such as the visual and motor systems), that allow us to perceive and move around also create our conceptual systems and modes of reason. [Reason] is shaped by the peculiarities of our human bodies, by the remarkable details of the neural structure of our brains, and the specifics of our everyday functioning in the world (p. 4).…Concepts and reason both derive from, and make use of, the sensorimotor system; the mind is not separate from or independent of the body (p. 555)

Given the underlying characteristics of students diagnosed with LD and/or ADD attributed to sensory and motor challenges, Lackoff and Johnson's cognitive theory is helpful for explaining the relationship between the sensorimotor system and conceptual understanding. Applying a bottom-up perspective of LD adolescents' difficulties points back to the original problems that led them to be diagnosed and require special education services. Though the previously reviewed literature on LD students' problems highlight some of their common characteristics once they reach adolescence, the sensorimotor challenges that lead to these difficulties are not considered in framing their educational opportunities or designing interventions. Without this understanding, educational programs will continue to assess LD

students' needs based on external manifestations of their underlying sensory-based and regulatory struggles in the school setting. Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) theory of embodied cognition supports a holistic view of learning that combines the various sensorimotor mechanisms and connects the mind and body in conceptual understanding.

Greenspan (1998) applies a developmental perspective that combines affective and cognitive domains of learning in children with developmental delays, explaining that emotions, desires, and intentions guide behavior and thought (pp. 13-14).

> …There is an intent or purpose to behavior. This intent comes from affect or emotion…Intent or affect give meaning to words and activities; a word or activity has no meaning if there is no purpose or goal to it, no emotion invested in it (p. 339).

This perspective shows the importance of integrating affect and interests in activities to make learning a more powerful and engaging experience for students with sensory and motor related disabilities. Greenspan explains how various aspects of the sensory system work together and are regulated, comparing self-regulation to the job of an orchestra conductor. The conductor provides "organization, purpose, and goals" that serve to regulate the sensory system; emotions or intent from "interactive relationships provide this sense of purpose and organization" (p. 339).Based on this perspective, Greenspan invented Floortime therapy for children with developmental delays, using children's interests and tapping into their affect to attract their attention and engage them in communication and social interaction. Generally, children with language-based problems have difficulties with receptive or expressive verbal skills which in turn have a negative affect on their ability or willingness to communicate; those with regulatory challenges experience difficulties

guiding their attention or processing information in the environment. In Floortime therapy, a child with these developmental delays is drawn into social interaction through the therapist's use of affect and by engaging the child's interests through preferred activities. Engagement through social interaction enhances language and abstract thinking skills by giving meaning to the embedded social and linguistic symbols.

Applying a developmental perspective to LD students by understanding the important influence of their sensorimotor system on their learning and conceptual reasoning, their lack of engagement can be viewed as a response to the unrealistic expectations of the general education curriculum. Adolescents with LD and ADHD have sensorimotor challenges that do not disappear with age. Therefore, engaging affect and interest in learning are important considerations for enhancing their motivation and self-efficacy. Thousand et al. (1997) refer to the extensive documentation of the relationship between learner motivation and achievement in the literature (Flavey & Grenot-Scheyer, 1995). According to the authors, student motivation is enhanced when teachers promote active learning strategies as opposed to instructional strategies such as whole-class lecture, which relegate students to being passive learners. They describe active learning opportunities that include hands-on activities and student-to-student teaching, sharing, and collaborating to direct the course of learning.

Considering the multiple dimensions of students' educational experiences, a major problem in the current outcome-based educational context is the reductionistic view of learning and an over-emphasized role of the individual in the acquisition of

knowledge. As mentioned, inclusion in this context has translated to the placement of students with LD in general education classrooms where they are presented with challenging curricular demands, with the assumption that they will learn and reproduce that information. The simplified theory of learning embedded in the current policies narrow educational opportunities for adolescents with LD and impedes the implementation of inclusive principles. Applying the social-constructivist perspective to inclusive education highlights the gaps between today's policy demands and the learning requirements of LD adolescents.

The Social Constructivist Perspective of Inclusive Education

Research shows that knowledge acquisition is a process that is influenced by both individual characteristics and the social learning environment. At the individual level, Stone and Reid (1994) describe the multifaceted nature of learning as coming to understand, an active and creative process that is grounded in past understandings as well as current contextual supports (p. 73). Based on their social constructivist perspective, knowledge must be integrated with other aspects of functioning, such as behavior, values, affect, and cultural experience (Stone & Reid, 1994).Mallory and New (1994) explain that learning is mediated by the social classroom context; their social constructivist view of inclusive education implies that curriculum is contextually relevant and problem based, and assessment is authentic and personally meaningful (p. 322). Other definitions of inclusion offered in the literature imply that there are individual, social, and environmental characteristics that interact and affect inclusive education:

> Inclusive schools are schools in which all students and adults are welcomed, valued, and supported, and are learning together through common, yet fluid, activities and environments (Sapon-Shevin, 1992; in Thousand, et al., 1997).
>
> Inclusion as operationally defined by York (1994), involves students attending the same schools as siblings and neighbors, being members in general education classrooms with chronological age-appropriate classmates, having individualized and relevant learning objectives, and being provided with the support necessary to learn.
>
> Villa & Thousand (1995) believe that inclusion is an attitude, a value, and a belief system. (King, 2003; p.152)

These definitions show that contrary to the individualistic and normative values inherent in the popular discourse of education policies, the requirements for inclusive education are much more complex. Margaret Wang's review of literature reports 28 categories of influence on school learning based on a conceptual framework applied by Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1990). These categories were found in inclusive learning environments responsive to the diverse needs of all students. Among categories of greatest influence on learning were cognitive processes, student/teacher social interactions, social/behavioral attributes, and motivational/affective attributes (Wang, 1997). In line with the social constructivist conceptual framework applied to this study, these categories (Table 1) capture both individual and contextual attributes as important influences on inclusive learning environments.

TABLE 1. CATEGORIES OF INFLUENCE ON LEARNING IN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Individual Factors	
Metacognitive Processes	Students' executive capacity to plan, monitor and, if necessary, re-plan learning strategies.
Cognitive Processes	Include not only intelligence, but also prior knowledge, competency in reading, basic mathematical skills, and verbal knowledge.
Social and Behavioral Attributes	The social nature of school and peer influence. Students who engage in positive and constructive behavior are more likely to perform well.
Motivational and Affective Attributes	Student motivation determines effort and perseverance with regard to school tasks. The role of effort and perseverance, long acknowledged as important by

	classroom teachers, are now regarded as key attributes necessary for developing self-regulated learning.
Contextual Influences:	
Student/Teacher Interaction	The frequency and quality of student and teacher social interaction contribute to students' self esteem and foster a sense of membership in the class and school.
Classroom Management	Effective classroom management increases student engagement, decreases disruptive behavior and makes good use of instructional time.
Classroom Climate	The social-psychological dimensions of classroom life including cooperation among teacher and students, common interests and values, the pursuit of common goals, a clear academic focus, well-organized and well-planed lessons explicit learning objectives, and appropriate level of task difficulty for students and an appropriate instructional pace

Source: Wang, 1997

With regards to an inclusive curriculum design, Thousand et al. (1997) called for a paradigmatic shift by restructuring high schools to embrace broad-based outcomes and allow secondary teachers to generate a more flexible curriculum that promotes creativity in students, honors students' multiple and unique ways of knowing and showing their learning (Gardner, 1983) to encourage higher order outcomes for a greater number of youth. Thousand et al. (1997) promote the application of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (1983) to assess how students best learn.

> Gardner's model assumes that all individuals possess capacity for knowledge, but each person acquires and expresses it in diverse ways. Traditional, secondary schools have relied on students' abilities to acquire and express their knowledge through linguistic and mathematical/logical means. Gardner has suggested that reliance on such a narrow understanding of intelligence is a disservice to many individuals whose intelligences are exercised and demonstrated through other means. Gardner delineates seven types of intelligences: linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. (Thousand et al., 1997; p. 271)

The recommendations reviewed thus far show the importance of a flexible curriculum at the secondary level that allows students to engage through their strengths rather than limiting learning opportunities to language-based instruction. The authors also emphasize the importance of opportunities for students to use their

creativity. These suggestions based on prior research point to benefits of the arts for students with learning differences. Considering students' overall educational experiences through the social constructivist view highlights the reasons why LD adolescents' educational requirements are not met within the ideology that currently drives inclusion, based on the premise that all students should meet the same predetermined standards relying on language-based skills.

In addition to the mentioned set of recommendations considering individual learning needs of students with disabilities, other research shows important factors related to the teaching and learning process, activities, and the social learning environment. Jorgensen et al.'s (1997) eight curricular components that enhance inclusive educational opportunities(Table 2) are processes embedded in arts-based classrooms.

TABLE 2. INCLUSIVE CURRICULAR ELEMENTS

A Central Unit Issue, Problem, or Question	Structuring a unit of study around an issue, problem or essential question creates a framework for the learning experience and provides direction and coherence. When all students in a classroom are focused on addressing a common question, difference in learning style and ability are less important that the commonality of all students construction meaning in the content area, in a personalized way.
Unit Grabber	Beginning each major unit of study with a highly motivating "grabber" or kick-off activity can help engage all students (by assessing and involving students' prior experiences and interests).
Learning Experiences that Link	All students need to have explicit connections made among individual daily learning experiences.
Richly Detailed Source Material	The use of richly detailed source material that represents a variety of student learning styles and intelligences assures that each student in the class has access to the knowledge base in the topic being studied.
Varied Learning Formats	When teachers use a variety of teaching formats, such as cooperative groups, whole class instruction, student pairs, Socratic dialogues, labs, and teacher student conferencing, the probability increases that each students learning style will be addressed.
Multiple Assessments	To ensure powerful student learning, teachers need to monitor and assess students' progress through the unit, not just at the end. The greater diversity found in the inclusive classroom makes the need for periodic assessment all the more critical.
Varied Modes of Expression:	Intelligence is comprised of many different kinds of abilities and talents. While teachers traditional tend to emphasize verbal-linguistic and logical-

	mathematical intelligences to the exclusion of most other talents, teachers in inclusive classrooms need to design instructional and assessment activities that 'tap into' the variety of intelligences (such as musical, interpersonal and spatial intelligences).
Culminating Projects	Culminating projects provide student with opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of the unit's central issue or problem through a public presentation. When teachers provide choices for how students can present their final exhibition including options for written papers, demonstration, oral presentations and building models each student has the opportunity to use his or her favored learning style.

Source: Jorgensen, et al. 1997; p. 7

Jorgensen et al. (1997) explain the purpose of student evaluation within an inclusive context is to:

> Gather information on what a student knows, what the student needs to know, how the student best acquires knowledge, and how a student uses what he or she knows… Demonstration of student knowledge through work samples (projects, exhibits, videos, reports, presentations and the application of concepts in real life situations), and through enhanced social interaction yield far more valuable information about the progress of a student than having a student respond to a closed set of questions on a paper and pencil test. (Thousand et al., 1997; p. 273)

Trent, Artiles, and Englert (1998), describe four basic principles of the social constructivist perspective applied to inclusive education: a) apprenticeship in applied settings, b) access to empowering modes of discourse, c) guided instruction that leads to self-regulated learning, and d) learning in cultural historical contexts of importance in designing inclusive education (Trent et al., 1998, p. 285). Their framework is based on the work of Vygotsky (1978), the Soviet psychologist who brought together individual and contextual aspects of learning. The four basic principles outlined by the authors are defined in Table 3.

TABLE 3. SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Apprenticeship in Applied Settings	Knowledge is acquired through social interactions in a contextualized setting (i.e., classroom interactions and curricular design) in which students are allowed to see how the various parts of the learning process fit together.
Access to Empowering Modes of Discourse	Highlight strategies for problem solving. Teachers must make explicit higher cognitive levels of thinking that makes visible the meta-level strategies that are valued and privileged in schools.

Guided Instruction that Leads to Self-Regulated Learning	a. The gradual transfer of the cognitive process to the learner. b. Teaching in a student's ZPD: instruction in a cognitive process in advance of learners' independent performance by tapping into those cognitive functions that are in a state of maturing. c. Collaborative ways of thinking and ways of acting are first experienced in interactions with peers and teachers but, overtime, are gradually internalized by learners to guide, determine, and mediate their own mental activity. d. d. In collaboration with teachers and peers in a social context, students have an opportunity 'grow into the intellectual life of those around them;' students with disabilities are lifted to higher levels.
Learning in Cultural Historical Contexts	Individuals are active learners who craft knowledge based on their prior experiences. They use cultural tools (symbols, constructs, or material) to function in their social milieus.

Source: Trent, Artiles, and Englert (1998)

Research supporting the social constructivist perspective of education that shows the importance of the processes outlined in Tables 1-3 was conducted in 1990, by the American Psychological Association's special Presidential Task Force on Psychology in Education to a) determine ways in which the psychological knowledge base related to learning, motivation, and individual difference could contribute directly to improvements in the quality of student achievement, and b) provide guidance for the design of education systems that would best support individual student learning and achievement. The resulting document, "Learner Centered Psychological Principles: A Framework for School Reform and Redesign" (American Psychological Association Presidential Task Force on Psychology in Education, 1993) specifies fundamental principles about learners and learning:

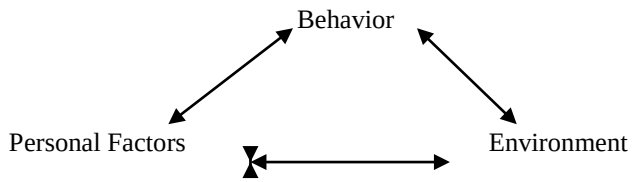
> [Learner-centered practices] couple a focus on individual learners (their heredity, experiences, perspectives, backgrounds, talents, interests, capacities, and needs) with a focus on learning (the best available knowledge about learning and how it occurs and about teaching practices that are most effective in promoting the highest levels of motivation, learning, and achievement for all learners). (McCombs & Whisler, 1997, in King, 2003)
>
> A critical understanding is that the learner-centered model focuses equally on the learner and on the process of learning….The theoretical roots of the learner-centered perspective can be found in a social cognitive model of student motivation (Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992). Students' beliefs

> (cognitions, perceptions) about themselves and the task or classroom environment act as mediators of their behavior and are crucial in explaining how an individual negotiates and adapts to the social environment. The social aspect of the model implies that the self-system is embedded in a social context that includes the individual and individual's interactions and relations with the task and with others… These efforts share a belief that learner performance is optimized through guidance by a more knowledgeable other (e.g., teacher) who structures an optimal level of challenge by considering the demands of the task and the level of the learner. (King, 2003, p. 153)

The social-cognitive theory of learning referred to in King's explanation of learner-centered principles highlights the importance of cognitive and motivational engagement, as well as individual and social processes in learning. Prior research in this area explains the relationships between the various affective and cognitive components of learning and their influences on academic achievement (Figure 1):

> People are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli. Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocality in which behavior, cognitive and other personal factors, and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other. (Bandura, 1986, p. 18)

Figure 1. Triadic Interaction of Behavior, Personal Factors, and the Environment



Source: Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory of learning.

The social-cognitive theory accounts for the interaction among the person, the environment, and the behavior (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000, in Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003). Studies based on this theory found interactive and cyclical relationships between the affective and cognitive domains of self-efficacy, motivation, and self-regulation that in turn affect academic achievement (Bandura,

1996; Garcia & Pintrich, 1991; Pintrich & Linnenbrink, 2003; Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003). Bandura et al. (1996) state that self-efficacy beliefs "influence aspirations and strength of goal commitments, level of motivation and perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, resilience to adversity, quality of analytic thinking, casual attributions for successes and failures, and vulnerability to stress and depression" (Bandura et al., 1996, p. 1206).Self-efficacy leads to behavioral, cognitive, and motivational engagements that guide learning and achievement which in turn affect future feelings of self-efficacy (Pintrich & Linnenbrink, 2003).

Garcia and Pintrich (1991) found that intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and self-regulated learning interact and influence academic achievement (Garcia & Pintrich, 1991).Academic self-regulation refers to "the process by which learners maintain cognition, affect, and behavior in order to achieve personal goals" (Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003). According to Zimmerman's cyclical model of self-regulation, learners set goals, monitor their progress, and reflect about their performance interactively (Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003). "Children's beliefs in their efficacy to regulate their own learning activities and to master difficult subject matters affect their academic motivation, interest, and scholastic achievement" (Bandura, 1993; Schunk, 1989; Zimmerman, 1995 in Bandura et al., 1996).The acquisition and use of cognitive strategies applied by self-regulated learners are fundamental to academic achievement for all students, including those with LD (Biemiller & Michenbaum, 1992; Bembenutty & Zimmerman, 2003; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Deshler, et al., 1984).

Figure 2. Social-Cognitive Perspective of Learning Processes

Aptitudes and Prior Experience→	Self-efficacy →	Self-Regulation: Behavioral Engagement • Effort • Persistence • Instrumental Help-seeking Cognitive Engagement→ • Strategy Use • Metacognition Motivational Engagement • Interest • Value • Affect	Learning and Achievement

A social-cognitive framework of affective and cognitive attributes of learning in relation to academic achievement (based on a combination of models by Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003 and Schunk, 1989).

In Figure 2, I combined models by Schunk (1998) and Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003). Schunk (1989) found that aptitudes and prior experiences influence students' initial beliefs about their learning capabilities affecting their self-efficacy (Schunk, 1989, p.15). Self-efficacy determines task engagement and student motivation and learning (Schunk, 1989). Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) found that self-efficacy promotes behavioral, cognitive, and motivational engagement in learning leading to the development of self-regulation as well as improved achievement.

The multi-faceted nature of learning as influenced by individual characteristics and mediated by the social environment, including curriculum, instruction, activities, and student-teacher interactions are highlighted by the social constructivist theory. The importance of these aspects of learning is further supported by research applying the social-cognitive framework and Learner-Centered

pedagogies. Contrary to the narrow focus on academic outcomes based on standardized test scores, the aforementioned research on inclusive learning environments, shows the important influence of the social educational context and learning opportunities on students' interests and motivation to learn. In contrast, the testing requirements of NCLBA and the IDEA are based on a normative perspective of educational opportunity with the false assumption that instruction of standards-based curriculum and inclusion in standardized testing benefits students with learning disabilities without regard for their differences. Research shows that this narrow focus in education can actually harm students with learning disabilities placed in inclusion settings where schools are held accountable for their progress based only on their test scores. In order to provide inclusive educational opportunities, a social constructivist view of education provides a lens that captures the importance of positive learning experiences to enhance LD students' self-efficacy and motivation. Given the social implications of failure for adolescents reviewed in the previous section, it is no surprise that they have higher rates of absenteeism, lower grade point averages, higher course failure rates, more prevalent feelings of low self-esteem and higher rates of inappropriate social behaviors than the student population at large (in Swanson & Deshler, 2003).

The individual and contextual aspects of learning in the arts (reviewed in the next section) show that arts education and the integration of the arts in the school curriculum provide inclusive learning opportunities for students who are at risk of academic failure. The findings from prior research in the arts fit within the components of the social-constructivist perspective of inclusive education, by

addressing complex individual, social, and environmental aspects of learning. In the next section I discuss studies of arts-based learning within a social constructivist framework to lay the theoretical foundation for my study that links the benefits attributed to the arts with the educational requirements of adolescents with LD placed in inclusion schools.

Arts Education and Integration: A Review of Research

Arts education refers to the study of different art forms (music, dance, visual arts, and theater). Arts integration is defined as the use of the arts as media to communicate content and methods of learning through practices such as careful observation, inquiry, practice, creation, representation, performance, critique and reflection (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 64). Several studies show that arts-based approaches lead to motivational and cognitive enhancements in learning; these gains were also found to be greater for students who are at academic risk (Baum et al., 1997; Catterall, 2002; Ingram & Seashore, 2003). The following example of an arts-integrated program from Chicago schools shows some of the ways the arts enhance students' learning opportunities though "powerful social and emotional dynamics":

> In arts-integrated classrooms, work more often clearly and meaningfully connects to students' own experiences and feelings. Students create a product for an audience that matters to them-not just their teachers, but also their schoolmates, families, and communities-as they internalize motives to do well. (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 63)

The description of an arts-integrated educational context shows the value of the arts in providing additional media for learning. Visual arts, music, and drama offer students who have difficulties with tasks required for academic learning (such as reading and writing) other ways to engage and perform. Students with learning

disabilities who may have difficulties with language-based instruction can engage through visual, kinesthetic, or musical modes of learning. The social and emotional dynamics referred to by Rabkin and Raymond (2006) further allow students to connect their feelings to activities in an arts-based classroom, making learning a more powerful and meaningful experience.

Definitions and Trends

Burnaford et al. (2007) trace the idea of an integrated curriculum as far back as the 1918 Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education report which recommended the organization of the curriculum around major themes (Cruikshank, 2000), and William Heard Kilpatrick's "project method" which proposed units or themes of study based on students' interests in order to make learning more relevant and meaningful (Burnaford et al., 2007, pp. 1-2). John Dewey (1931) proposed the reorganization of subjects so that "the interdependence of knowledge and the relationship between knowledge and human purpose would be made clear" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 149; in Burnaford et al., 2007, p. 2). In 1936, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) published a report titled *A Correlated Curriculum* which described a democratic education model of secondary school curriculum that "combined subject-specific learning with interdisciplinary and integrated options" (Burnaford et al., 2007, p. 2). Today, the notion of arts integration is based on this historical trend that led to the mid-twentieth century notion of "problem-based learning and inquiry learning," which suggests that "the questions students ask to work through an investigation or problem create an approach to learning that is multidisciplinary and relevant to the real world" (Burnaford et al., 2007, p. 2).

In the subsequent sections, I review both individual and environmental benefits associated with arts education and integration based on prior research. At the individual level, findings support academic improvements and enhancements in student's self-concept, motivation, and cognitive engagement in learning. Based on these studies, the transfer of cognitive and motivational acquisitions within the arts to other subject areas is the link between the arts and improved academic outcomes (Catteral, 2002; Rabkin & Redmond, 2006; Baum et al. 1997; Burnaford et al., 2007). As mentioned, lower self-efficacy, motivation, and cognitive engagement, as well as difficulties with self-regulatory skills are challenges faced by LD adolescents that impede their academic progress. Findings from prior research show that the arts have the potential to address these areas related to students' ability to engage successfully in learning.

In addition to individual gains, in the subsequent paragraphs I review literature regarding the environmental benefits associated with the arts. Through the arts, students are included in lessons and classroom activities for which they may otherwise lack the basic skills required for participation (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). In addition, researchers found that the strategies used in the arts instructional environment led to the development of self-regulatory skills for low-performing students (Baum et al., 1997). In the last section of the overview of arts education literature I explain findings regarding the transfer of motivational and cognitive attributes of learning from the arts to academics. Based on the described benefits found in other studies, information regarding whether and how arts education benefits

adolescents with LD provides insights for creating inclusive learning opportunities through the arts.

Individual Gains

Large scale studies of the impact of arts on academic achievement show that students involved in the arts performed better in math and reading and scored higher on standardized tests than those who were not (Catteral & Waldorf, 1999; Corbett et al., 2001). Based on their evaluation of the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE), Catteral and Waldorf (1999) report that in the 23 arts-integrated schools, most serving low-income students, standardized test scores of students rose as much as two times faster than the scores of youth in more traditional schools. Surveys of teachers, administrators and students revealed that engagement in the arts led to improvement in students' self-concept. Teachers reported that an arts integrated curriculum has learning, attitudinal, and social benefits for children (p. 52). The researchers also found that the relative advantage of involvement in the arts increases over the middle and high school years (Catterall & Waldorf, 1999, in Fiske, 1999).

Corbett et al. (2001) also reported gains in math and reading test scores based on their evaluation of A+ schools in North Carolina. The A+ program's goal is to "create enhanced learning opportunities for all students by using arts-integrated instruction which incorporates Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, as well as other theories of intelligence and recent brain research" (Burnaford et al., 2007, p. 33). The A+ program served schools with larger proportions of minority students than the state as a whole; the evaluation results indicated increased

communication, community involvement teacher collaboration, and substantive assessments (Burnaford et al., 2007, p. 34).

The arts in education are also reported to increase students' motivation to learn (Deasy, 2002). Newman (2000) attributes increased motivation in learning in the arts to the authentic intellectual learning experiences: "Learning in the arts is interesting and meaningful, promotes higher levels of engagement, raises students' intrinsic standards and motivates students to invest energy that learning requires of them (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006; p. 63)."A study of an arts-integrated program in Minneapolis (Ingram & Seashore, 2003) showed that through the use of the arts, low-performing students who were previously withdrawn or disruptive became active and productive class members (Rabkin & Redmond, 2006). Baker et al.'s (2004) study relates improvements in student engagement to an increase in students' self-perceptions of success in arts-integrated programs. Motivational gains from the arts are especially important for struggling students such as those with LD whose experiences of academic failure through the years decreases their motivation to engage in learning by the time they enter secondary school (Swanson & Deshler, 2003).

In addition to the mentioned research findings, Sally Smith, the founder and late director of the Lab School of Washington, a private arts-based school for students with LD believed that the "power of the arts" are in the way they provide LD students who have language-based difficulties to use all their senses in learning. She explains that "many nontraditional learners are visual learners who do not think in words but rather, think in shapes, forms, sizes, and textures;" "their world is a graphic world"

(2001, p. 4). She describes that the arts "articulate human experience," offer concrete learners "hands-on experiences" (Ibid, p. 5), and provide the material for the "concrete child" who needs to "look, touch, and see" (Ibid, p. 21) in the learning process. Smith believes that the arts are a learning tool because their symbolic nature allows for understanding without words. She also explains that the arts are "motivators;" they "capture children's excitement, interests, and passions;" and "they build self-worth, confidence, and self-esteem" (Ibid, p. 5). Smith draws on Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, explaining that "alternative learners frequently use visual intelligence, musical intelligence, or kinesthetic intelligence" (p. 24).She criticizes the current standards and testing practices for students with LD, and believes that the arts are a necessary component of learning for uncovering their talents.

Baum et al. (1997) found that students' success in the arts was related to the nature of arts instruction which relies on a mixture of both verbal and nonverbal teaching. The authors report that parallel to the sequence advocated by cognitive developmentalists (Piaget and Brunet), in arts instruction nonverbal instruction often precedes the verbal and is given more emphasis. "The arts students had been assessed as having particular strengths in nonverbal intelligences- musical, kinesthetic, and spatial (Gardner, 1995) and were eager to attend to tasks that emphasized those abilities (i.e., tasks that forecast success)" (Baum et al., 1997, p. 37).

Students gained self-efficacy from successful experiences using their areas of strength, which increased their motivation to engage actively in learning. According to the authors, these positive experiences led to students' development and use of

self-regulatory skills. Self-regulatory skills are defined as "processes such as choosing practice techniques, using memory aids, finding suitable places to work, asking relevant questions, and setting interim goals" (Baum, et al., 1997; p. 33). Baum et al. found that students who were failing academically gained self-regulatory skills through their artistic areas of strength. Students in arts classes paid attention, followed directions, set goals, and practiced on their own. They also had self-set performance goals and expressed confidence in their artistic abilities; their successful experiences in the arts helped them to build self efficacy. Most importantly, Baum et al. report that self-regulatory behaviors shown by the students in the arts had not been explicitly taught; the students had been motivated to discover them on their own so that they could succeed (Baum et al., 1997).

To assess some of the individual gains with regards to the enhancement of educational opportunities associated with learning through the arts, Wolf (2007) designed the Dimensions of an Enriched Framework for Opportunity to Learn (Table 4) as a conceptual tool. Wolf combines principles from three theoretical orientations (Universal Designs for Learning [UDL]), Equity and Standards Movement, and Arts Education) in order to determine opportunities to understand, opportunities for excellence, and opportunities to imagine offered in arts-based classes. Table 4 shows the various components associated with each of the three opportunities provided through the arts.

TABLE 4. DIMENSIONS OF AN ENRICHED FRAMEWORK FOR OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN

Opportunity to Understand	Multiple modes of representation, multiple modes of expression, and multiple forms of engagement
Opportunity for Excellence	Clear and widely shared information, sustained access to key tools, spaces, and interactions, challenging assignments, and supports for learning

Opportunity to Imagine	Originality, choices and varieties of excellence, exchange and response

Source: Wolf, 2007

Environmental Benefits

In addition to individual improvements in cognitive and motivational areas of learning, studies have found environmental benefits associated with the arts in the school curriculum. In their book titled "Third Space; When Learning Matters," Lauren Stevenson and Richard Deasy (2005) describe their findings based on case studies of arts education and integration programs: "By forging new relationships between artists, students, and teachers, the arts created powerful contexts and conditions for learning in which students played active and meaningful roles in their own education and through which a sense of community was formed within and around the schools" (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, p. 10). Arts integrated classrooms created positive interpersonal relationships and enhanced the classroom climate.

The authors used the term "third space" to describe the context created by the arts: "The artist used the term to capture the atmosphere in the classroom when she and her students create works of art, one in which students are deeply absorbed and able to take the risks demanded in a creative process" (Ibid, p. 10). The historical use of the term in the arts is used to describe the way in which meaning exists in the interaction between the viewer (the first space), and the piece of art (the second space); the authors suggest that "a similar third space is opened in the process of creating a work of art" (Ibid, p. 10).

Stevenson and Deasy (2005) found "mattering" to be the central concept that teachers, students, and school administrators expressed when they described the

impact of the arts on student learning, and why arts learning experiences engaged students in different and more powerful ways than other school programs: “Learning mattered to students, they said, and students felt like they mattered in their schools” (Ibid, p. 18).The researchers found that the arts provided a medium through which students connected their lives to school by being allowed to use their imaginations and personal backgrounds in their work. The arts “involves an active process of meaning-making” and “students’ background experiences are central” (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, p. 51).

The arts also improved the school environment by allowing students to express and share their feelings through artistic media which in turn decreased their negative behaviors. As reported by a teaching artist, “I think we are giving kids another way to express themselves besides being mad or angry” (Ibid, 2005, p. 27).The researchers found that parents, teachers, and administrators in several schools attributed good or improving student behavior and attendance rates to their arts programs (Ibid, 2005, p. 35). Stevenson and Deasy (2005) conclude that the arts create a learning context that offers “active participation,” “higher order thinking,” “variety,” “collaborative activities,” and “meaningful connections to students’ cultures and lives outside of school;” research on the improvement of learning environments found that these conditions enhance cognitive development, positive youth development, and student engagement (Bransford & Cocking, 1999; McLaughlin, 2000; Stipek et al., 2004, in Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, pp. 48-49). In addition, the arts contributed to creating a sense of community; belonging to a

community of learners leads to positive outcomes for students (in King, 2003, p. 156).

Baum et al. (1997) also found that gains in individual self-regulation were related to the learning processes used in arts-integrated educational environments, and that the advantages were even greater for under-achieving students. They observed a group of students in their regular classrooms and in an arts-based setting and reported:

> Arts environments inspire students to assume greater responsibility for their learning whereas in regular classrooms students are expected to adopt more passive roles. Arts teachers focus on training students to master a series of specific techniques; classroom teachers emphasize the final outcomes or the correct answers. In arts classroom the students share the stage with the instructor in setting goals, trying new skills, and evaluating their own and each others' performances. In regular classrooms, the teachers take center stage, and the class is an attentive audience only when entertained. (Baum et al., 1997 p. 36)

Baum et al. (1997) conclude that learning environments and instructional strategies used in the arts setting have a positive influence on the extent to which students develop and use self-regulatory behaviors.

With regards to measurable school outcomes, Stevenson and Deasy (2005) report several examples of improvement based on their study of various arts-integrated schools. In Tucson, Arizona, school district officials and teachers at Peter Howell Elementary credit the school's integrated arts program for improved scores on Arizona's standardized tests, including improvement in reading and mathematics. Pierce Street Elementary in Tupelo, Mississippi has the highest number of entering students deemed at risk for failure by the school district's early prevention of school failure assessment; through their arts program they engage students in activities that

are meaningful to them and help them master a range of literacy skills required on standardized tests. Hand Middle School in Columbia, South Carolina had an eighty-five percent rate of improvement on test scores of its African-American students and was named an Exemplary Writing School by the Writing Improvement Network and South Carolina Department of Education (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, pp. 62-63).

Summary

Prior research on the educational needs of adolescents with LD shows the importance of self-efficacy, motivation, and self-regulation in their learning. However, most of these studies investigate their learning in academic classrooms that tap into their areas of weakness. Less is known about the types of opportunities in schools that inspire and engage LD students or take into consideration their strengths. Another gap in research on LD students is the absence of their perspectives and lived experiences within schools.

Findings from studies of effective inclusive education shed light on pedagogical processes and characteristics of learning environments that enhance the inclusion of students with LD in general education classrooms. The multi-dimensional components and instructional processes of inclusive education highlighted in this literature are contrary to the narrow definition of educational opportunity embedded in the standards-based curriculum and testing framework endorsed by the NCLBA and the reauthorization of IDEA; these polices assume that inclusion in grade-level curriculum and testing is sufficient for the inclusion of LD students in learning.

Studies of general education students and those “at-risk” of academic failure

found that art-based settings create learner-centered environments that lead to enhancements in cognitive and motivational engagement in the learning process. Based on the premise that the various modes of learning included in the arts have the potential to engage students with LD who have language-based difficulties, I designed this case study to explore the nature of students' learning in the arts. As explained throughout the last two chapters, I am interested in learning whether and how the processes involved in learning through the arts can enhance inclusive educational opportunities for adolescents with LD. In Chapter 3 I explain the methodology for an exploratory case study of the nature of individual and contextual elements in the arts that influence LD adolescents' engagement in learning. Most importantly, the research design gives voice to students' interpretations of their school-based experiences by using their narrative accounts as the primary source of information. Insights gained from this study can inform arts education programs as well as highlight various aspects of inclusion at the school level that are left out of the current policy discourse.

Chapter 3: Methodology

> The problem of disclosing the character of educational events and the quality of what children are learning can, I am arguing, be conceived as an artistic problem.(Eisner, 2002, pp. 188-89)

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential benefits of arts education for adolescents with LD placed in inclusion schools. Through a case study design, I observed and interviewed a group of students who were receiving special education services and were participating in a public charter school's drama and music classes. I collected information from their teachers and parents to gain understanding of each student participant's educational profile. I studied the context and nature of students' engagement in learning in an arts-based setting in order to examine the value of arts education in a public school inclusion program. The music, drama and visual arts teachers were interviewed with respect to their pedagogical styles and perspectives of teaching the arts to students with LD.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

Prior studies of the arts in education point to enhancements in affective domains related to learning, such as improved self-esteem, as well as cognitive advancements, including the acquisition of self-regulatory skills. These improvements attributed to the arts were found to be greatest for "at-risk" students (Catteral, 2003). In this study, I extended the set framework to look specifically at the influence of the arts on LD adolescents' engagement within the context of an inclusion school. The research problem is based on the premise that within the current standards-based curriculum and high-stakes testing policy framework, LD

adolescents are increasingly disengaged from learning. Disengagement results from the unrealistic curricular demands at the middle and high school levels that are based on covering predetermined benchmarks of standards-based curriculum instead of meeting individual students' needs (Swanson & Deshler, 2003). Studies show that students' experiences of success or failure as they engage in learning have a great influence on their decisions to remain in school (Bridgeland et. al, 2003). Investigating possible benefits of the arts informs interventions for LD adolescents who are at risk of dropping out of school.

In my research I studied the nature of students' opportunities to learn within arts classes through a social-constructivist lens that takes into account both the social and contextual components of learning and various aspects of student engagement. The study was based on the premise that the arts offer activities that tap into alternative modes of learning that fall into some students' areas of strength (based on Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences), thereby increasing the likelihood of their engagement through means that are not offered in academic subjects. Most studies of adolescents with LD look at their engagement in areas that rely heavily on language-based skills; my goal was to investigate the nature and degree of students' engagement in a setting in which learning does not require their area of weakness. Therefore, the study was designed to inform ways of engaging students with LD in learning and in school by looking at whether and how arts education provides them with inclusive learning opportunities through alternative means of engagement.

Prior research regarding the educational requirements of adolescents with LD points to motivation as an important factor to consider in designing inclusive learning

opportunities for this student group (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Deshler, 1984, 2003). In addition, research shows that behavioral, cognitive, and motivational engagement in learning is a prerequisite to academic achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003;Deshler, 1984, 2003). Despite the importance of motivation, and the inter-relationship between affective and cognitive domains of learning, these aspects of students' lived experiences are often left out of policy considerations for students with special needs. Exploring the different dimensions of engagement through the social constructivist perspective allowed me to study the less measureable aspects of students' engagement related to affective domains of learning such as students' attitudes and motivation to learn. The use of qualitative methods of data collection and interpretation within a social constructivist theoretical framework enabled me to investigate the various aspects of LD adolescents' learning experiences and contextualize the place of the arts in their education.

The policy context explained in previous chapters serves as the macro-environment that influences educational priorities for students with special needs. These policies have a negative effect on LD students' engagement in learning by holding them to the same unrealistic expectations of standards-based curriculum and testing as their non-disabled peers. Eisner (2002) gives several reasons for the overemphasis on test scores as indicators of academic achievement:

> Somehow a type of precise objectivity is implied when complex forms of learning are reduced to a single score or letter; parents often want an unambiguous indicator of their child's or the school's performance; and there's a lack of alternative ways of evaluating educational quality. (p. 188)

Through this study, I intend to contribute to "alternative ways of evaluating educational quality" by: 1) contextualizing the characteristics of adolescents with special

needs and their educational opportunities within the greater policy framework; 2) applying a holistic theoretical perspective of education based on the social-constructivist theory that takes into account individual and social components of classroom learning; 3) using narrative inquiry to describe the experiences of students and teachers who are ultimately affected by policy and curricular decisions in their own words.

This study is significant because it addresses the following gaps in research:

1. There is little research on the remediation of motivational deficits in adolescents with LD (Deshler, 2001). Studies of the less measurable, affective domains of learning are needed to inform interventions designed to enhance LD adolescents' experiences in schools.
2. The study adds knowledge regarding teaching and learning processes in arts education, and the ways in which the learning opportunities in the arts provide a motivational entry point for students with LD.
3. The social-constructivist framework captures the interaction of individual learner characteristics and contextual factors as important aspects of inclusive education. This perspective sheds light on important considerations left out of the current implementation of inclusion in middle and secondary schools.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study is: What are the processes involved in an arts education settings and how do these processes affect LD adolescents' engagement in learning?

More specific questions that informed the broad research question were:

1. **What is the nature of teaching and learning in an arts-based classroom?**

This question explores the aspects of teaching and learning that are unique to the arts. Other studies have described various aspects of learning in the arts; however, less is known about how the opportunities provided address the specific challenges faced by adolescents with LD. To answer this question, I conducted observations and narrative interviews of students and teachers involved in thearts; this information is presented in Chapter 4 (the case study context) and Chapter 6, the thematic analysis of the findings.

2. **How do the arts affect LD students' engagement in learning?**

   While prior research in the arts suggests that students are more engaged in arts classes, there is little known about the specific aspects of learning in the arts as they relate to particular types of student engagement. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) describe three types of engagement in learning: behavioral, motivational, and cognitive. My goal was to expand upon these indicators by understanding students' experiences and the nature of their engagement in the arts through their own narrative accounts.

3. **What are the teachers' perceptions of their own teaching and how do they perceive LD adolescents' learning and performance within each art form?**

I was interested in how teachers view LD adolescents' engagement in the arts, and whether or not they differentiate their teaching to meet their needs. In Chapter 4, I included teachers' narrative accounts of their pedagogical styles and factors that influence how they teach the arts. Teachers also revealed their perceptions of LD students' learning experiences and the ways in which they try to meet their needs.

4. **What are the students' perceptions of their involvement in the arts and what experiences do they value?**

   The themes for the findings in Chapter 6 are primarily based on the students' own perceptions of their participation in arts-based classes. Students shared the nature of their engagement in the arts and the learning opportunities they perceived the arts offered them. They also compared their motivation to learn in arts versus academic classes. The analysis of their narrative accounts, triangulated with information presented by their teachers and parents derived the themes presented in the findings (Chapter 6).

5. **What are parents' perceptions of their children's engagement in the arts and their overall strengths and weaknesses in learning?**

A missing piece in the literature on the arts is the views of parents regarding their children's involvement in schools-based arts programs. Parents' unique perspective of their children's strengths and weaknesses is presented in the student profiles in Chapter 5. The information they provided informs the place of the arts in their children's overall educational experience and engagement in school.

The preceding questions were designed to take into account the complex individual and social processes involved in learning in an arts-based setting. My goal was to understand the nature of students' engagement in the arts with regards to their strengths and weaknesses at the individual level; I also wanted to capture the environmental factors (including the teacher's pedagogical style, classroom activities and assessments, and opportunities for engagement) as they influence LD students' engagement in learning. Most importantly, I wanted my findings to rely in large part on the research participants' own interpretations of their experiences. The voices of

students, teachers, and parents, often left out of academic research, are included in this study as the primary basis for the findings.

A quality arts-program at a small charter school offered a unique opportunity for an in-depth study of the implications of arts education for adolescents with LD. Including the research participants' voices in the construction of the themes offered a valuable perspective of learning opportunities provided by the arts. The themes derived from the students' accounts of their experiences situate the particular type of learning that takes place in the arts within their overall opportunities to learn. The information collected informs issues to consider in designing inclusive learning opportunities for adolescents with LD.

Research Design and Methods

The social constructivist conceptual design for this study is supported by Eisner's (2002) notion of an "evaluational landscape." Eisner asks, how can research in education "be communicated so that the complexity and ambiguity and richness of what happens in schools and classrooms be revealed?" (p. 189). He suggests the construction of an "evaluational landscape" from "a variety of sources and revealed through different types of reporting procedures" (p.189). In line with these goals, this study requires the exploration and interpretation of the complex and dynamic processes of students' engagement in arts-based learning that require qualitative research methods of data collection and analysis. The interpretive nature of qualitative research is suitable for the goal of studying learning processes within schools as lived experience (Merriam, 1998). The social constructivist theory of education that informs the epistemological orientation of this research design holds

that learning happens in the dynamic interactions of students and teachers within the social classroom context. Qualitative research allows for the exploration of the participants' experiences with learning in the arts based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain that the goal of a qualitative researcher is to "study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (in Clandinin, 2007, p. 4). I used narrative inquiry within a case study design to collect the participants' stories as they experienced their engagement in the arts (Clandinin, 2007): "Narrative inquiry begins in experience as expressed in lived and told stories (p. 5)." This form of investigation also allowed me to include the affective aspects of engagement by telling the story of the drama and music classes, including participants' interpretations of their experiences. Finally, narrative inquiry captures the nuances of teaching and learning in the arts for the construction of an evaluational landscape. Clandinin explains that while narrative inquiry has experiential starting points, it is also "informed by and intertwined with theoretical literature that informs either the methodology or an understanding of the experiences with which the inquirer began" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; in Clandinin, 2007, p. 5). The theoretical research that informed this study (presented in Chapter 2) highlights the importance of understanding various influences on educational opportunities for adolescents with LD; this body of literature is referred to in the analyses of the findings (Chapter 6).

My own academic training in the areas of psychology, special education, and education policy, as well as my work with students with special needs, informed the

application of the social-constructivist perspective to this research design. In addition, in the beginning stages of this research my son was diagnosed with sensory integration disorder, considered to be the underlying physiological challenge for children diagnosed with a range of disabilities, from LD to Autism. My son's pattern of language and conceptual development helped me learn about the underlying sensory processing differences that influence learning and my research in this area contributed an additional layer of analysis to this study's findings. His artistic and musical talents also inspired my investigation of the importance of modes of expression offered by the arts for students with language-based and sensory processing challenges.

Case Study Setting and Participants

I used a case study design to frame the complex interplay of the individuals and the environment (Yin, 2003) in an arts-based setting. Stake (1995) explains case study methodology as the study of "the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). Merriam (1998) describes case studies as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic: "Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program or phenomenon… descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study… and heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study" (pp. 29-30).

Case study methodology sets boundaries around the phenomenon of interest (Miles & Huberman, 1994, in Merriam, 1998). The case in this research design is the

arts program at Urban Community Public Charter School (UCPCS); I chose the school because of its exemplary arts program, the diversity of the student body, and the inclusion program. UCPCS provided an ideal context for the study of adolescents with LD engaged in arts education. The school offered music, visual arts, and drama classes.

The case is bound by the number of participants, time and place. The students selected were all those who were diagnosed with Specific Learning Disabilities in areas such as reading, writing, and math; most were also identified as having Attention Deficit Disorder (with or without hyperactivity), and some had additional diagnoses such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). One of the participants was being tested for LD in writing but the assessment results pointed to ADHD as the primary disability affecting the student's writing. There were seven participants from the seventh and eighth grade combined groups. In addition to observing and interviewing students, I collected information from their teachers (presented in detailed vignettes in Chapter 4), parents, and related school staff in order to explore the nature of the students' involvement in the arts program and its influence on their learning.

The case was also bound by the curriculum unit (Middle Eastern and North African Arts) covered weekly during the study, beginning in mid-April and ending in mid-June, 2009. Ideally I wanted to observe students in all three arts electives. However, since these classes were held simultaneously, I observed two out of three classrooms during alternating weeks. I chose music, based on my background and experience playing in the orchestra in junior high school and beyond. Knowledge of domains under

study enhances the researcher's ability to observe and analyze the phenomenon of study (Eisner, 2002). I also observed the drama class; the teacher was the arts coordinator and the person who designed particular arts program at the school. She provided information relevant to the study based on twenty years of experience teaching drama. Though I could not observe teaching and learning in the visual arts class, I interviewed the teacher about the topic of the study; this information is added in Chapter 4 as it adds to understanding important considerations in designing an arts program. The detailed vignettes of each classroom, supplemented by interviews with all three of the teachers (presented in Chapter 4) add to the context of the students' experiences.

I determined the boundaries of the case based on various considerations. The opportunity to study a curriculum unit from beginning to end provided a unit of study. One of the requirements of narrative inquiry is attention to temporality (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, in Clandinin, 2007). Given that "events, people, and objects under study are in temporal transition;" bracketing students' engagement in drama and music within a given time period allowed for a thorough study of their experiences within an episode of learning in the arts. The number of students in the case facilitated deeper focus on each individual story. Therefore, while the choice for the unit of analysis had some limitations (discussed in a subsequent section on "Strengths and Limitations"), it offered boundaries that allowed me to capture an in-depth view of the complex nature of engagement in the arts.

In order to maximize what can be learned from a single case (Stake, 1995), I chose an instrumental study of LD adolescents' engagement in the arts. UCPCS is considered a successful urban charter school by outside evaluations and known for

the quality of its arts program. An instrumental case study provides a theoretical understanding of something greater than the case itself; it informs the phenomenon that is embedded in the case (Stake, 1995). An urban public school that serves a diverse population (including adolescents with special needs) in an inclusion setting met the criteria for exploring the relevance of the arts for this student population and its potential contribution to inclusive education in public schools. Urban public schools serve a large number of students who are historically over-represented as academically "under-achieving." These schools are most affected by the NCLBA (the policy framework for this study) that holds schools accountable for students' performance based on standardized tests. Therefore, the case provides insights into how the school negotiates its competing goals in order to maintain a quality arts program. The relatively small size of a charter school allowed for teachers to know students intimately, enabling them to provide insights regarding the students' affective engagement in learning in the arts within their overall educational experiences. This information is valuable for those interested in designing similar opportunities for adolescents with LD in a public inclusion school.

Data Collection

Eisner (2002) applies the terms connoisseurship and criticism from the arts to education research. Connoisseurship refers to "knowledgeable perception;" "to be a connoisseur is to know how to look, to see and to appreciate" (p. 215). My knowledge from the fields of psychology, music, special education, and education policy prepared me to be a connoisseur of various aspects of students' learning within this particular study. These experiences guided my attention in the process of data

collection. Criticism according to Eisner refers to the "art of disclosure;" or "the art of disclosing the qualities of events or objects that connoisseurship perceives" (p. 219). I used Eisner's notion of *educational criticism*, as a lens to look at nuances of students' engagement in drama and music included in the report of the study.

In the research process, I applied a combination of Merriam's (1998) procedures to collect information. Merriam's (1998) protocol for data collection in a qualitative case study includes interviewing, field observations, and document analysis. According to her, "Qualitative data consists of 'direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge' obtained through interviews; 'detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions' recorded in observations; and 'excerpts from various types of documents" (Paterson, 1990, p. 10 in Merriam, 1998; p. 69).

Table 5 shows information regarding the data collection procedures for interviews and observations conducted in this study. I spent a total of 10 weeks (30 hours) observing drama and music classes; an additional 25 hours were spent interviewing students, teachers, parents and other school staff. I also reviewed documents related to the school's program and read students' IEP's and evaluations.

TABLE 5: DATA COLLECTION

Participants	Beginning of Research	Middle of Research	End of Research
	Interviews (number and duration)		
School Director	1 x 60 min.		
Inclusion Specialist	1 x 30 min.	1 x 30 min.	1 x 30 min.
Inclusion Teacher	1 x 60 min.	1 x 60 min.	
Visual Arts Teacher	1 x 60 min.		1 x 30 min.
Drama Teacher	1 x 60 min.	1 x 60 min.	2 x 60 min.
Music Teacher	2 x 60 min.	1 x 45 min.	2 x 60 min.
Parents	1 x 30 min./each		
Students		1 x 45 min.	1 x 20 min.
	Observations:		
Music Class	15 hrs.		

Drama Class	15 hrs.
Total Interviews	**25 hrs., 20 min.**
Total Observations	**30 hrs.**

Interviews

I used open-ended, semi-structured questions to explore issues guided by the research questions (Merriam, 1998). All three arts teachers were interviewed and contributed to understanding the context of the students' experiences within their classes. The teachers also provided information regarding the processes involved in teaching the arts, including the choices they are faced with in implementing their program (see Chapter 4). The humanities teacher, inclusion teacher, and parents of the student participants were interviewed in order to construct individual profiles that portray various aspects of the students' learning differences as they affect their engagement in school. Permission was obtained from all participants to include them in this study and to audio-record interviews (See Appendix D, Consent Forms).

The complex processes involved in learning in the arts cannot be captured by surveys or predetermined interview questions. Therefore, I began with open-ended questions regarding the participants' perceptions of engagement in the arts and used probing (Merriam, 1998) to ask for more detail or clarification when necessary. My goal was to construct narrative accounts of responses provided by the study's participants as the main source of data. Catherine K. Riessman (2008) describes interviews as narrative occasions when the interviewer and the interviewee jointly construct meaning with the goal of generating detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements.

My teaching experience enabled me to establish rapport with the teachers who participated in this study through empathetic understanding. As evidenced in the interviews, teachers openly shared their experiences and reflected on teaching LD students, providing valuable information that is often left out of education research and policy considerations. My prior experience with LD students also prepared me for the limitations of their verbal communication as a means of expression. I used probing to help students clarify their ideas, and relied on interviews with parents and teachers, as well as my own observations to fill in the missing pieces of the students' overall strengths and weaknesses. The information provided by the parents who participated was valuable for completing students' profiles (Chapter 5).

Observations

According to Merriam (1998), "The conceptual framework, the problem, or the questions of interest determine what is observed" (p. 96). The social-constructivist theoretical framework for the study guided my attention to multiple aspects of the classrooms including the setting, social interactions, student-teacher relationships, and activities involved in arts-based learning. Therefore, during my observations, I recorded the nature of students' engagement in music and drama, the types of activities they participated in, the teaching processes of the two teachers observed, as well as characteristics of each of the student participants.

Observing participants in their setting over time offered the best conditions for storytelling (Riessman, 2008). My role was that of an "observer as participant" (Merriam, 1998); I had a "peripheral membership role," explained as researchers who "observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider's identity

without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership" (Adler & Adler, 1994, p. 380, in Merriam, 1998, p. 101). My goal was to be part of the natural environment while maintaining enough separation from classroom activities that allowed me the opportunity to observe and record information. According to Clandinin (2007), "Narrative inquirers, throughout each inquiry, are in relationship, negotiating purposes, next steps, outcomes, texts and the other concerns that go into an inquiry relationship" (pp. 69-70). In this study, I had the opportunity to use my observations to engage teachers and students in further conversations regarding their involvement with the arts. As described by Clandinin, these relationships guided the course of the study and choices regarding next steps.

Documents

I reviewed school documents provided by the director to understand the context of the arts within the school's goals and programs. In addition, I obtained parent permission to read students' educational history and their evaluation results in their IEP files. Though I wanted to use videotapes of students' engagement in the arts as a source of information, I was not able to obtain permission for this type of recording from all the parents. Given the nature of students' work in music and drama, I could not capture their performances without filming them. I include some pictures in the Chapter 4 to show the arts classrooms and the assessments used without disclosing the student participants' identities.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data collected throughout the investigation was stored on my password-secured personal computer and in locked cabinets in my office. I maintained confidentiality by using pseudonyms for the school and the study's participants. I reviewed information collected on a daily or weekly basis (subsequent to observations and interviews) in order to record my reflections. The collected data was organized in computer files based on the source of information and the date. At the end of the data collection process, I transcribed all the recordings of observations and interviews that were audio-recorded. I did not use computer software for coding or data analyses; given the narrative approach used in the study, upon the completion of transcribed interviews, I organized the information based on emerging themes. The themes were derived from the stories told by students of their experiences in arts-based learning. After several rounds of reviewing their narrative accounts, I derived three themes that were triangulated using teachers' and parents' interview information.

Eisner (2002) describes the task of communicating what happens in schools to an audience as "educational criticism" and compares the task to an "artistic problem" that requires "putting together an expressive, sensitive, and revealing picture of educational practice and its consequences" (p. 192). I applied Eisner's four aspects of educational criticism to the analysis and interpretation of the data from this research; they include descriptive, interpretive, evaluative, and thematic dimensions in the analysis and reporting of research findings.

Descriptive: The descriptive aspect aims at the vivid rendering of the qualities perceived in the situation (Eisner, 2002, p. 234). My goal was to highlight students' (and teachers') experiences with the arts setting. Therefore, as much as possible, I used direct quotes by the participants from interviews and classroom observations in order describe the stories in narrative form. I found it challenging to report the "sensory qualities" of the events and experiences of the participants within the art classroom without including video tapes or audio recordings of their performances in the findings. Therefore, I relied on the narrative approach as "the study of experience through stories" (Merriam, 1998; p.157). Narrative renderings allowed me to portray "education as a process" within the "lived experience" of the school setting (Merriam, 1998, p. 4) by constructing the stories of the participants using their own voices. According to Eisner, what educational critics should do "is not to translate what cannot be translated but rather to create a rendering of a situation, event, or object that will provide pointers to those aspects of the situation, event, or object that are in some way significant" (p. 220); "What counts as significant will depend on the theories, models, and values alluded to earlier" "but it will also depend on the purposes of the critic" (p. 220).

In order to minimize my role as the "translator," I included a chapter on the context of the study (Chapter 4) to offer a detailed description for the reader to make his/her own interpretations. I also included large portions of the participants' stories and the interviews throughout the context and findings (Chapters IV, V, and VI) to provide the information that led to my understanding of the importance of the students' engagement in the arts. The findings reveal my analyses of narrative

information presented by the students, their teachers, and their parents with regards to the intersection of their unique strengths and weaknesses in learning and engagement in the arts.

Interpretive: The interpretive attempts to provide an understanding of what has been rendered by using among other things, ideas, concepts, models, and theories from the social sciences and from history (Eisner, 2002, p. 234). Prior studies discussed in the literature review section (Chapter 2) informed the contextual framework of this study with regards to the surrounding policy environment and the particular challenges of adolescents with special needs. The findings from research on adolescents with LD and inclusive education (presented in Tables 1-4), and information from prior research in arts education (presented in Chapter 2) informed my understanding of various aspects of learning and served to contextualize my findings within these bodies of literature. However, since my goal was to study students' own interpretations of the value of the arts in their education, I relied on their narrative accounts and the information offered by their teachers and parents to interpret the importance of their engagement in the arts.

According to Stake (1995), the constructivist paradigm holds that knowledge and meaning is constructed rather than discovered (p. 99). The inductive process of data collection in qualitative research allows for emerging themes through on-going analysis (Merriam, 1998). I used Eisner's (2002) questions to guide my interpretations: "What does the situation mean to those involved? How does this classroom operate? What ideas, concepts, or theories can be used to explain its major features?" (p. 229).Throughout the data analysis process, I consulted additional

sources to help me understand and interpret the nature of students' engagement in the arts and its significance, with alternative or additional explanations for the meaning of events that occurred in the arts classrooms.

Evaluative: The evaluative aspect of educational criticism attempts to assess the educational import or significance of the events or objects described or interpreted (Eisner, 2002, p. 234). According to Eisner, evaluation "pervades the perceptual lenses themselves" in the processes involved in what the researcher attends to and chooses to describe. He adds that the role of educational criticism is to "improve the educational process" (p. 231), which requires value judgments regarding "what counts in that process." The researcher/ educational critic will have to evaluate whether or not students are being "helped or hindered by the form of teaching they are experiencing," whether or not "they are acquiring habits of mind conducive to further development or are these habits likely to hamper further development" (p. 231-32). As previously mentioned my experiences as a special education teacher, a mother of a child with sensory integration disorder, and my academic training shape my perceptual lens and guided my attention in the data collection, data analysis, and interpretation phases of this study. I intentionally highlighted the affective and physical aspects of learning in the arts because I view these as prerequisites for cognitive and motivational engagement for students with language and sensory-based disorders. Studying the affective and physical characteristics of learning add new dimensions to the current discourse on "academic achievement" as measured by standardized test scores; this focus is more relevant for understanding and preventing LD adolescents from dropping out of school.

Thematic: Eisner explains thematic analysis is "the distillation of the major ideas or conclusions that are to be derived from the material that preceded it. What is the larger lesson or lessons that this particular educational critic has to offer? What specifically can be learned from it? What does it all add up to?" (p. 233). Themes in the findings section (Chapter 6) of this study are derived directly from students' narrative accounts of their engagement in the arts. In line with my focus on affective as well as cognitive domains of learning, these themes capture and inform areas of engagement that are imperative to take into account a comprehensive understanding of students' opportunities to learn in light of their sensory challenges, as well as their strengths. This focus is intended to move away from a normative perspective of educational opportunity embedded in the current practice of inclusion, replacing it with the importance of students' experiences as the main source to consider in planning programs or policies intended to benefit students with special needs.

Internal Validity, Structural Corroboration and Referential Adequacy

The procedures for data collection and interpretation described in previous sections allow the reader to use structural corroboration and referential adequacyto determine the validity of the findings (Eisner, 2002). Structural corroboration "seeks to determine the extent to which criticism forms a coherent, persuasive whole. It seeks to determine if the pieces of the critical story hold together, make sense, provide a telling interpretation of the events" (p. 240). Referential adequacy refers to the match between the phenomena of study and the telling of the research processes; it requires the reader's judgment regarding whether or not the "critical disclosure"

portrayed in the analysis and report of the findings matches their understanding of the phenomena studied.

Structural corroboration and referential adequacy (Eisner, 2002) are relevant for the evaluation of this study and other qualitative research: "The essence of perception is that it is selective; there is no value-free mode of seeing … objectivity is a function of intersubjective agreement among a community of believers" (Eisner, 2002; p. 218). Eisner (2002) poses an alternative set of criteria for the evaluation of qualitative studies: What we can productively ask of a set of ideas is not whether it is really true but whether it is useful, whether it allows one to do one's work more effectively, whether it enables one to perceive the phenomenon in a more complex and subtle ways, whether it expands one's intelligence in dealing with important problems" (p. 237). The detailed information provided in the report of this study presents the complexity of LD students' learning opportunities by looking at the multiple influences on students' engagement through a case study of their involvement in the arts. The vignettes and teacher narratives also serve to show the processes that are unique to arts education, while the students' explanations of their experiences shed light on the importance of this approach for their engagement in learning. Therefore, the "validity" of the information is in part due to its usefulness for planning inclusive curriculum and opportunities for adolescents with LD.

According to Merriam (1998), "Rigor in qualitative research derives from the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description" (p.151). She explains that validity "deals with the question of how

research findings match reality:" "Do the findings capture what is really there?" (p.201) According to Merriam, internal validity is a strength of qualitative research in line with its goal to "understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening" (p. 203).

The social constructivist design of my study sheds light on multiple aspects of students' learning within the arts that uncovers the complexity of the nature of their engagement. The narrative form of inquiry and direct quotes from the study's participants allow readers to evaluate the evidence used to derive the findings. Narrative presentation of data collected through observations and interviews also shows the basis for my interpretations. Finally, the following indicators of internal validity outlined by Merriam were used in my research:

1. *Triangulation*: I used multiple sources of data (observations, documents, interviews, and multiple perspectives) to inform my findings.
2. *Long-term observation*: I collected data from the beginning to the end of a curriculum unit in order to capture a complete episode of the participants' experiences.
3. *Peer examination*: I conferred my analyses and the basis for my findings with colleagues and received feedback that was incorporated in my interpretations.
4. *Participatory or collaborative modes of research*: The narrative approach used in this research is a participatory mode of investigation that includes the participants and their experiences to derive the findings of the study.
5. *Researcher's biases*: I have disclosed my biases by describing the factors that have shaped my perception and the particular design of my study.

Reliability or Dependability of Findings

Reliability "refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). Merriam describes the problematic regarding reliability applied to qualitative research:

> *Reliability in research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results. Qualitative research, however, is not conducted so that the laws of human behavior can be isolated. Rather, researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it. Since there are many interpretations of what is happening, there is no benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish reliability in the traditional sense. (p. 205)*

Therefore, achieving reliability in qualitative research is impossible. Merriam suggests "dependability" or "consistency" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 288) as alternative goals. Consistency and dependability are determined by "whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 206). I followed the subsequent steps recommended by Merriam (1998) to increase the dependability of my research:

1. *The investigator's position*. The investigator should explain the assumptions and theory behind the study, his or her position vis-à-vis the group being studied, the basis for selecting informants and a description of them, and the social context from which data were collected. (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993 in Merriam, 1998, p. 207)

2. *Triangulation*. Using multiple methods of data collection and analysis, triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity.

3. *Audit Trail*. The detailed description of how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made through the inquiry.

Naturalistic Generalization

External validity, also known as generalizability depends on the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam, 1998, 207). According to Stake (1995), in qualitative research, one can make *naturalistic generalizations:* "Conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life's affairs or by vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves" (p. 85). In other words, given the goal of a qualitative case study to

understand and explain a phenomenon, the degree to which the information can be generalized to other events or places depends on the extent to which the reader can relate the findings to his or her understanding. The detailed, thick description of the setting and classroom vignettes, in addition to students', teachers', and parents' narrative accounts provide sufficient context and information for the reader to have a "vicarious experience" of the case study. This information can be used to determine whether or not the findings are applicable to other situations or contexts related to the study.

According to Eisner (2002), the thematic aspect of educational criticism enables the reader to grasp the essential points of a study, hence facilitating naturalistic generalizations. He explains that "The themes within and educational criticism not only provide a distilling of the essential features of that criticism, but they also provide naturalistic generalizations that can guide one's perception of other classroom, schools, or teaching practices" (p. 233). The themes highlighted in the findings allow the reader to decide whether or not these aspects of engagement in learning are relevant or important in other settings and to the overall educational opportunities of adolescents with special needs.

To enhance naturalistic generalizations of my study, in addition to the application of thematic analysis of the findings, I used two strategies suggested by Merriam (1998, p. 211):

1. *Rich, thick description*- providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred.
2. *Typicality or modal category*- describing how typical the program, event or individual is compared with others in the same class, so that users can make comparisons with their own situations. (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993)

These procedures facilitate naturalistic generalizations by presenting enough detail regarding the case that allows the reader to make his or her own judgments regarding its application to other contexts. According to Eisner (2002), once the uniqueness of the case is established, we are in the position of looking and recognizing it in other circumstances.

Ethical Concerns

This study was approved by the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB). According to IRB standards, the study posed a low level of risk to the participants. I reviewed guidelines and ethical issues put forth by the IRB and applied them to the research and reporting procedures. When I began fieldwork and discussed the content of my consent forms with the school staff, I realized that changes needed to be made to the original form in order to protect the student participants. The original consent and assent forms reported the title and purpose of the study as the exploration of "The potential of arts-based education for adolescents with learning disabilities." I was informed that the students in the school did not know their specific diagnosis and that the inclusion program addressed the needs of all those who needed remediation for various reasons. Therefore, to protect the LD students from emotional harm, we decided to give permission forms to all students and their parents. The title and purpose of the study was changed to "The exploration of engagement in the arts in an inclusion setting." Words referring to special needs or disabilities were removed from the permission form and IRB approval was granted for this change. Merriam (1998) identifies ethical issues regarding how much the researcher reveals about the actual purpose of the study and the problem of how

informed the consent can actually be. However, during the parent interviews, I revealed the true purpose of the investigation to obtain permission to study students' confidential documents.

In the data analysis and dissemination process, one of the ethical concerns mentioned by Merriam (1998) is around the role of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection. Researcher bias in choosing the information to discuss and reveal is considered problematic. I tried to address this issue by the disclosure of my subjective viewpoint, through thick description of observations presented in narrative form, and by explaining the choices I made in the research process.

In reporting students' and teachers' narrative accounts, I considered questions regarding how much privacy and protection from harm the participants are afforded (Merriam, 1998, p. 213). Though the interview questions did not illicit any information that would place the participants at risk, any statements that could be misunderstood or could harm a student or teacher were eliminated from the narrative accounts. There were a total of three statements made by teachers that were eliminated; these omissions were unrelated to the purpose of the study and did not affect the findings. Another ethical consideration is the exposure of the participants in reports or publications of the study (Merriam, 1998). While pseudonyms were used for the participants and the school, Merriam (1998) points out the difficulty of anonymity at the local level. I followed the precautions she suggests for dealing with this problem: 1.) Considering possible consequences of the research before undertaking it, 2.) Presenting results with as little distortion as possible, while

maximizing the potential benefits of the research, and 3.) Taking special care in disseminating the results (pp. 217-218).

I considered the importance of participants' time prior to planning interviews. With regard to parent interviews, they were limited to 30 minutes (except two instances when parents had more to say); parent interviews were conducted based on their availability. Students were interviewed at times designated by their teachers and based on their own willingness to participate at a given time. For example, one of the students wanted to be the last to be interviewed and another was eager to be first. Teachers were also consulted prior to scheduling their interviews and in most cases their generosity with their time exceeded my expectations. Finally, in order to offer something in return, I provided materials (such as music and costumes) and provided input regarding Middle Eastern arts to the music and drama teachers. Based on the students' vote I organized food for a party at the end of the curriculum unit to thank them for their participation. These small ways of giving back allowed me to show my appreciation for their time, but I can never compensate the valuable information they provided me with their willingness to participate.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this research have to do with the topic, the theoretical framework and the methodology. Searching for ways of preventing the high dropout rates of adolescents with special needs is a worthwhile topic at the present time when nearly 50% of them drop out before completing high school. In addition, review of prior research points to the need for further investigation of the affective domains of learning for adolescents with special needs. It is necessary to investigate programs

such as the arts with respect to students' strengths and weaknesses as well as the effects on their self-efficacy and motivation as factors that influence their engagement in learning. The application of qualitative research methods and narrative inquiry captures students' lived experiences within schools, an understudied but important source of information regarding their educational opportunities. Finally, the combination of various aspects of education research in framing the study (including education policy, arts education, learning requirements related to adolescents with special needs, inclusive education, and learning theory) provide a comprehensive theoretical background for the study and situate the findings in the implementation of inclusion within the historical policy context of the research.

A case study design captures the phenomenon of interest and allows for deep focus on learning processes of students engaged in the arts. The narrative descriptions of student accounts of their participation in the arts highlight their experiences as the most important source of the findings. The inclusion of multiple informants, including students, parents, teachers and other school staff portray various perspectives of students' engagement in the arts. Narrative interviews and data collected also facilitate the reader's own interpretation of the events and processes in arts-based teaching and learning.

My professional experience of more than ten years with students with various difficulties (six years specifically with adolescents with LD), have prepared me for understanding the intricacies of the topics covered in this study. My commitment to and compassion for students with disabilities was born from first-hand experiences teaching them in the current standards-based normative conceptualization of

educational opportunity. Lastly, my son's intense affiliation for the arts and his diagnosis of sensory integration disorder a year prior to the start of this research enriched my perception and drove me to apply a developmental perspective of sensory challenges. This perspective informed my understanding of the longitudinal course of the emotional and cognitive challenges faced by the student participants.

The findings of this study have some limitations. First, a single case study reveals information that is particular to the school studied; the information cannot be used to make generalizations regarding arts education in contexts that are dissimilar, without considering the influence of the particular teachers' pedagogical styles and the nature of the arts program described. Another limitation is regarding the choice of a public charter school instead of a more typical large public school where most adolescents with special needs are placed. Charter schools have characteristics regarding their size and management that are different from other public schools. The uniqueness of the case described in (Chapter 4) will be important to consider prior to applying the findings to other inclusion programs. Finally, due to time limitations based on the school schedule, the visual arts class was not included in this study. Other studies are needed to understand the particular importance of visual arts for adolescents with special needs.

Chapter 4: Case Study Context

> Teachers create an atmosphere not only by what they say or do but also in the way that they are present to their students. They produce a certain atmosphere by the ways they work with the spatial and temporal dimensions of their classroom…Every teacher's classroom and every school is characterized by a certain mood. (van Manen, 1991, p. 184)

The goal of this Chapter is to describe the context of the study through a detailed description of the arts program at UCPCS, including the classroom setting, types of activities, teachers' pedagogical styles and interaction with students. First I describe the process of selecting the site, the participants, and the school setting. Then I combine my observations with teachers' narrative accounts to describe the drama and music classes throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) curriculum unit, from mid-April, 2009 to the end of June, 2009. In the sections concerning the music and drama classrooms, I provide detailed descriptions of the teaching and learning processes that I observed. These processes show the nature of students' modes of engagement in the arts as well as the unique pedagogical styles of the teachers observed. One of the findings of this study was the important influence of teachers on the nature and degree of students' engagement in the arts. For example, the opportunity to choose activities and freedom to integrate their ideas in their work greatly influenced students' level of engagement in each class.

While my initial focus in this study was not the teachers, I could not separate their contribution to the learning environment from the opportunities they provided for particular types of engagement the students experienced in each class. In subsequent sections of this chapter, I refer to the writings of van Manen to interpret the teachers' pedagogical styles as they influenced various aspects of students'

engagement in the arts. Through thick description of the classrooms I observed, I hope to reveal the "pedagogical tact" entailed in the music and drama teachers' ways of engaging students in their particular art form (van Manen, 1986). *Pedagogical tact* is a "particular sensitivity and attunement to situations" and "cannot be described in a direct and straightforward manner;" it needs to be described "indirectly, by way of examples and anecdotes" (p. 48). Therefore, the classroom vignettes and teachers' narrative accounts show their particular styles and attunement to the students. I also include information from an interview with the visual arts teacher who contributed her thoughts on teaching students with special needs; she offered a divergent perspective of the purpose of arts education that was in contrast to the music and drama teachers' priorities. Her views further support the importance of teachers' varying pedagogical styles in shaping students' opportunities to learn in the arts.

The teachers' detailed narratives show their decision making processes and priorities. Their reflections also clarify their views and attitudes towards teaching students with LD. While each teacher's style is unique, the common theme among the three teachers was that they perceived no difference in LD students' abilities to engage and perform well in the arts as compared to their peers without disabilities. In some cases they reported that some of the student participants in the study were particularly talented in one of the arts. In one case a student who struggled with handwriting and fine motor skills was a great visual artist; two other students who were perceived as disruptive in other classes where talented musicians, yet another student participant who had great communication difficulties was a shining star in drama. In their narrative accounts of teaching, all three teachers showed an intuitive

ability to assess students' learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, auditory…), as well as their developmental, social, and sensory needs (related to movement, attention, and expression) in learning. While the teachers did not report making specific accommodations for each student based on his or her IEP, they all incorporated various modes of instruction and opportunities for participation and movement that met students' needs.

In sum as part of describing the context for the study's findings, this chapter shows the importance of teachers' choices and pedagogical styles and its influence on the opportunities provided for students to learn in an arts-based classroom. The information collected from the teachers also shows the competing perspectives and priorities that can inform the design and purpose of an arts program for students in an inclusion setting. Finally, the classroom vignettes show the activities and processes involved in participating in music and drama at UCPCS.

The School Setting

It was the week before the holiday vacation in December of 2008, a hectic time to visit a school. After looking around the street corner twice, I finally realized that I was standing in front of Urban Community Public Charter School (UCPCS), the old building with Greek columns in front of its large windows. Upon entering the building, I walked through the doors, into a large space with high ceilings, colorful walls, a large reception area, bright with sun entering through the windows. I was struck by the difference between the physical environment of the school and most other public schools with their long, gray hallways full of lockers on both sides. I

thought that if the light and colors were any indication of the school's aesthetic appreciation, I may have found the setting for my case study.

I learned about UCPCS through family, friends, and members of the community whose children attended the school. The school has a quality arts program which includes drama, music, and visual arts as an important part of the overall curriculum. I had heard one particular story about a student with LD who was artistically talented and thrived at the school. The story about this student's experience combined with the information I had gathered regarding the school's diversity with respect to race, socioeconomic status and students' academic abilities led me to view the setting as a potential instrumental case for my research in which inclusion and arts intersect. Further, the small school size meant that ideally the teachers would know the students well and be able to provide me with insights into their learning experiences.

I had an appointment with the director of UCPCS, Dawn (all names are pseudonyms), and was eager to meet her and discuss my proposed research. I explained that the purpose of my investigation was to learn more about the possible benefits of the arts for adolescents with LD in inclusion programs. She offered to tell me about the arts program at UCPCS before we decide whether it would be a good fit for my study. The following paragraphs are Dawn's explanations regarding the school philosophy, context and goals of the arts program, as well as her perception of the ways the arts benefited students, especially those with LD. Each section begins with Dawn's narrative account of each aspect of the arts program followed by my comments reflecting on her statements.

School Philosophy and the Context of the Arts Program

> Basically, the school opened in September of 2000 and we were probably planning for a year before then. I have been involved with the school since the beginning, we're considered the first parent-founded charter school in [the City]. So, a group of parents wrote the charter; I worked with them on parts of the application, and really helped crafting the vision to get the school started. And I would say some of the core pieces from the very beginning were definitely creating a strong community through the Responsive Classroom Model, really teaching kids to care about themselves, each other, the environment; so the arts were important to our vision from the beginning, really to encourage creativity, and get kids engaged. I mean that was absolutely something that we envisioned, and we connected it with Expeditionary Learning which was something that I became more familiar with when I was up at Harvard… it just seemed that that was the perfect fit for our school and kind of what we wanted in terms of hands-on learning, experiential learning for kids.

The Responsive Classroom Model referred to by Dawn is based on the philosophy that children need both academic and social-emotional skills for optimal learning. Therefore, the school program incorporated social and emotional skills in the curriculum. Expeditionary learning is a project-based instructional approach that includes active, hand-on learning processes. I asked Dawn to further explain how they conceptualized the arts in the school curriculum. I wanted to know more about the types of opportunities provided for middle school students to engage in the arts.

Goals of the Arts program

> They have [arts] electives but not every kid is going to take every subject, I think probably in the lower grades there's more connections (to what they do in the classroom). [In middle school] the Arts Team tries to connect to classroom learning expeditions for the first part of the year. And it's sometimes a little tricky in middle school you know starting fifth grade and sixth grade. And then in the Spring, the Arts Team really works to do their own learning expedition.
> I believe that the arts really do provide so much for kids. I mean we really believe in that whole idea of multiple intelligences, that the kids really need lots of different ways to be successful and to represent their work, so we didn't want the arts program to totally stand alone; we wanted there to be a lot

> of integration of the arts into the curriculum in the classrooms, but we also wanted the arts to be taught as a discipline that had its own integrity and its own experts. So bringing Linda in from the beginning was critical, because one of the things that is really challenging which is often challenging for small schools and start-up school is funding. I think really the key to developing a strong arts program was that Linda started from the very beginning as full time as not just the drama teacher but the Arts Coordinator, and she saw all the classes twice a week, and she supported the other teachers and really gave a lot of leadership to the program. She established a lot of partnerships that have been valuable and she really has a strong vision for it as well. We did not have a full time [visual] art teacher until 2004, and we didn't have a full time music teacher until 2005. So, I would say that these programs, visual arts and music are much stronger… it really took having people in those roles that really wanted to build them and develop the program and have the vision. …we had three different music teachers before Oliver and they… they didn't have a vision- they taught music but they didn't build the program the way he has. … he came in and really had a big picture idea of the types of experiences he wanted kids to have across the grades, balancing instrumental music, and music theory, and vocal music, and just really a balanced program that was a really good fit with the school philosophy.
> …What's hard for all arts teachers when you are in a pre-k through eighth grade school is, it's hard to find people who can be equally good at teaching pre-k kids and eighth grade kids because developmentally they're really different, and I think that from a music perspective, he really plans things so that they're developmentally good for that age. …. In pre-k they might have lots of different activities in a class period, versus, seventh and eighth graders, they might really spend the whole time period engaged in developing one song,…I think all of the arts teachers think about building students as artists over a period of years, not in one year. And I think that's really important in the arts curriculum we haven't developed as formal of a skills curriculum as we have for other things…

In describing the program, Dawn valued the teachers' ability to plan experiences that gave students a sense of ownership of their work as one of the strengths of the arts program at UCPCS. van Manen (1991) describes the pedagogical process that creates opportunities for students to experience ownership as the art of pedagogy; "The art of pedagogy is the art of tactfully mediating the possible influences of the world so that the child is constantly encouraged to assume more self-responsibility for personal learning and growth" (p. 80).

Ownership in the Learning Process

> I would say that all the teachers, Linda and Oliver do this amazingly well… they give students a ton of ownership. So you know in drama they are performing plays they wrote, in music they compose most of the music that they perform. They talk about the elements, they put it together… they do the whole thing. …They're going to start with an idea, something they're studying about and learning about and then they're going to say well, how can we develop a piece of music that would represent that idea, and they'll get kids' input… I think it's teachers that really believe in it, that really trust the process, and it's not always clean and neat…it can be messy but you'll get to a strong end-product…[The students] direct it, they absolutely feel like it's their ideas, and I think that the kids, their sense of ownership is so strong…

I asked Dawn to share her thoughts about students with special needs within the arts program. I wanted to know how she perceived the value of the arts for these students' learning experiences.

Students with LD: Arts as "an incredible motivator"

> You know kids are at risk for lots of different reasons, but I think there have been a lot of kids that the arts have really made a huge impact on. A former student at our school who's now in the upper school, he and his cousin wrote a whole play that was just incredibly funny and engaging and thoughtful, and they practiced it and they did lighting and they did programs, and it was just the kind of thing where you're like oh my gosh! Only an incredibly gifted kid would be able to do this! …But what you wouldn't have known is that this was also a student with a pretty serious learning disability, whose reading was significantly below grade level. The motivation…you could see that from the way he put the whole program together by himself, and he wrote the script himself. I feel like it [the arts] is an incredible motivator for kids and it's an entry point that lets them practice other skills, where they may not be as strong, through something that they are successful with.
> I think that the arts absolutely help students' self-esteem. We had a kid this year, who has an IEP now, but he was new to UCPCS in eighth grade, and I would absolutely put him in a category of at-risk for drop out because his academic skills were low, he wasn't getting work done, there were some behavioral issues, and we were kind of like is he going to finish eighth grade? It was a challenge. Interestingly enough, the drama teacher mentored him and he just had a real knack for performing in drama… and he was rapping and doing poetry… He was able to not only express that here, but really to be recognized by his peers and others. And I think that he had this sense that I don't think he's had in school, that he's really good at something that's

> acknowledged by the school…He thought maybe I'm good at something that people outside of school see, but to feel like you're good at something that maybe your classmates and your teachers acknowledge and value as much as other academic disciplines, I think has made all the difference. He's going to stay in the upper school next year…this was absolutely a kid who would be at risk of dropping out who I think has a really, really good chance being in the upper school next year where the rest of his skills will be developed.

According to Dawn's stories of the value of the arts for students with special needs, there are clear benefits with regards to a positive influence on their motivation and self-esteem, found in prior research on arts education for at-risk students (Baum et al., 1997; Catterall, 2002; Ingram & Seashore, 2003). Dawn gave detailed examples of why and how the arts motivate students and enhance their self-esteem, specifically for those who struggle academically and as a result have a negative self-concept within a school setting. She also described how the arts saved an adolescent from dropping out and opened doors for him to enhance other academic skills through a sense of belonging in school, giving him the experience of being a valued member of the community by classmates and teachers. Based on her description of the benefits of the arts for students with special needs, arts education creates an inclusive setting for them by addressing the affective domains of learning, such as motivation and self-esteem. These enhancements engage LD students in the school community, providing an entry point for learning other skills.

I asked Dawn to tell me how she handled competing budget priorities and their affect on funding for the arts program. I had read that schools' arts programs are the first to be cut due to budget constraints, especially in response to the NCLBA's accountability demands, creating an incentive for schools to fund test preparation at the expense of other programs such as sports and arts. I also had in mind my own

experience in NYC where test preparation took precedence in the school budget over the music program I had tried to start with instruments I had received as a donation through a grant. I was not sure if this was a problem at UCPCS; therefore, I asked Dawn to explain whether or not there were competing demands that affected funding for the arts.

NCLBA and the Arts

> …Funding is never enough to do the things that you want to do so … it is a challenge to fund everything that we want to do. I think the thing that we've tried to say is that the Arts is not an extra, it's not extracurricular, it's part of the curriculum… Our facilities funding was cut this year, we needed to cut things… the arts program, we haven't really put that on the table, where I guess that's my role as a leader to say that it's important enough that we're not going to cut this… because we consider it a core program, we consider it as important as other programs. But I think that it is hard… because we do have a lot of pressure to make sure that the kids make AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress] … I think you have to really believe that having a program that is well-rounded and addresses the whole child is ultimately going to help your test scores and help you have a strong school... The challenge is that you have a lot of schools, especially struggling schools, that want something really quick and immediate and directly linked to increasing your reading scores or increasing your math scores… and that's not always what you're going to have with an arts program. But I think when I think of what our kids are able to do, particularly in literacy, there's a strong connection to drama, and the arts, and probably with math as well…It's harder in the high school because we just can't afford full-time arts teachers, and with the number of credits they have to do in all the other subjects to graduate… [City] has pretty rigorous graduation requirements…

Based on Dawn's account of competing influences on the school budget, it seems that the NCLBA's accountability demands do in fact have an adverse affect on funding for the arts. While Dawn was able to protect and continue the arts program at the elementary and middle school levels at UCPCS, the "rigorous graduation requirements" at the high school level prevented her from giving equal importance to the arts program; there was no funding or time within the school curriculum. Based

on this case study, even in an independent charter school where the leadership values the arts and intends to provide all students arts-based experiences, requirements of NCLB limit the budget, the curriculum, and the allocation of time on areas of learning that are not related to standards-based curriculum and test-based accountability.

Gaining Access and the Selection Process

Based on Dawn's description of the arts program at UCPCS and its benefits for students with learning differences, I decided that the school would provide an exemplary case for my research. She gave me permission to do my study at UCPCS if Linda, the Arts Coordinator agreed, and the arts teachers were willing to participate.

Linda was lining up kindergarten students for dismissal when I entered her classroom. She noticed me but did not stop focusing on the children until they left the classroom. Her confidence in her interactions and communication style with the students showed that she had many years of experience as a teacher. Upon hearing the purpose of my research, Linda gave me permission to observe arts classes during the last quarter of the school year. She expressed that she was happy to help if the information could benefit adolescents with LD. Linda explained that they were in the planning stage of the last of the four arts expeditions of the academic year (April 14th-June 21st). The students were going to learn about the arts of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA); she welcomed me to observe her classes during the curriculum unit. I told her that I am from Iran and grew up immersed in Persian arts; I offered to contribute information, books, props, and music to help.

We discussed the seventh and eighth grade students' arts schedules. Linda explained that beginning in fifth grade, students choose the art form they want to participate in for each of the four expeditionary learning units of the year. Students indicate their first, second and third choices among music, drama, and visual arts and usually get into their first or second choice class. A challenge for my study was that the arts electives for middle school students were offered simultaneously from 12-1 three days a week. While I wanted to observe all three arts classes (drama, music, and visual arts) as they address different ways of learning, because of the schedule, I first decided to choose one art form. I initially chose drama since Linda had agreed to participate, she was an experienced teacher, and as the coordinator of the arts program she could offer me a lot of valuable information. However, before beginning my observations, I realized that my own background in music prepared me to have a better understanding of teaching and learning in the music classroom. I thought that I was better prepared to describe the students' experiences in music since I was familiar with the learning processes involved. Finally, given that in the music class there were only four students identified with special needs and only three of them had IEP's, I decided to divide up my observations between music and drama classes to include more students in the study. While this decision decreased my time in each of the classrooms, the benefits of including more students and two art forms gave me a much better understanding of different aspects of engagement in learning through the arts and its relationship with students' areas of strength and weakness.

Finally, it was time to obtain permission from students and their parents through consent forms explaining the purpose of my study and their rights with

regards to participation in my research if they agreed to be a part of it. Upon my discussions with Oliver, the music teacher, and Adam, the special education coordinator, it became evident that it would be inappropriate for me to use terms such as “students with special needs” or “students with learning disabilities” in the permission forms given to students. They informed me that at UCPCS, many of the students who received special education services did not know their diagnosis. The inclusion program addressed the academic needs of all the students in the classroom and intentionally avoided focusing attention on those with LD in ways that would have a negative social impact on them. I was relieved to remove the labels from my permission forms. I have always found it difficult to refer to students with labels that depersonalize them and describe them based only on their areas of weakness. van Manen (1991) describes the problem with the line of thinking that leads to the use of these labels for students:

> There is an acute danger in thinking professionally about children… We are all in danger of thinking and talking about children in abstract ways, in categories. The theoretical language of child ‘science’ so easily makes us look past each child’s uniqueness toward common characteristics that allow us to group, sort, sift, measure, manage, and respond to children in preconceived ways. (pp. 17-18)

Despite my own personal struggles with labels, both as a teacher and a parent of a child with special needs, I had originally included them in the consent forms in order to fully disclose the purpose of my study to the participants. Merriam (1998) points to the difficulty with full disclosure when it conflicts with ethical concerns for the participants. For the purpose of the consent forms, upon discussion with school staff, the ethical decision was to protect the students from the emotional harm by removing terms that separated them from their peers. I obtained IRB approval for

changing the title and purpose of the study on the consent forms to a case study of "students engaged in the arts in an inclusion setting." In the research process, I gave all students permission forms to participate; I also made sure that I do not reveal my target group, the students with IEP's, by interviewing a number of students who were not receiving special education services; (that information is not included in the data or findings). While I adjusted the consent forms to remove the term "LD," as a researcher I have to place the knowledge gained from this study within related fields of research; therefore, to be clear about the students who participated in the study based on the current use of categories in schools, in the report of my findings students' diagnoses are included.

In the following sections, I describe the drama and music classes based on my observations and teachers' narrative accounts of their experiences, both within the MENA unit and with regards to teaching the arts in general. Subsequent to the sections on the drama and music classes I observed, I include an interview with the visual arts teacher as she describes a teaching methodology that is based more on content than process, with emphasis on the progression of skills she hopes her students acquire through the grades. Her considerations bring to light the influence of teachers' unique characteristics, and the ways they prioritize their goals on shaping their students' learning experiences.

Drama Class: The Stories of Joha

> To cultivate pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact one needs to act in such a way that the glance expresses the soul's capacity for pedagogic relationship. (van Manen, 1986, p. 50)

Linda was a thoughtful teacher whose style and body language engaged students in learning. She used a lot of affect and inflection in her voice that maintained her students' attention. She also thought about their needs for movement, positive reinforcement, and respect in the way she taught her class. In this section I combine my observations along with different segments of my interviews conducted throughout the study with Linda in order to describe the MENA unit in drama. I describe the goals of the curriculum unit and the processes of teaching and learning in the drama class. This information provides the context and background to what the students themselves describe as the benefits they attribute to learning in drama in Chapter 5.

Assessments, Activities, and Goals

Prior to the start of my observations, I asked Linda about her goals for the MENA unit and the assessments she intended to use in order to get an understanding of the purpose of the activities I was going to observe.

I could teach it!
I *know* it or can *do* it!
I'm still *learning or practicing*
I have no idea yet

Learning Targets for student self-assessment

Well, we have what we call *Learning Targets*…. A lot of educational pedagogies use the idea, and they are specific, easy to define goals that are written in kid-friendly language and kids know from the beginning the whole idea- it shouldn't be a surprise for any kid in the end about what they should have learned… So there are three specific learning targets: one is about map skills, finding different countries, one is specific to the character Joha, one is learning about Hakawati, a style of Arabic story-telling-Hakawati originally came from Islamic preachers in the streets- being able to put together and perform that… so these are all goals that, these two goals (*referring to Hakawati and the character, Joha*) are part of the MENA world but they are also part of Arts goals that inform my work. And then this (*pointing to the maps*) is just something that all the arts teachers thought would be really interesting and helpful to work a little bit with kids on maps...

In the beginning we're very, very transparent about what our goals are, what we want them to become experts in, and the first day of class we show them the *Learning Targets* chart, and each kids gets a sticker with their initials on it, and they see where they are, from *no idea* to *I'm such an expert I can teach it*… they put their sticker here, and then at the end we revisit the *Learning Targets* chart and it looks like this (*holding up a chart from a previous unit with students names attached*). So then kids can visually check in with where they are. So it's self-assessment for kids but also, the expectation is that teachers will check in with kids, we're aware of the kids who think they're experts but they are not, or they think that they don't know anything because they're too modest. But once they start the study, I would say "I noticed that you got this right away," or "I noticed you were able to tell me ten different things about Hakawati so I'm curious that you're down in *I have no idea yet"*.

In addition we do progress reports… it's broken into *performance, responsibility, effort, progress*…, 2.5 is considered grade level from 1-4, and then this is the space for teacher narratives for each quarter…It's a lot of on-going informal assessments just because arts are performance based so I can really see how kids are changing and progressing and growing…because our groups are so small it's really easy to know who's working at their potential and who's taking a risk…. If I give a quiz and I see that everybody missed a question it just means that I didn't cover it well enough…so it's not that they didn't get it it's that I didn't get it across so I go back.

> (*Referring to the goals of the unit*) Well, we tried to build background knowledge…the ultimate goal is to have a performance about Joha in the Hakawati [story-teller] style. So, we've been reading a lot of Joha stories and understanding things about Joha, about folk literature, and what a hero is or an anti-hero or what folk literature is … I've read through dozens of stories and found stories that illustrated different things, like he's a trickster, he's a fool…So the first week we studied a bit about the region and how stories, ancient stories in the oral tradition…we read a lot of Joha stories about being a fool, being wise, Joha as a rebel, and if you live in a country that potentially has an oppressive government, how can you make fun of the government, or let your feelings be known without being thrown in jail… I listed all the stories that we had read, and I asked each kid to highlight four or five stories they would be interested in being in for the performance… Usually what I'll do is I'll have the kids take a story and turn it into a script but because it's the end of the year and things are a little bit crazy…I'm actually doing that step for this elective myself. So I just turned all the stories into short little scripts and then next week we'll start actually figuring out how to stage them, so they'll be acting but they'll also be kind of thinking as directors; what props they need, what costumes they need, where does the character come in, I mean basically all of the things that a character would do…getting that performance together, having their lines memorized, getting everything set, painting anything we need to for the Celebration of Learning. I think it's very important for the kids to see each other's work and for the parents to see… so that's why we turned it into the Celebration of Learning (*the final performance*).

On my first day of observations, seventh and eighth grade students arrived at the drama class and sat down in a semi-circle facing the blackboard behind the teacher. I had been in the music class during the first week when Linda had already introduced the map of the Middle East and North Africa to the students and discussed Joha, the Middle Eastern protagonist of the stories they were going to read and perform in the subsequent weeks. There were three questions on the board:

1. Where are Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon on the map?
2. Why do you think Joha stories exist in these countries?
3. Joha, Juha, Ojuta, Mulla Nasradin are all names for this character. Why do you think there are different names/spellings?

Linda first gave students maps and asked them to work in groups of three to label the countries. She went around to each group to see how students were doing

and without giving them the answers, she asked them to recall their prior discussions to help them remember the countries on the map. Students discussed their answers with each other. After some time, they were directed to go back to the big circle and Linda went over the map by asking them to volunteer the countries' names as she pointed to them on the map. When students offered answers, she simply repeated them without saying whether their responses were right or wrong. If they seemed insecure about their answers, she reassured them by saying that they had only recently learned the map so it made sense if they did not know it yet. Then she revealed a large map of MENA on the wall and went over it, briefly offering information about each country.

Map of MENA

Linda: What do you notice about these countries?

Student 1: They are all together like a puzzle.

Linda: Anything else you notice besides being together? Anything about size?

Student 2: They all seem kind of random.

Linda: What do you mean?

Student 2: They are different sizes. They all speak different languages.

Linda: Good. What else are you noticing?

Student 3: Their main religion is Arabic.

Linda: Arabic?

Student 3: Muslim (*the student blushed and looked down*).

Linda: Right. Don't be embarrassed. That was a very good thing to say. Why do you think that Joha stories exist in all these countries?

Student 4: Maybe someone spread it around, went from one country to another and told the story.

Student 5: Maybe somehow they are all connected.

Linda: I like the word *connected*, I am going to write it down.

Student 6: It's like the stories of "La Llorona" that started in Mexico and went around from country to country.

Linda: You my friend are brilliant! Some people actually think it was started in Turkey but we don't know. Maybe someone heard the story on the radio and called a friend on his cell phone and told them story…What's wrong with my story?

Student 1: There were no cell phones or radios in ancient times.

Student 2: They didn't go to the library.

Student 3: They did have libraries.

Linda: Generally for someone to hear a story they would hear it from others. Why would someone go from Turkey to Syria?

(*Students came up with reasons, like trade, visiting family…*)

Linda: "The Oral Tradition." What does oral mean?

Student 5: In the mouth

Linda: Excellent! What does the word tradition mean to you?

Student 6: Heritage.

Student 7: The past.

Linda: Good answers. The heritage, the past, and the habit of telling a story.

Linda: What about the last question, why are there so many spellings of Joha?

Student 8: Maybe different countries pronounce it differently or call it a different thing.

Linda: If it is oral tradition it gets changed around, if it was written down it could have been exactly the same.

Student 9: Maybe someone wanted to take credit for it so they changed the name so no one knows it came from someone else.

Student 10: Maybe they changed some things in it, like the location…

Student 2: Maybe names can be pronounced differently like Louise and Lewis.

Linda: Great answers. Now, instead of telling you about Joha we are going to read some of the stories and let you figure it out.

A picture of Joha

As shown in the discussion above, Linda's teaching style was to ask students a lot of questions that provoked them to reflect and come up with their own ideas. She asked sub-questions that helped them build up to the new concepts she was teaching

them. Her instructional method taught the students metacognitive skills; it also kept them more engaged in learning. van Manen (1986) describes a tactful educator as one who "will keep alive the interest that produced the child's question" (p. 41). In addition to her probing style she engaged students in discussions with her enthusiastic tone and by providing a lot of positive feedback to students who participated regardless of the accuracy of their comments. When they made mistakes, she asked additional questions to give them more time to think and come up with another answer; she never told them that they were wrong. Linda seemed aware that the students were taking risks to answer her questions and she was careful not to discourage them.

Engaging Affect and Students' Bodies in Learning

In the beginning of the next class, Linda acknowledged that the students were tired from taking the standardized tests administered that morning. She asked them to try to participate and let them know that she will leave some time before the end of the class for an opportunity to move their bodies and release energy. She gave them the map of MENA again; this time students worked independently to label the countries. After some time, they were instructed to go back to the circle to go over the map. The following was written on the board:

"Do good and throw it into the sea." (Palestinian)
"Don't be good in words- be good in deeds." (Israel)
Anti hero
Folk hero
"Wise in his foolishness and foolish in his wisdom"

They went over the different ideas presented on the board. They discussed the phrase "wise in his foolishness and foolish in his wisdom." She wrote the words students offered to decipher the meaning on the board (i.e., "intelligence," "logical"). She then handed them six Joha stories and asked:

> Linda: What's the first thing you notice?
> Student: They are short.

After the students finished reading the stories, one of them laughed out loud. Linda said, "Why is it funny? Put it into words." Then she asked all the students who were laughing to explain what they were laughing at and why. The students were very attentive; their eyes were on the teacher or the student who was responding. They paraphrased a couple of stories in the explanation of their laughter.

> Linda: Jason, why, why are you laughing?
> Jason: Because…
> Linda: Because what? Why are you laughing?
> (*The student looks confused, doubting whether he should have laughed or not.*)
> Linda: I agree with you, but I want you to put it into words. Why are you laughing?
> (*Student continues to look confused*.)
> Linda: It's good to laugh, but I want to know why?
> Jason: Because it's funny.
> Linda: Can you put it into words? Why that's funny to you?
> Jason: Because Joha did something funny.
> Linda: O.k. now he laughed like I did but you (*looking at Sarah*) went "ha ha ha;" you had a different kind of laughter. What were you thinking?
> Sarah: That it's corny. Well I'm kind of laughing not because it's so funny but because it's so dumb.
> Linda: Okay, for the word dumb, can we substitute the word foolish? So sometimes we laugh at things that are dumb, in other words sometimes we laugh at things that are foolish. Okay, next story…
> (*Alba reads the next story and Brad laughed*.)
> Linda: Why are you laughing Brad?
> Brad: Because she was saying "if you were my husband I would give you poison to drink" and he is saying "if you were my wife I would drink it with pleasure."That means that if she was his wife he would want to die!

> Linda: Yeah that's right. She is saying "if you were my husband I would kill you" and he is saying, "honey if you were my wife, I would be glad to be dead." So it's that kind of comic insult.

Linda engaged students in a discussion about the term "logical," offered by one of the students earlier to describe the nature of the stories. The students compared these stories of Joha with the stories told by an Israeli story-teller who had visited the school at the start of the curriculum unit. After discussing the stories, they went over the term *anti-hero*. Linda wrote *not* and *against* next to *anti* on the board. She asked the students to look at the stories and find examples of Joha being an anti hero, then explain their choices. After going through several of the stories and the ways in which Joha exemplified an anti-hero, they went over examples of him being a folk hero. The students gave several stories of the different *folks* and described them as *regular people*. Finally they explored Joha's wisdom and foolishness in the stories.

"Excellent job everybody I am so impressed (*Linda commented*)."

Linda never assumed that the students knew the vocabulary she presented; she went over the definitions of all the terms she used in their discussions. She gave the Joha stories to the students and offered them an opportunity to come up with their own understandings. Subsequently, students offered their interpretation of the events and moral of each story. Linda mostly played the role of a participant in these discussions who guided the direction of the topics and activities. She facilitated the engagement of students who were not as likely to raise their hands by giving them clues to answer questions.

Linda helped them visualize what Joha and his son were doing in one of the stories in order to illicit students' imagination as they made choices of how to act out

their parts. They laughed as they recorded their comments on their copies. When students laughed, she encouraged them to explore what had made them laugh in the stories. In this exchange, laughter was valued as a form of expression that contained the affect related to the ways students were making sense of the stories. She helped them explore their reactions by reflecting and translating their affect into words. As they went through the stories, Linda activated students' imaginations prior to asking them to explore the terms discussed. This process created a rich discussion in which students had the opportunity to explore a story using their visual and affective sense-making. Students were integrating the mental visualization of the stories that provoked a reaction (such as laughter); then they explored their reactions through analyzing why they had laughed, coming up with words to describe how they felt. They drew upon their affective reactions to make meaning of complex verbal phrases such as *wise in his foolishness and foolish in his wisdom*. In Chapter 6 I further explain the important role of affect in learning with relation to one of the themes in the findings.

Joha's hat worn by each student for the final performance

When Linda asked students questions, she did not settle for their concrete answers but invited them to think about why they provided those responses. She

taught them metacognitive skills by encouraging them to think about their responses and how they came up with them. Therefore, Linda's discussions with the students were rich and invited their minds and bodies to engage. Further, her ability to include all students, even those who didn't always offer answers made for an inclusive discussion in which everyone had something to contribute. Everyone was invited to engage and rewarded by positive feedback as she valued all their responses.

After they finished reviewing the Joha stories, Linda guided students to the large "commons" room right outside of her class where true to her promise, she offered them a chance for physical movement. During the last six minutes of class they played a game called "Paparazzi" in which the students ran around and threw the ball at each other.

At the beginning of the next classroom observation, Linda reviewed the stories' scripts. She gave the students the opportunity to choose the stories and the roles they wanted to play. As they were choosing their parts, she asked, "Does anyone have strong feelings about the parts they want?" This example showed that offering choice to students is not always easy; the process takes a lot of consideration and planning. At first Linda based the decisions on students' strong feelings, and asked them to consider others' feelings if more than one student wanted to play a given role in the script. If there was still more than one student interested in a role, she used a lottery to make a choice in an effort to be fair. This process taught students social skills and consideration for others' feelings. The students were focused and handled the situation in a mature and respectful manner; there were no complaints when final decisions were made.

Next they went over the scripts. As students read their parts aloud, they would decide whether or not they should change the words by adding phrases that would make it more interesting; in this process students offered each other opinions and made suggestions. There was a lot of discussion about how the scenes and the lines should be based on students' ideas. As they reviewed the last story in which all the students had a role, they talked about whether they should keep the original term "jackass" in one of the scripts instead of "donkey," considering the presence of younger students at the final performance. Linda laughed, and in return her students relaxed and laughed too; after this exchange they were more engaged and offered more ideas in the discussion.

> Tomorrow we'll get up and actually act some of the lines (on stage). The music class will add some Arabic drumming in between the stories.

One of the students admitted that she was "afraid" and "nervous" to act. Linda discussed the concept *stage fright*, then told the student that she has some time to practice before the performance; if she was still nervous after the rehearsals they could talk about it again. Later Linda reassured the student again by saying:

> When your part is short, there is no time to feel worried. You'll be done quickly and people will be clapping for you.

Fifteen minutes before the end of class Linda said:

> You have been sitting for a long time so let's move the chairs to the center of the room and play props. (*Students moved their chairs and made another circle*.) This game is called 'props;' it works with the idea that theater is transformational. What does that mean?
> (*Students offered answers*): To change form; to switch; to change into something else.
> It's the idea that theater is transformational, (*Linda explained*). The Hakawati used a lot of props.

She discussed the rules of the game. An object such as a water bottle was passed around from student to student. Each had to transform it into something else. The students were not allowed to talk or say what the object was; they had to provide clues through body language. Each student got the object; some were spontaneous and quickly came up with something; others didn't know what to do and said "pass." Linda provided a lot of feedback and comments regarding their acting; she offered them ideas for how they could be more expressive through their gestures.

In the second stage of the same game, Linda told them that they were now allowed to use both sounds and words in addition to gestures to help their peers guess what their object was transformed into without actually naming it. She referred to a student's attempt as a good example of not rushing and having a beginning, middle, and end in acting out clues to describe the object. Overall students were more animated when they could use both gestures and sounds. Some seemed more comfortable with acting than others. Linda participated in the game by taking a turn. The students transformed the water bottle into different objects such as a musical instrument, a baseball bat, ice cream, and a hair curler. When some of the students got too excited and lost control of their behavior, Linda simply said, "That's not appropriate and you know it." The tone she used for redirecting the students remained calm and she did not draw attention to misbehaviors. Instead, she acknowledged that something in their behavior was inappropriate and let them correct themselves.

The students looked like they really enjoyed the game with the props. They often laughed and engaged their bodies in portraying what the object was transformed

into. They also seemed to enjoy each other's inventions. I noticed one of the students, Leo, was far less reserved than the others in the way he used his body and lay on the floor as he was acting. I was struck by the lack of inhibition he displayed compared to his more self-conscious adolescent peers. Other students looked at him with disbelief and some laughed. I did not think that they were laughing at Leo since the acting in this game was funny, and they had all laughed at each other's inventions throughout the activity. Linda commented on Leo's performance: "Clever!" (Leo is one of the student participants in the study who will be described in Chapter 5).

After class, Linda asked some of the students to stay. She closed the door and asked them if they could explain the difference between *laughing with* and *laughing at* someone. Immediately after she asked this question, one of the students admitted that she had laughed at Leo and knew it was the wrong thing to do. Following her confession, a couple of others also said that they realized they shouldn't have laughed at Leo. She let them know that though he is "eccentric," and they have a right to their thoughts "inside their heads," they need to be mindful of how they display their thoughts through body language. She asked them to think about how Leo would feel if they were laughing at him.

> That's an okay reaction to have. But I think when that comes out, he'll start to feel bad about himself and I just can't let that be. So, and I feel like all of you at some point, some of you more than others were laughing at him, and he's aware of that. So if you could check your reaction. If inside of you you think "Wow, I wouldn't have thought of that," or "That's an unusual reaction," that's fine, but if you could not let that come out through your face, through your body or through your words, I think that it would be a safer place for Leo in class. Everybody okay with that? (*Students nodded*). Cool. Have a good rest of the day.

I thought that Linda's approach to solving the problem she perceived was thoughtful. She did not stop class when the incident occurred; doing so would have drawn more attention to Leo and made him feel uncomfortable, especially since he did not seem to notice the students' reactions as he was absorbed in his acting. As an observer, I had not realized that the students were laughing at Leo any differently than when they had laughed at each other. But as their teacher, Linda who knew them better could read the nuances in their laughter, or perhaps knew that other students often laugh at Leo. She addressed the problem immediately after class, when the experience was recent. She did not yell at the students or make them feel bad; instead she validated their perception that Leo's acting was quite different and she could see why it would surprise them, using the word "eccentric" to describe him. However, she had them distinguish between having the "right to your thoughts" on the one hand, and showing them "through your face, through your body or through your words" on the other. Finally, instead of telling them that their reaction was wrong and reprimanding them, she drew their attention to Leo's feelings by explaining how laughing at him would jeopardize his safety. I was impressed with the way she taught the students empathy by validating their perception and modeling the importance of respect and safety in the learning environment through her own behavior. van Manen explains:

> When an adult turns from merely being an example of behaviors children imitate to being a real example, living the great values he or she tells children to uphold, then that adult assumes pedagogic significance in children's lives. (p. 44)

Teaching Students with LD

While during my observations the students did not show any difficulty understanding the stories, I asked Linda to tell me what happens if a student really struggles with reading the scripts.

> We probably do more writing than reading, because it's really important to me that kids are writing their own plays no matter what grade they're in… Reading… seventh or eighth graders, there have been a couple of classes where there was like a play-reading, play-writing class, Shakespeare class, of course we did a lot of reading for the Joha tales…They read it and then later they can say what happened in that story and what' s the moral, why did Joha do this, and they seem to understand the story too… so they're reading it and they're able to comprehend it, and talk about it.

In her explanation, Linda did not differentiate the participation of students with special needs from other students in the drama class. Therefore I decided to ask her more specific questions to clarify my understandings. I asked her if she noticed any differences in the learning processes of students who were identified as having LD, and whether she felt that she had to make any adjustments in order to include them in the class.

> I mean, it's so obvious maybe I shouldn't even bother to say it, but in drama I think the whole idea of reading is not just about print on the page, there's always another goal. So after you read something you get up and you perform it, or you get up and you play a game about it, or you improv about it, or you go with a small group and you find a corner and you turn it into a script. So I always assume that for the kids who struggle or get bored with reading or say this is too hard, who close down in the classroom…well they normally seem to close down a little less in drama because again it's not just read this and close the book and move on. It's read this and then what are we gonna do about it? Where literally they're up and moving either on the stage, or they're in the prop closet raiding props because they need them to, whether it's statues or moving through or getting improvisation, there's the reading, and then there's getting reading on its feet to do something which is another way of looking at a story or a text.
> And I think it's interesting because kids who struggle with skills in drama usually opt for visual arts where they can feel like this is my work and this is my seat here… I think for some other kids that's really hard for them, they

> have to move, they've got to get up, they can't sit on the stool and do the fine motor stuff. Often times they opt into music and drama just because there's a performance. A lot of times we share kids back and forth and then in visual arts there are kids who that's pretty much all they take. Yeah for the two kids that I'm thinking of who have IEP's in this class, they are very much back and forth between drama and music.

Since throughout our conversations Linda did not distinguish the participation of students with LD from others, I asked her directly to comment on whether or not she perceived any differences in these students' engagement in learning.

> So it's really easy if we're reading scripts and I see a third grader, or a fourth, or a seventh grader who can't read the script, that's really easy to see, or if there're kids with spatial problems or kids who, working in small groups just fly off the handle, or are easily hurt, or feel judged, or who have issues with talking or anger… or kids who have visual problems or kids who are not oral learner…. That's not as true with seventh and eighth grade…Usually it works out, where, because the three of us arts teachers split forty nine kids …these are kids where I don't just have them three times a week; I do lunch meeting with them, and every morning I'm at the door, so I see them coming in.
> We're such a small faculty where we have counsel with Adam Cole (*the special education coordinator*) and we'll talk about kids. Or he'll bring up a kid that somebody has a concern about… so and so is going through this at home, or we've discovered that so and so has a writing problem, so that we get that information.
> It's interesting; I think more often than not, the kids that are having terrible struggles in the classroom are not having terrible struggles in their arts classes. I think there's structure in the arts but there's also more freedom. There's a lot more learning through movement, and learning… I always advocate for this, it really addresses the whole child so within an hour lesson, or an hour project or activities, there are things for the kids, you know kinesthetic learners, and there are things for kids who are visual, and there are things for the kids who are oral learners… so I think that's just another thing that helps. … I think people think on the one hand that the arts are so free for all and everything is fine and it's just chaos, but I don't find that to be true at all.
> And we definitely have access to all the IEP's and all the information… Often times we'll find that they just reiterate what we already knew, again just having the small numbers it's so easy to see what's going on.

Linda spoke casually about *seeing what's going on* with regards to her ability to understand her students' strengths and weaknesses, but it requires attunement to a child's experience to know how he or she learns. van Manen (1991) refers to this type

of intuition as *embodied knowing*, a way of perceiving and listening to children instantly (pp. 84-85). She provided students with opportunities for learning based on her intuitive assessment of their needs. Each of her class sessions provided time for conversation, for acting with props, with or without words; there were opportunities for not only verbal, but also visual and kinesthetic means of engagement. These various modes of engagement created a social, inclusive learning environment that allowed students with LD equal opportunity for participation. The activities and modes of engagement that are part of teaching drama as an art form, as well as Linda's particular teaching style shaped the experiences students described in Chapters V and VI.

Music Class: Al Jeel Rhythms

> To become a teacher includes something that cannot be taught formally: the most personal embodiment of a pedagogical thoughtfulness. (van Manen, 1991, p. 9)

Oliver who is a professional violinist had entered the field of education at UCPCS where he taught music for the last five years. He contacted me to talk about the music of MENA before the start of my observations. During our first meeting we discussed his plans for the class, and I offered him some Persian and Arabic music CD's. Oliver was already familiar with Arabic music since he had lived in Saudi

Arabia during the first part of his childhood. Though he was young and relatively new to the field, he was thoughtful and reflective regarding his students' needs as he discussed his plans. Through our conversations, I realized that we shared a common perspective of teaching, with respect to prioritizing students' social and emotional well-being. Oliver showed concern and empathy for the affective aspects of adolescents' learning experiences in the types of opportunities he provided them.

The Importance of Ownership for Adolescents

One of the qualities that students most appreciated about Oliver was his ability to empathize with their social and emotional needs. In the following paragraph, Oliver reflects on the importance of freedom and respect for adolescents.

> I think that with that age group, they're unhappiest when they feel like they have to be subordinate…they have to follow directions, be told what to do, and any time they act like themselves, they get in trouble. Seventh and eighth graders like to talk to each other, they like to work together, they like to talk, they like to play… and I think as a teacher you have to pick your battles… When kids feel like they're being oppressed …. there's a difference between expecting them to be totally quiet and enforcing that with a very authoritarian tone, instead of saying "look guys, there are other classes going on, let's keep the noise to an absolute minimum," and have a consequence, but have it be something that makes sense…Especially if you explain why, they need to know why; why are you insisting on this? I think that they get very upset when a teacher insists on something that is not very logical to them, especially if they're insisting on something that is preventing them from being themselves. They really want to be able to express themselves, be individuals, have fun with their classmates while they're in school, and I think the arts classes give them that.

During our conversations, Oliver was willing to openly reflect on his teaching experience, allowing me to understand the thought processes behind his pedagogical approach and the choices he made. His assessment of adolescents' social and emotional concerns showed deep reflection regarding their needs. Taking into account the affective aspects of teaching adolescents, and considering their need for

autonomy in his lesson plans enhanced the social learning environment. Oliver was admired by his students, including those with LD who were viewed by other teachers as oppositional and had behavioral problems in other settings. Oliver describes that when he first began teaching five years ago, he had a more structured style of direct instruction. However, based on his assessment of students' individual learning styles, he adopted responsive methods that gave them what he called "ownership of the learning process," especially for the older students. As previously mentioned in Chapter 4, Dawn, the school director, valued the importance of students' ownership of their learning. She had pointed out that both Linda and Oliver were particularly skilled at giving students freedom to be creative in drama and music by writing their own scripts and composing their own music, facilitating students' sense of ownership of their work. Oliver reflected on the particular value of ownership in adolescence:

> First time I taught a guitar elective, I spent the whole class doing direct instruction with the whole group and I taught them to read music. But it was an uphill battle… to keep all of the kids' attention for a whole hour…My idea of teaching was that you have to be constantly overseeing what's happening, and constantly be directing. And then I started to think, they're learning to view things exactly how I view them, which is not true to their musicianship… It's not true to their creativity and their skill, and it's made me realize my own limitations too 'cause so much of the way I've been trained has been that traditional approach… and so it forced me to question my own music education, and I forced myself out of my own comfort zone. And what I realized is that when kids want to do something, and they don't know how to do it, and they go through the process of figuring it out, they learn it faster and they learn it better than if somebody taught it to them.

Guitar class was the most popular music elective.

> I began to think what is it that kids are really interested in with the guitar? And I asked them at the beginning of guitar, what do you guys want to do in this class? And they all agreed that they wanted to learn songs that they know, songs that they can sing… that was what they wanted to focus on. The focus was on individual interests, what you're really interested in, and my framework was the songs. I had a song from the movie *Juno*, I had two Beatles songs, *Hey Jude*, and *Let it Be*, and I taught them those chords and then, once they learned those, they could research the internet what they wanted to learn. A couple of people wanted to learn *Yellow* by Cold Play, another guy wanted to learn a heavy metal song and he looked it up and taught himself how to read the tabs and how to play it… class time was used mostly as practice time. I would give them a skill, and then they would practice the whole hour… Sometimes they would focus on that skill and sometimes they would go off…That was the first class where I fell in love with doing small group work, and, because I saw that kids were totally self-motivated… I realized that they got so much further!! I think they got so much further than they would have ever gotten if I were standing up and telling what to do every step of the way, I never thought that kids could learn so many chords and so many songs on the guitar!

Oliver's reflective pedagogical style led him to adjust his teaching methods, students' activities, and his lesson plans according to their needs. Students valued his flexibility and were empowered when he allowed them to make choices regarding the activities they engaged in.

MENA bulletin board in music class

The following vignettes are from my observation notes of the MENA unit in music class. They reveal the teaching and learning processes Oliver and the students were engaged in as they explored how to play Al Jeel (Arabic style) rhythms on the drums and compose a piece for their final performance at the Celebration of Learning.

Building a Social Environment

It was the first music class of the quarter. Oliver brought food for the students. "At staff developments they have food for the teachers. Why not begin the unit with food; it builds a more social environment," Oliver told me before the start of class.

> Welcome to music. We always wait until the end of the class to have food. But this time I thought we would enjoy some food in the beginning.
> (*Students found a seat. They were smiling and seemed happy to be there. After introducing themselves and stating the reason they signed up for music, they lined up and served themselves snacks. Oliver played a Louis Armstrong CD. As the students ate and mingled, they smiled more and seemed to get more comfortable within the classroom environment. They would dance and swing their way back to the food as they stopped to have conversations with each other and with their teacher. They asked Oliver to play the guitar for them.*)
> (*Oliver was singing as he played*) "Baby you know that I miss you…"
> (*All the students were laughing as one girl yelled*) "That's not how it goes!"
> *(Then he played and sang What a Wonderful World. The students tried to sing along. One of the girls said)* "How about a Spanish song?"

> "Oh, a Spanish song!" (*Oliver played La Bamba on the guitar*).
> *As he continued to play, one of the girls stood up and grabbed a drum, and began playing with him. Another girl grabbed a drum and started playing along in her seat. She played very well. One of the boys asked if he could play the guitar and began to play, showing his instrument to another student who joined in. Before long, they had an improvised band playing music.*

Oliver had succeeded in building a social environment in which students felt welcomed and comfortable on their very first day. He facilitated a relaxed atmosphere through his own engagement and participation as a member of the group. Everyone looked happy to be there. They ate, played music and sang for the entire hour. van Manen (1986) describes the importance of mood and atmosphere in the classroom:

> Atmosphere is the way in which space is lived and experienced. But atmosphere is also the way a teacher is present to children, and the way children are present to themselves and to the teacher. Mood is set by bodily gesture and tone of voice. (p. 36)

The following examples of the ways in which the space in music class was lived and experienced by the students and their teacher have as much to do with Oliver's teaching style as the activities involved in playing music. His enthusiasm for teaching and respect for students invited them to be present and motivated in the enlivened classroom atmosphere. This was a class where body language and music were the main sources of communication; Oliver guided students with his gaze and his movement around the room. Throughout my observations, he showed patience and provided students with constructive feedback. His tone and positive attitude towards students built an inclusive social learning atmosphere where everyone was invited to add his/her ideas in the learning process.

Wang (1997) found the student/teacher interaction and classroom climate were important contextual influences on providing inclusive learning opportunities for students. With regards to student/teacher relationships, she found that the quality of these interactions contributed to students' self esteem and fostered a sense of membership in the class and school. Oliver's authentic interactions with and respect for students seemed to raise their self-confidence; even those who were initially quiet and shy became more engaged throughout the class sessions. In terms of classroom management, Oliver's teaching style was the opposite of *management* in the traditional sense. His pedagogical style created an inclusive classroom environment by fostering high levels of engagement. As Cooper and Valli (1996) suggest, in inclusive classrooms where students are involved in the "construction and interpretation of the cognitive and social aspects of that environment" (p. 143), engagement replaces the need for management. The presence of contextual influences, including the social and affective dimensions of the classroom climate (i.e., cooperation among teacher and students, common interests and values, and the pursuit of common goals) (Wang, 1997), were engaging elements of the music classroom that led to a social and inclusive learning environment.

The circle where students gathered with their instruments.

Embodied Engagement in Exploratory Learning

The students moved their chairs to the circle, each holding a drum. Oliver played an Arabic song and told them to listen to the beat. The second time he played the song, he told them to begin playing their drums to the rhythm to get a feel for the beat. The students began drumming to the song and continued to play even when the song ended. A few minutes later, Oliver told them to break up into three groups. The three groups were going to practice in different locations: the front stairway, the back stairway, and the classroom. Oliver left the room with one of the groups and I remained with the students in the classroom.

The group I observed consisted of 11 students. They could not keep their hands off the drums as they discussed how to compose their own Al-Jeel rhythm, each of them inventing and adding his or her own beat. Joey, one of the student participants in the study began playing first, keeping a consistent beat and leading the group. Then the students decided to switch their seats around to sit closest to the person whose beat they were following. Throughout this process, students shared their ideas and offered each other suggestions on how to improve their rhythms. All members of the group were fully engaged and respectful in their interactions. They were focused on their responsibility as a group, to compose a rhythm and share it with the other groups when they returned to the classroom.

Doumbek (Middle Eastern drum)

> "Ready," (*boom, boom boom, …*).
> "Something sounds wrong!"(*shouted one of the girls. They discussed the problem and another student said*)"I think I was off." (*Joey and the boy next to him talked about how to keep their beats together.*)
> *Joey led again.* "Ready?" (*boom, boom, boom,…*)

As the students played the drums, they looked at each other's hands. Each student invented a rhythm, with Joey keeping the beat on the bass drum to keep them together. I left to observe another group practicing in the stairway. Each group had practiced for about thirty minutes while Oliver went around and helped them along before they all reunited in the classroom. Most of Oliver's guidance was through body language; he communicated with them with his gaze, directing the student whose turn it was to play. After each group returned to the classroom, Oliver asked the students to quickly take their seats to play their piece as he was going to record them.

As students played their instruments, they continued to look at each other's eyes and hands; their communication was non-verbal. Each time they played, they showed more confidence; the music got louder and they looked more relaxed and engaged. Some students were moving their bodies to the music as they played. I was focused on the student participants in my study (those with IEP's). Estela was

smiling. Joey was tapping his feet. Patrick picked up the cymbals and laughed as he hit them together. He liked to be funny; he slapped the guitar strings with his hands, showing off his skills, making the girls laugh. Claire was chanting and yelling "yeah!" After each group performed, the others would applaud. Noah's generally flat affect had disappeared; he shook his head from side to side and his long curly hair dangled in his eyes. The episode gave class participation a new meaning for me; deep participation in learning required embodied engagement, in which the mind, body, and affect were involved.

After Oliver had recorded the music they played he said: "Okay guys we have to decide which recording we want to keep." Oliver and the students commented as they listened to the music and decided on the version that sounded better; then Oliver wrapped up: "Alright cool. That sounded really good."

Other drums played during the MENA unit

The next day, the students were gathering their instruments and heading downstairs to the "commons," a large multipurpose room with a stage in the front. Oliver let the students know that they will be practicing for the last time prior to the

final performance. He wrote down the instrument each student had chosen. There were two violins, two guitars, four drums, two tambourines, two egg shakers, and a keyboard. The students went down and set up on stage. Everyone was focused. The very first time they played through the song it sounded great; I was surprised at how well they performed together. On stage, Noah was shaking his head to the music, looking like a rock star. Patrick was less silly than usual. The two boys looked confident as they played, looking up and smiling, showing off at times. When they stopped playing, they asked Oliver for feedback on the chords they had played. Noah played with something in his hands and wiggled in his seat. Estela did not have the usual mischievous look on her face; she looked serious and focused as they played, then she turned to her friend saying "Go girl! Go girl!" After they played the song once, Oliver said: "Great job! Let's practice the transition again."

Jason looked nervous but proud, smiling as he played the main beat on the bassdrum. The quality of the music they had put together was impressive. They transitioned between different rhythms. The students gazed at each other and gestured to cue each other to join in with the group. Oliver's comments were always positive and he was patient when students made mistakes, helping them figure out what to do the next time they played. For example, at one point when they were off beat, Oliver stopped them and asked:

> Who rules in the land of rhythm? It's Joey. You're the foundation.
>
> (*Noah asked*) Is Joey hitting the beginning of a measure?
>
> Yes,(*Oliver replied*).

They continued to have a discussion about when each instrument should start playing to join the group. Oliver suggested listening to and looking at each other in order to know when to play their parts.

Should I be next to her then because I can't hear? (*asks a student*).

Instead of Oliver directing every aspect of this process, students asked questions and talked to each other about where they should sit and how to cue each other to start playing.

What are we missing? (*Oliver asked*).

Boom ba-boom boom… (*Noah replied*). (*One of the students closes his eyes to hear the beat*).

It has to be piano… soft. (*Oliver said*).

Throughout their activities, Oliver provided students with guidance as they explored their preferred way to engage in learning Middle Eastern music. After learning the Arabic rhythms on the drums, students were given the freedom to choose instruments and compose their own version of Al-Jeel. There was equity in the power structure and decision-making processes in the classroom between Oliver and the students. He held them responsible for their own work and they lived up to his expectations. They handled their freedom responsibly. The following is the summary of Oliver's own reflection on teaching the MENA unit in music.

> I thought of listening to recordings and having them extract the music by ear, which I think ended up working out a lot better…for me to give them each a drum, and let them come up with some rhythms than for me to create a piece and teach it to them. I think to them it kind of ignited a natural ability to hear something and then do something with it; so it comes from them rather than from me. And I think that that age group responds better to taking leadership, and feeling independent, feeling like they're given the freedom to do things on their own…

> To prepare for the final performance, I got the kids to look at what they got from listening to Al Jeel and then create a whole drumming piece around it. …I think I had a keyboard out… somebody started fiddling on the keyboard, someone hit the drum…and little by little it started turning into a piece, so it wasn't planned. It wasn't composed in advance by anybody; it just naturally evolved... Once it was set in motion I had to make it work, and give it some kind of form. I had to pull ideas out of the kids to turn it into a performance piece that we presented, but I think by then they had a good idea how to do that from working in small groups so much… [The final performance] was an original piece that they put together based on Al Jeel. What was interesting about that performance was that I would have never come up with that. Never! It wasn't really my style…So to me that's a more meaningful musical experience than being taught something through direct instruction. …I feel really, really good about how it went. It was a positive experience and I learned a lot.

Oliver's reflective pedagogical style led him to constantly think about his teaching experiences. He improved students' learning opportunities based on his intuitive understanding of their social and educational needs. According to van Manen (1991), "Pedagogical action constantly prods us to reflect whether we did things appropriately, right, or in the best way possible" (p. 15).

Teaching Students with LD: the Importance of Self-Efficacy and Motivation

To answer my research question regarding the particular nature of LD students' participation in learning in the arts, I asked Oliver to reflect on the students in his class.

> Performance-wise and skill-wise, it depends so much on the individual and what their experience has been. Some of them had lessons outside of school, and some of them haven't. But as far as their level of engagement, I think they were more engaged in that class than they have ever been in any of my other electives.
> I think on an individual basis they were all self-sufficient, they were self-motivated. If they had questions they'd ask me but I didn't feel like I needed to give them [students with LD] any additional support or guidance or discipline… I didn't need to keep them on track any more than the other kids. Actually there are a few other kids who needed more guidance than they did.

As shown in Oliver's description of teaching the four student participants (presented in Chapter 5), he did not have to provide them with any additional accommodations to participate in music class. It is important to note that all the students with LD were also diagnosed with ADHD. Oliver described them as focused and engaged in their work, in part because of opportunities to "take on a leadership role" as an important aspect of their engagement. He also described their aversion to direct instruction and being told what to do. Finally, he explained that when the students were involved in an activity that made them feel good about themselves, they were fully engaged.

Based on their extensive research on motivation, Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) found that students' self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of behavioral, cognitive, and motivational engagement in learning. Some of their indicators for each of these aspects of engagement (such as effort, persistence, help-seeking, interest, and affect) are the same as the characteristics Oliver highlighted in his description of the students' ways of participating in the learning processes in his class. According to Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003), self-efficacy leads to engagement which is a prerequisite for academic achievement. Enhancing self-efficacy beliefs is even more important for students with LD whose challenges in academic classes have a negative influence on their self-esteem. Given their difficulties with many of the verbal and written tasks required in school, the embodied and affective modes of engagement in music provided them with inclusive learning opportunities in which they had positive experiences. In this context, they excelled and performed just as well or better than their peers without disabilities.

Students' accounts of their experiences in music class, (presented in Chapters V and VI) show that they valued opportunities for engagement through the kinesthetic and musical modes of learning in which they could use various sensory systems and affect. Further, Oliver's planning for their social and emotional needs for autonomy and respect created a sense of ownership of learning that students with LD responded to with a positive attitude. These experiences of success in music enhanced their self-efficacy, as well as their motivation to learn. In music and drama, students with LD and ADHD were far from the passive, helpless learners referred to in prior research on these students (Sideridis et al., 2006; Raviv & Stone, 1991).

Visual Arts Teacher Interview

> To know something is to know what that something is in the way it speaks to us, in the way it relates to us and we do it. (van Manen, 1986, p. 44)

I met with Allison, the visual arts teacher, who had kindly agreed to participate in an interview though I had not been able to observe her class during the MENA unit. We had a conversation about her experiences teaching art, with focus on students with special needs. She provided insights based on her extensive experiences teaching visual arts to students with special needs. Given the richness of

the information she provided, I decided to include her experience in this study as it informs the engagement of students with LD in the arts.

Her perspective also brings to light considerations that are important for making decisions around the goals and priorities of arts education programs. Compared to Linda and Oliver who emphasized student ownership and social-emotional considerations in the learning process, Allison was more focused on the acquisition of skills, and relied much more than the other teachers on the national standards for the arts to guide her teaching. Her perspective also shows the decisions arts education teachers are faced with as they determine the types of learning opportunities they provide for students. These differing perspectives are important aspects of the debate regarding how the arts should be taught and for what purpose.

Art as a non-verbal "Universal Language"

> One of my teaching experiences was at a school for special children…it was a wide range of kids from autism to severe behaviorally challenged kids, to wheelchair- bound and physically challenged kids, as well as mentally challenged kids, not just learning disabled kids. So I worked in this environment and tried to develop a curriculum, where sometimes the art work worked as therapy, sometimes the art work worked as communication, and sometimes the art work worked as just release. And in that I wasn't so much concerned about getting skills or regular content …I kind of broke it up between those three areas: physical therapy, communication, and release.
> I was working with some very autistic kids that did not have the eye contact, would have the repeated sounds or movements… and I found that even though I'm in this space, and what the student worked with was in their space and their world, in the art work, we kind of came together through using colors, through using shapes and lines, that's where the communication began. And it was actually this job that formed what I felt teaching art was really all about. The visual arts is a language, a universal language, where you come to understand some shapes and lines and colors. You look at pieces, no matter where you are, and I guess it's the same thing with music as well, it's a universal language. With visual arts, and a lot of these times when people just don't see the in-depthness of some of these people going through these challenges (*referring to students with special needs*), where it can come out,

> some things that they normally can't communicate because of a physical challenge, or again because they are in their own world.
> (*I told Allison about my son's difficulties with communication and his compulsive need for drawing*.)
> But I almost wonder if it's our innate…where there is a weakness in one area, we develop a strength in another…A strength is formed where art comes out… or, where, it hasn't been introduced and once it is it's really embraced and then it can develop.
> When I was working with this population…we are so verbal in our communication… always communicating verbally and when you see a kid who might be physically challenged, I remember one of the students, he really was rigid with his movement, but when I was working with him on an art piece and working on physical therapy, the personality, the wonderful humor that comes out even though his speech is very slurred because his control is very limited… in his art work he just got so happy and we were able to communicate… he actually challenged himself to speak more or type into his thing more… we have that interaction, that chance, that space to express yourself….as opposed to not providing that time and that space…the space, that communication where you see so much more in-depth, as opposed to just the surface, that checklist of let's get them to do this, this this and this.

Here Allison explained her past experience with children and adolescents who had more severe challenges than the student participants in this study, and were educated in special settings outside of the general education environment. In that context, Allison seemed to value "the space to express yourself," to communicate non-verbally through art; she explained the value of visual arts for non-verbal students or those with severe language difficulties.

A Curriculum for the Language of Visual Arts

> I think at this place I really developed my concrete view of what I felt art was…again, what I keep coming back to is the communication, learning the language as a skill, and everybody can master a language, if you learn the fundamentals, so…I use the national standards, and I really believe that at that age level there are some skills that kids should be exposed to and able to practice, the next year you can work upon... I actually begin by painting still lifes in pre-K, and it kind of goes up to fourth grade before they get to choose electives. And you can see every year, how much their skills develop and the language develops, simply because you are exposing them all the time…I also have to do a lot of expeditionary work which ties with what the class is doing

sometimes, so I do have to forfeit some of my background knowledge.

In the general education environment, Allison relies more heavily on the national standards for arts education and implements a skills-based, incremental approach to teaching visual arts. According to Allison, visual arts is a language, and students need to learn the skills to master the language. Based on this philosophy, she refers to the national standards to guide the curriculum she uses to teach students skills to be visual artists through an incremental approach throughout their time at UCPCS. However, in the subsequent paragraph, Allison shares a project in which students had the freedom to express their creativity rather than practice a skill; she referred to it as:

> …a breath of fresh air! In every grade level I try to have just one project where it's purely either abstract, or where they're relating to a piece or representing a piece. (*Holding up an abstract painting done by students*) this is in seventh and eighth grade where I did just pure finger painting. In pre-K, experimenting and just being in the paint with a creative touch and when it gets to their next project, and that is just a pure kinesthetic connection to their materials. And then first and second [grades], I like to leave some space… I do a project every year again, where they paint to a piece of music which is usually abstract and at the time we usually talk about abstract and realism, so introducing the language, I really try to create a little bit of space where kids can kind of use art as pure expression without being literal. But then again… you know I have all the other checklists I have to get through as well.

I was surprised that despite Allison's appreciation for the projects she described as "pure expression," she only allowed for one project each year, and only in some of the grades. In fact, she later explained that she provided these experiences for freedom of self-expression through visual arts less often for the older grades (the students in my study). She explained that since the older students chose an art form for electives, they had fewer opportunities to learn the skills in each art form; therefore she had to focus on teaching them the skills when they opted for visual arts.

I asked her to describe the "checklists" she referred to that prevented her from providing students with experiences to create their own styles of art.

> It comes from the Arts Standards, and it comes from the demands of the expeditionary learning style. For example the seventh and eighth earlier this year were studying Ancient Greece, so I did a little bit of pottery, and this (*showed me some sculptures students had done*) relates to ancient Greece. I also did painting the neighborhood in water color because the final project for them was to paint. I guess they selected buildings that had Ancient Greek influence…architecture here and they put their pieces in a calendar and they sold it to make money for an organization here in the city. …I hear what they're doing [in academic classes], and I think how can I break it down so I can get in my Arts Standards, and how can I build skills to create a project that they can do something with. Before the school year actually begins, in August when we come back early, that's when we meet a lot with the teachers to sit in on their planning… and for me, my process is, I just kind of listen to what they're doing, and then I start writing down what are some standards that I want to try to check off or do in the fall, and then in the middle ground I develop a project that will meet both sides.

Examples of students' artwork in Allison's class

From her explanation, I interpreted that Allison is bound by the arts standards on the one hand, and Expeditionary Learning projects with the academic subject teachers on the other. I was not sure about the extent to which her approach to visual arts came from her own philosophy of teaching, and how much was related to her perception of external requirements for teaching the arts through the standards. So I

asked her about her opinion of the standards and how it compares with her own philosophy of teaching visual arts.

> I really…I don't know I'm a very structured person, probably over-structured... I really like standards; they give me a structure, but I don't think that I have to live by them, do or die. I kind of take what I want and leave what I don't because realistically when you look at it, you can't get through everything of what they expect you to get through. I remember one training that I went through when I was working for the [city's] public schools, and they give you this structure, and they say what is it that you realistically want the kids to walk out of your art class with at the end of the year? And for me that makes it very real…what do I want… concretely want them to know, to master by the end of the year, and I have that in the back of my head.

For a moment, I felt as conflicted as Allison….What should the goal of arts education be? Teaching skills for students to become artists, or providing opportunities to engage in the arts and allowing them to find their own connection? I tried to clarify my own perception by asking Allison to explain hers. I asked her: How would you compare this process of step-by step learning of skills and techniques with the other process you were talking about…the pure expression? Are there similarities or are they contradictory?

> You mean compared to art therapy, communication and release, versus starting from the beginning? Well when I was there (*referring to the special education school where she taught*) I touched on some of the foundational, but just not as expansive as here, because in order to be able to communicate again you have to have the basics…so I created real basic projects. For example, with one class, it was a group who had serious physical and mental disabilities, I created a project where we created texture boards. So using the word texture, seeing the word texture, and they had to create their own boards where they … picking up, the pressure, the glue, one was cotton, one was beads, damp paper, and then after that we would use it to create words, soft, bumpy, rough… in the end there's a communication thing behind it, but it wasn't the rigid…Now when it's pure release, when you're in that critical space of just needing pure release, then I think you just need to honor, and just have the materials, and just do it…

I was having difficulty letting go of the contradiction I perceived in Allison's

appreciation for art as creativity and expression, and her heavy use of a standards-based approach to teaching. I thought if Allison acknowledges the importance of this *pure release,* why does she stay so structured? And what is her perception of which types of activities the students value in visual arts? So I asked her to describe how she thought students felt about the types of arts activities they wanted to engage in.

> I know I have to fight more for the space to put this (*the abstract work*) into my curriculum. Yeah, I impose that… I make sure, I feel like this (*the abstract art*) is the ultimate purpose of art, for me, so to be able to leave that space each year, every year where kids start to develop that connection a little bit further because they kind of continually practice it.

Teaching Students with LD: "Meeting them where they are at"

I asked Allison to describe what she thought about teaching students with LD in an inclusion setting at UCPCS.

> …Sometimes, when people come to observe my class, they might say I can't identify that kid. I actually have passed my threshold… I don't have those labels. They're not coming to me and saying this is an IEP kid... I just meet them where they're at. And I say that about art too. It took me about three years to reach this grandiose theme that art is not only done by people who are very talented…and you could do picture-perfect art. So that's why my board out there shows all types of artists…like Picasso, to really break their mold, that art is about communication versus pretty, you know? So I try to meet them where they're at…if they have a visual-spatial processing challenge... if they have a fine motor skill problem…
> Even if I don't have an IEP, from my many years of experience, I just pick up on it. There are the signs, the cues that this child will need more support in fine motor skills versus this child. And I kind of have the background knowledge on how to support them in many different ways. A lot of times when I teach I really believe in the different strengths in learning, the kinesthetic…the verbal…so I really try to hit all of those different aspects when I am teaching a new skill or when I'm teaching a new content, versus just sitting and showing, and then go do…

Her explanation shows that Allison relies on her intuition and years of experience teaching students with special needs to detect their strengths and weaknesses. She addresses their individual needs through a multi-sensory approach

to instruction. Since I did not have the opportunity to observe her teaching style, I asked her to describe what the process she had explained looks like in terms of what kids actually do.

> So for the shading exercise for third and fourth [grades], I do have some kids who I'm sure may probably have an IEP, but I really don't let it stick in my head or let the label affect me. I'm really there for the individual child…. I think that's kind of more important than hearing a label or hearing they have this challenge or that… instead of authentically helping that individual where they're at. So when I'm up front, and we review language, I show them a final piece, and then I do it right in front of them, and I'm always talking, making it story-like, you know "now I'm as light as a feather," "now I'm heavy as a hammer," and then I have them do it immediately. So there is a literal, there is a kinesthetic, there's those who can look and learn…There are kids who might pick up the skill faster, and some who need support, and for me, my job is to help those who need more support feel comfortable, to create a classroom environment where they feel comfortable by a) asking for support, and b) hoping that they know enough to be able to ask a question… to ask for support. When I have a kid asking "I don't get this," or "I need help," that is success for me. I say "thank you" because I always stress, "I'm here to teach you," "I'm here to help you." When we have these learning targets to check off "I have no idea" to "I can teach it," I always stress that it's okay, Ms. Grant (*referring to herself)* goes to the computer, and I'm down here (*referring to "low" on the Learning Targets chart*), and I have no idea and I'm okay with it so I always stress that it's okay not to know…
>
> I had one kid in my class who apparently had a fine motor problem but I didn't know. Because the work that she produced here was amazing, and then they showed me something that she produced in the classroom; I was like, who did this? Is this my kid?! That is really odd! And I guess that goes back to the skills…not boring stuff but the fundamental stuff, where she learned that and then…I don't know if the challenge wasn't a challenge any more… I was just shocked at the difference between the work she produced in here and in the classroom. And I always also stress, slowing down, maybe with my ADHD kids, about breathing, and slowing down… about the process and really embracing the process of the work.

Allison's ability to assess her students' areas of strength and weakness, along with her willingness to use various modes of teaching (i.e., verbal, kinesthetic, visual), enabled her to meet her students *where they were at.* She also talked about using relaxation techniques and emotional support in ways that show her awareness

of LD students' sensory and affective needs. It is unfortunate that I did not have the privilege of observing her classes for this study. However, her experience and perspective of arts education added to issues to consider in planning opportunities for engagement through the arts. Though she adopted a more "structured" approach, student participants who had taken her class reported having the experience of expressing their feelings through their artwork in her class (Chapter 6), though one student complained of not being able to build a sculpture that he wanted to.

The competing priorities among the teachers in this study with regard to teaching skills versus providing opportunities for creativity and student ownership of their work was one of findings that have important implications for the types of experiences students are provided with through arts education. In addition, the extent to which teachers use the national standards for the arts and whether or not this skills-based approach is beneficial or harmful for students' experiences in the arts are important factors to consider in designing arts-based programs.

Summary

The common theme running through all the arts teachers experiences with students' with LD is that in each particular art class, these students performed just as well, if not better than their peers without LD. The analyses in the findings of this study show that the student participants valued learning opportunities that allowed them to use non-verbal, kinesthetic, musical, visual, affective, and social modes of learning. The arts-based environments that allowed these various modes of learning were more engaging and more inclusive than academic classes that rely heavily on language-based instruction and performance. The arts provided students with

opportunities to learn through areas of possible strength, especially since they chose the art elective they participated in. The multiple modes of learning also gave students more opportunities to engage by using different aspects of their sensory system. Finally, as shown in the classroom vignettes, the arts rely heavily on affect and body language (especially in drama and music); these classes provided occasions for students to integrate their emotions in the learning process.

With regard to their pedagogical styles and approaches to teaching students with LD, all three teachers were intuitive and knowledgeable regarding their students' special needs. They all used various modes of engagement in their instruction and activities, providing students with multi-sensory opportunities to engage and learn in each class. The activities that are a part of learning engaging in the arts by nature are more inclusive for students with LD or ADHD because they allow them to use their areas of strength, or learn through a modality that allows them access to participate.

Finally, the difference in the teachers' pedagogical practice was related to the degree of structure and the extent to which they relied on arts-based standards rather than allowing students to choose their activities. Oliver focused on student creativity, ownership and personal connection to music. Linda connected her goals (partially derived from drama standards and in part based on her perception of her students' needs as they became evident through informal assessments), consciously integrating opportunities for movement and verbal vs. non-verbal expression. According to Allison's own description of her style, she was more structured and relied more heavily on the visual arts standards, but based on her experiences with students with special needs, she used multisensory approaches to teaching to meet their needs. The

implications of these various pedagogical styles are further explored through the students' experiences of each approach, presented in the themes in Chapter 6.

Having described the context of the arts classrooms observed, the nature of the activities involved, and the teachers' pedagogical styles and priorities, in Chapter 5 I introduce the student participants. I present detailed profiles for each of the seven students observed in either music or drama, based on various sources of information, including my observations, interviews with their teachers, and interviews with the parents who participated in the study. Chapter 5 introduces each student based on his or her strengths and weaknesses in school-based learning. I present the perceptions of their humanities and inclusion teachers (as representative of the students' participation and performance in language-based classrooms) in contrast to the arts teachers' evaluation of the same students in music or drama. This information lays the foundation for the findings in Chapter 6 by describing the context of the arts in the student participants' overall educational opportunities.

Chapter 5: Student Participants

> Individual identity takes form in the contexts of relationship and dialogue; our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture for all children the sense of worthiness and agency. (Greene, 1995, p. 41)

In this chapter, I present each of the student participant's individual profiles with the goal of contextualizing their experiences in the arts within their strengths and weaknesses in learning. The information was provided by students themselves, their teachers, and their parents. My intention was to portray a holistic view of the students and add their voices, often left out of education research, to describe their learning experiences. The absence of a complete picture of students with disabilities, including their perceptions and experiences regarding their learning opportunities leaves a generalized impression of them based on a deficit model and labels that only identify their weaknesses. These generalizations do not provide information regarding the students' strengths, or what motivates them to engage in learning and why. To fill this gap, the information presented in this chapter was collected through a social-constructivist view regarding the students' learning styles, the sources of their difficulties, as well as pedagogical and environmental factors that influence their engagement.

The students reported on their arts-based experiences, often comparing the differences between learning in the arts versus their academic classes. They also provided information regarding how they feel about various modes of engagement in learning (i.e. expression through the arts versus writing). I present excerpts from interviews and examples from their participation in drama and music classes that show the students as I got to know them through this study.

Both general education and arts teachers were interviewed and their narrative accounts included in this chapter show the difference between students' engagement in the arts and their learning in their academic classes. This information is important to consider in planning inclusive educational opportunities and for contextualizing the place of arts education within their overall school-based experiences. In addition to the teachers' and students' perceptions and narrative accounts, I include the perspectives of parents who participated in the study regarding each student's characteristics. The information provided by parents adds to understanding the value of arts education for each student.

I was introduced to the students by Oliver and Linda, the music and drama teachers who explained to them that I was there to study the benefits of the arts in public schools and may talk to some of them in order to learn about their experiences with the school's arts program. The students who were receiving special education services for LD (most of whom were also diagnosed with ADHD), were interviewed along with some general education students in order to protect them from emotional harm that may be caused by revealing the full purpose of my research as a study of students with LD.

As evidenced in the subsequent paragraphs, some students were more expressive and had more to say while others offered less, but equally valuable information. Most of the students were initially reserved and struggled with verbal expression, while a couple of them were very verbal and eager to participate. It's important to take into account that most of them had moderate to severe difficulties with expressive language and struggled to verbalize their ideas. Therefore, at times I

probed them on specific topics they mentioned in order to improve my understanding of the experiences they discussed. As I spent more time in the classrooms, the students became more comfortable with my presence and were more willing to share their experiences.

The information collected shows that in line with findings from other research on the characteristics of adolescents with LD, these students' learning challenges affected them socially and emotionally. Some students, especially the girls (Estela and Alba) used socialization to hide their academic challenges and compensate for their difficulties engaging in classes that required them to learn using their areas of weakness (such as reading, writing, or math). Others such as Joey, Noah, and Patrick were self-conscious and tried to display an indifferent attitude. As the students' profiles show, the social and emotional effects of their learning differences were mediated by individual experiences (at home and at school), the learning environment and activities required, and the teachers' pedagogical styles and interactions with students. Each student's unique set of circumstances and characteristics affected them differently.

Based on information collected in this study, while students with LD are more vulnerable for having social or emotional problems, parental and teacher support, as well as the influence of the learning environment has a strong influence on their self-esteem. Given the relatively safe social environment of Urban Community Public Charter School compared to large public schools where LD students may remain anonymous, some of the student participants were socially well adjusted and even popular among their peers. Regarding their self-esteem and emotional well-being, the

social school and classroom environment as well as the learning requirements had a strong effect on their self-efficacy beliefs. In other words, students' sense of self-efficacy was affected by the learning context and skills required for engagement.

The amount of information presented in the student profiles varies and is indicative of their expressive language abilities, whether and how much their parents participated, and the information that their teachers provided. I add the voices of their parents and teachers in order to situate the students' arts-based experiences within the broader context of their education, with emphasis on their strengths and academic weaknesses. The students' accounts are mostly based on information they reported in individual interviews that were mildly edited for clarity. In presenting this information, I realize that a strong limitation is the absence of their tone and affect. In order to ameliorate this problem, at times I include long excerpts of the students' narrative accounts to help portray their moods and affects. Therefore, the format of the profiles varies to accommodate the most complete portrayal of the students based on the information available for each participant. The student profiles in this chapter create the context for the findings regarding the benefits of the arts, presented in Chapter 6.

The Musicians

Music Bulletin Board

Noah

"I doubt he's going to talk to you," warned Adam, the Special Education Coordinator. Noah was noticeable. His tall body was slouched in his chair, his head hung low; his bangs covered his eyes, as if he was hiding behind his curls. His body language signaled a stronger than typical boundary between him and the world around. He looked somber, pale, and disconnected. He did not look like he would want to talk to me, or anyone else for that matter. My experience teaching students with sensory processing challenges told me that his strong boundary had a purpose that should not be misunderstood with a lack of desire to share his world. I was eager to connect with him in a way that respected the safety of his space, viewing his closed door as a challenge I was familiar with. Taking the time to connect with Noah, to gain his trust, was the key to opening that door; I understood his need to be self-enclosed. As a researcher new to the school, I had no relationship with Noah to rely on; I thought of the great privilege it is to be a teacher.

I never pulled Noah out of class for an interview; all our conversations were in the context of the classroom or on the street as students walked around the school. In music, I would sit next to him, but not too close; I did not want to invade his marked space. I would comment and praise him when he played well, but I would also talk to other students in his group so that he would not perceive too much attention directed at him. Eventually he began making eye contact with me by looking at me when he played the guitar. Then he began sitting closer to me so that I would hear him play. Noah never let go of his guitar when he answered my questions; he held on to it as a security object and played it the entire time we were talking. Playing the instrument

facilitated communication and added expression to his face; his verbal ability did not match the maturity of his body language.

Once when I was observing Noah in a small group playing the drums in the stairway, he began talking to me in the spaces between the practice sets.

Noah: I lose my attention.

Golnar: What do you mean?

Noah: I just like, forget. I lose my place. I just, forget. Especially when there are multiple people, then I start playing other people's beats.

Golnar: What's the process, how are you all supposed to come up with a piece at the end?

Noah: Each person just starts playing a beat on top of the others.

After practicing a couple of times, they came up with a very interesting piece that sounded synchronized, as if they had been practicing for days. Noah had figured out how to maintain his rhythm on the drum. Oliver (the music teacher) came to check on the group. As he approached them, they seemed to gain confidence and act as if they were completely in charge of their work. Oliver brought Middle Eastern finger cymbals and asked if anyone wanted to play these instruments to "make it more flavorful." Noah was the first to raise his hand; he had the idea of hitting the finger cymbal against the drum. Oliver liked the idea and helped him figure out how to get the best sound. Noah followed Oliver's advice and seemed to like receiving attention from him. Music seemed to be a language Noah was comfortable with and Oliver spoke it well.

Another day when we were walking back from the metro station near the school where Oliver took the students to play for the public, Noah and I had a

conversation that helped me understand him better. We were carrying folded chairs and talking. His attitude was cool and nonchalant. He said something about the private guitar teacher he had and liked, whose number he lost. I couldn't hear him well.

Golnar: Did you like the teacher?

Noah: Yeah.

Golnar: What did you like about him?

Noah: I don't know. He was just awesome*(long pause*). And I like sticking with music teachers… I don't like changing.

Golnar: You don't like switching teachers?

Noah: No. I stopped playing the violin because my teacher left. And I started like, five months ago and then I stopped because my teacher left.

Golnar: You played the violin too?

Noah: I played that when I was like three.

Golnar: And you had to switch teachers many times? (*Realizing that this must be a theme for him, something that upsets him*.)

Noah: Yeah my teachers kept leaving.

Golnar: Where did they go?
Noah: Other places. Like they moved out of the area. They like left.

Golnar: And did you get upset because they all left?

Noah: I don-no (*mumbles*). I just don't like the changes.

Noah was adopted by his fathers, James and Felipe, who at the time of the study were separated. The following are excerpts from a conversation with James (Noah's father):

Noah is angelic. He has a strange kind of LD; high off the charts IQ. He is very good at Physics. The reason is that a different part of the brain is

> used…there is something different. Science… my intuitive sense is that it's a different kind of thing: concepts, creative connections…
> Painful writing…His writing problems affect his self-esteem, terrible memory… He gets stressed out if he sits too long… Great tennis player.
> I know he is very artistic and does well in arts. He played the recorder, took cello lessons, flute, self-taught guitar … ask him to play the guitar for you.
> He sometimes composes. He likes cartooning and drawing.
> He needs to be in a setting that makes learning relate in a real and fun way… gets the kids engaged in learning... using a different part of the brain.
> They were going on a school trip to the Model UN and he was in panic. He didn't want to go and he wouldn't say why. I'm dealing with strategies to understand this.
> He is very sensitive. He has an incredible radar- if you're inauthentic- he'll pick it up right away.
> Do you know Green up at Harvard? He wrote *Lost at School*. That's Noah, *The Explosive Child*. It's still really, really hard. The teachers say they understand …What's really going on is he is terrified of failure.

After the class rehearsed for the final performance, Noah grabbed his guitar and sat closer to me, looking at me as he played. I thought I should take advantage of this opportunity to interview him. He and I were sitting alone as the other students were congregated around Oliver on the other side of the room, putting away their instruments and making comments on their performance.

Golnar: So do you always sign up for music when you choose electives?

Noah: Yeah.

Golnar: What's your second choice?

Noah: First guitar, then art, then drama.

Golnar: So you like visual arts better than drama?

Noah: Well, drama, I don't like acting. I'll do lighting.

Golnar: And how did you start playing the guitar?

Noah: (*He is playing the guitar as we talk*). Um, a few years ago, I just, I found my old guitar, like I keep this guitar in the basement, and I started to play it. And then I got my dad to buy me an electric and then I took lessons for a bit, and then I just self-taught myself to play.

Golnar: Did you also take guitar at school?

Noah: Ah, yeah. But it was just stuff I knew. It was just like practice.

Golnar: So what do you think of your arts classes at school?

Noah: Arts is more free. You get to do more stuff. And it's not like tests and all that. Besides I play guitar as a hobby; I don't write as a hobby or do math as a hobby.

Golnar: So you get to do what you love? What do you think is your greatest strength at school?

Noah: Probably guitar is my strength and my favorite. But I'm pretty good at math.

Golnar: What's your least favorite class?

Noah: Humanities.

Golnar: Why?

Noah: I hate writing (*keeps playing different songs as he talks to me*).

Golnar: You sound great on the guitar. You seem to be a natural; it seems like you are not even making much of an effort and you sound great.
Noah: This was actually the first chord that I learned (*plays a chord*), then I learned (*plays another chord*), then I learned… (*keeps playing different chords*)

(*He seemed much more comfortable and interested in communicating with the music, playing the guitar, than answering my questions. Therefore, I remained quiet and listened for a while*).

Golnar: That sounds nice. And what kind of guitar music do you like? What type of music did you start learning?

Noah: I don't know. Alternative. Blues is really easy to play (*then he played some blues music and seemed totally immersed in it; he was not bothered by the announcement on the loud speaker*.) (*He played the Blues very well as he slapped the beat on the guitar*.)

Golnar: Wow! It sounds very professional! So you like the Blues…

Noah: Yeah. That was the first song I learned. It's easy. (*He kept playing the guitar*).

Golnar: Why do you think you are good at playing the Blues?

Noah: I just like the scales and the tunes. (*Played another blues song*). And you can do basically whatever (*referring to improvisation*).

Golnar: That's great that you can create your own music. What else can you tell me regarding how you feel about having the arts in school?

Noah: They're pretty good. Like, (*pause*) drama it's just like acting, and there's lighting and the sound board. And music works with drama a lot, and arts (*referring to visual arts)* is kind of independent. They just do their own stuff. And we do like a bunch of stuff, like we have three or four electives a year.

Golnar: Do you like the variety of electives offered or do you prefer to be in the same class the whole year?

Noah: I like variety.

Golnar: What do you think of this unit, MENA?

Noah: I think it's awesome. Mainly 'cause I like Israel a lot. I've been to Israel twice. I used to be able to speak it.

Golnar: Hebrew?

Noah: Yeah and I used to be able to read it and that helped a lot.
(*We discussed how some schools do not offer an arts program and I asked if he would feel the same about school without arts.)*
Noah: No I definitely wouldn't. It would be a lot more boring. 'Cause it's like class, class, it's class, class, and then you get a break, either fitness or this (*referring to the arts electives*), then you have class, then you have lunch, then you have class, class, class. So, it's the only break from classes.

Golnar: What makes it a break?

Noah: Classes is all work and tests, and, right and wrong… and I just don't like Humanities.

Golnar: And is it because it's right or wrong?

Noah: No, in humanities, well there's grammar which is right or wrong, but you don't know if it's right or wrong because it has weird rules. And in math it's just right or wrong, one plus one is two; it's not four, it's not three, it's two.

Golnar: And tell me, what do you like the most about music?

Noah: It's easy to express yourself and stuff. (*He kept playing and showing off his musical skills. He played a very loud and emotional piece that sounded very good and lasted a few minutes. His body language showed that he was very engaged; he moved his head to the rhythm).*

Golnar: That sounds great. Thanks for playing for me. I really enjoyed it.

Noah: I can play (*names a song I could not hear, then he keeps playing*). I can play this on the electric guitar; it's better. This *(referring to the guitar he was playing)*is a little bulky. (*He keeps playing music, another Blues song and we talk about the difference between acoustic and electric guitar*.)

Golnar: Would you consider becoming a professional musician?

Noah: (*Seems to light up at the idea*) Possibly! (*Then he plays the theme from The Godfather*.) I learned that yesterday!

Golnar: By yourself?!

Noah: Internet. I looked up the music. I used to play it on the piano when I was younger.(*Then he plays another song*). I can't remember the rest. *(Tries again)* I don't know… That's what I was learning when I stopped taking lessons.

Noah did not want to stop showing me his ability to play the guitar. He wanted to be admired for his musical skills. In the beginning of the study I would have never thought he had so much he wanted to share. I was sure I would not have connected with him if it were not for the music facilitating our communication.

Based on his IEP, Noah was diagnosed with Speech and Language Delays in the fourth grade. On a later IEP his diagnosis had turned into "Emotional Disability." Finally, his latest evaluation showed that Noah had central auditory processing disorder. However, the diagnoses on his most recent IEP were: ADHD Combined Type, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and LD in reading, math and written expression.

Interview with Susan Jones (seventh and eighth grade Humanities teacher):
Susan: Noah is one of my advisees, so I've been working with him for 2 years. He started out with a lot of social issues that have mostly gone away. In the sixth grade, and then when we got him in the seventh grade, he was maybe used to being teased at other schools and it took him a while to get over that but he didn't want to participate with other kids on things, and he would often not participate in anything he totally doesn't like. Writing is like… he won't do it. He's gotten to the point where if he knows he has to do it, he'll write a paragraph. And like maybe two or three paragraphs that can stick together. But that's about it in terms of writing. And in general he really is resistant to any…he doesn't like to be assigned things…he doesn't like to be told what to do. He's pretty oppositional which also has lessened over the years. He used to refuse to do any work and hide under the table in sixth grade. It was pretty bad. I mean I wasn't there but that's what I hear. Last year we got him to this point where he would do some work, then in the beginning of eighth grade there was this sort of regression where he wasn't doing anything but we pulled him out of it.

(*Hiding under the table immediately caught my attention. I had guessed that Noah's need to protect the space around him, and the hair in his eyes had a purpose. Students with sensory integration disorder, the underlying difficulty that leads to a range of diagnoses from LD and ADHD, to Autism Spectrum, can become over-stimulated in reaction to sensory stimuli such as certain lights and sounds in the environment. I was also not surprised that he avoided writing tasks since as Noah himself had reported, it was his greatest challenge.*)

He's really talented in math and science. Mentally he can understand all kinds of complicated math concepts; he did college-level physics classes this year. His dad is really into pushing him into that. He's also really interested in Physics, and very theoretical science things. But again, he doesn't necessarily want to produce work in those classes. He will participate in discussions, and generally, if you verbally ask him, is retaining the information you are presenting in class… but expressing it in writing, it does not work with him. He also will not take tests. We have basically excused him from standardized tests. Last year we had it as part of his disability that he wouldn't take tests and then this year we couldn't do that so he just stayed home sick. But on standardized tests, he would fill in all a's or all b's, and he'll still do that for me in here… where he just writes abcdefg…I can tell, he's basically saying "I don't want to take this."

Golnar: Why do you think that is?

Susan: I think that when he feels that he can't do something, then he is not going to try it. I think that when he feels like something is busy work or is not useful he doesn't want to do it. I think that when he thinks that something is

below his level he doesn't want to do it. Because we have this portfolio process, he's very concerned with, "Is this a portfolio requirement?" "Do I have to do this to graduate?" then he will do it. I think it took him a while to figure out how things work here, and he's like okay, I will do the things that I have to do, but I'm not going to push it for the things that maybe I can get away with.

(I thought that Susan was right in her initial statement; when Noah felt he couldn't do something he avoided the task. Yet in her description, she also thought that he doesn't want to do what he considers busy work. But his difficulties with expressive language, attention, and working memory point back to avoiding activities that are truly challenging for him. I thought it was a survival strategy to find out which activities were absolutely required for graduation and do that work. Yet his nonchalant attitude probably gave the impression that he was trying to get away with doing less work, hence his diagnosis of Oppositional Defiant Disorder).

He's socially…this year he's friends with everyone in his class, is much more engaged, so his behavior issues pretty much disappeared this year.

Golnar: What do you think that's about?

Susan: He came from a public school and I'm sure that he just got horribly teased. And I think that it took him up to sixth grade to get over that. Also in the sixth and seventh grades he became friends with this girl who was in the outs with the popular group in this class…She had had some issues and they went out for a while. She ended up transferring to the upper school. And I think with her out of the picture he felt more free to be friends with everybody, because before I think he was being loyal to her. I don't think they ever had a problem with him. I also think he got less sensitive…the kids will be like, "Noah are you going to do your part of this or do we have to do it for you?" And they'll really call him out on that stuff…and I think that originally when he got here, that would have freaked him out and he would have shut down. And now he can be like "Yeah, you know," it seems that he can deal with that, because they know him.

(The differences in Noah's levels of engagement with other students and his attitude towards his peers show that though adolescents with LD many times do experience social challenges, in an environment where they do not feel isolated they have fewer behavioral problems. Hence a lot of oppositional behaviors serve as a protective mechanism.)

Golnar: What do you think of his communication skills?

Susan: He's interesting. He's very good at communicating when he wants to argue something with you, and will often argue. He loves to figure out what's

inconsistent or hypocritical that adults are doing and point it out, like "Have you noticed this?" "I'm gonna argue with you about it." When asked about his feelings, he will often not talk at all.

Golnar: What kinds of feeling questions?

Susan: Like we went to the Model U.N….he kept saying to me "Do we have to go?" "Do we have to go?" "What if we don't go?" "What if my dad says it's against my religion to go to the Model UN?" And I thought okay he's trying to see if this is optional or not and I said "No you have to go." And his dad told me "Noah wants me to write you a note saying that he doesn't have to go to the Model UN, what's up with that?" So I sat him down and asked "Are you scared?" And he said "no, no."One thing he would say was that he was worried about sitting for that long, well actually his dad said that, and I prompted him, I said "are you worried about having to be there for that long?" He said "yeah." So we worked out a deal where I would take him out for a break if he needed it and if he really felt like he couldn't handle it his dad would come and get him. Then he was fine and he went. But in that moment he was clearly scared, it was something that they had to go with high school kids and argue, and speak, but he wouldn't ever say, I'm scared.

Golnar: Do you think he was scared of working with the other kids or he was scared of sitting down for so long?

Susan: I think that he was scared…I don't know. I don't know what he was scared of, I mean he sits down all the time in here, it's not like he's that hyperactive. I think he was a little scared that he was going to get in trouble. He often will put his head down in here, but usually he's still listening… so sometimes I let him get away with it, especially if he'll read with his head down on the table…and during the simulations for Model UN he kept putting his head down and I told him you know you can't do that at Model UN, and I think he was getting worried that he wasn't going to be able to follow the rules, but he went and he was fine, he did put his head down and I told him to put it up, so…

(I was again reminded of what I know about kids with sensory challenges that are often accompanied by motor difficulties. My son who has sensory and motor difficulties and is placed in an inclusion class cannot always join in the group for circle time when students are required to sit up for a period of time. His occupational therapist explained that the degree to which he participates in group activities can depend on the lights and sounds in the environment, his attention span at the time, the amount of language processing required, or postural and motor challenges that make it difficult to sit still for too long. It made sense to me that Noah did not want to go to the Model UN where the physical environment was unpredictable and he would have to stay in his chair regardless of his sensory and motor needs.)

He also won't allow his dad to come into the school. I sent home something, because he hadn't turned in his permission slip, and he was like, "But that's about graduation, you can't tell my dad about graduation." I said "Noah, I have to tell dad." He was trying to convince me not to tell his dad that there was a graduation ceremony, and I said no, that's the whole point of graduation. He also didn't want to have a mentor, the eighth graders all have mentors, and I kept asking him, I knew it would be tricky and I asked him "Who do you think you would work well with." He asked "Do I have to have one?" I said "No, but they could help you" and he said, "Couldn't you help me?" so I said "Okay fine;" so I was his mentor, which makes sense. I guess he's just really resistant to having relationships with adults. But he has very good relationships with several adults here, and even the adults that he, doesn't like, he doesn't get disrespectful he just shuts down.

Golnar: What affects his relationships with the teachers? Is it based on the class you teach or based on teachers' personalities?

Susan: I think it's based on personality. I think it's based on will you engage with him? It's not the subject matter because in fact he really struggled with both the new math and science teachers *(subjects that were his strengths)*. He really struggled with them. Mostly because they both, the math teacher especially, really would not accept that Noah was gonna do less work than other kids. Somehow it was fundamentally upsetting to him, that if Noah could show that he could do it on one problem, then he wouldn't have to do other problems, so he kept trying to push him…and Noah knows the deal, so he was not gonna have that. Pushing him doesn't work for him. Telling him "I'm gonna help you do it" works, or "You have to do it because all eighth graders have to do this," but saying "You have to do this right now because I tell you so" does not work.
I mean very early on I learned that I needed to say "You have two choices." Saying "You have to do this now, the way I tell you to do it" …he just stops, even if he can do it. But if you say "You can either do this assignment now or you can finish it with me at lunch," then often, he'll say "Okay fine, I'll just do it now."

(The last paragraph shows the importance of teachers' pedagogical styles and ability to understand students' needs. Though Noah had reported hating Humanities, he wanted the teacher to be his mentor. Her flexible style and intuition regarding his needs made her an ally. On the other hand, though he had a great conceptual understanding of math and science, when the teachers were inflexible with modifying the work to fit his attention span and working memory, he shut down. Susan also reported that if Noah was placed under pressure to perform a task "now" he would shut down. She offered him choices that helped him clarify what he needed to do, and what he could handle at a given moment. It also helped him process the demand by giving

him time and turning the verbal request into an actionable choice. Another strategy that I was taught to help my son who has difficulties processing language and who also shuts down under demanding requests was to give him time and always two choices to simplify his options.)

I don't see him as that ADD. He definitely has organizational problems, but he can be like hyper-focused. That's one of the things that he recognizes about himself. Last year I was doing all these drama activities to teach concentration with them and he was so proud of himself because he could do the concentration games longer than anyone else…He like hyper-focused.

Golnar: What kind of concentration games were they? What did they involve?

Susan: There was this series of games where you gave kids a physical thing to hold on to, and that was like their concentration. It was like "hold on to your concentration," so they had to do this physical warm up all at the same time, and then they would do this game where you would stand in a circle and someone would walk around and try to make eye contact with you and you would just have to focus on a point on the wall and not react. And if you laughed, or you moved, you were out. And the goal was that everyone would be able to do it. You would make it increasingly challenging, and first I would walk around, then I would have kids walk around, then, the kids got to talk and actively try to distract people, and he was super good at it. The rest of his classmates were not. And he could just…the idea to him was "I'm just gonna hyper-focus on this one spot on the wall," … he could do it forever. He used to have staring contests with our old director of services. Every time he got sent out he would have a staring contest with her.

Golnar: What are his academic interests?

Susan: Math and Science concepts. He's really spatially aware. He can solve a rubrics cube in two seconds. He is actually a pretty good artist which is interesting 'cause his handwriting is horrific. He's really good at computers… he's hacked his way into several things on the school network.

Golnar: Does he type his work?

Susan: He does sometimes, but word processing is not cool enough for him. He likes all these like drawing programs. He's a pretty strong reader. He can read pretty challenging things, but he doesn't do well on reading tests 'cause he thinks they're stupid so he doesn't want to go back. So he'll have to read something and write a summary that includes all the important details and he just, I mean I think he doesn't have it all necessarily right there in his head, but he can go back and use to book but he's always like "Uh, whatever…" He says the three things he remembers off the top of his head and then he's like

"Okay, I'm done." He doesn't want to revise. Revising is really hard for him. He's gotten to the point where he will revise his work once, that's it.
(*His father had reported that Noah had tremendous difficulties with working memory, explaining his challenge with reading tests and writing.)*

Golnar: What about socially and behaviorally?

Susan: He never gets in trouble for actively breaking a rule. Like he doesn't steal or curse, or like hit anyone. The only times he gets in trouble is for refusing to do things. He never gets into trouble for doing the wrong thing.
I think it's hard because there are some things that we would have pushed him on. Like he doesn't turn in homework of course, and we would have pushed him on that this year, but his dad really didn't want to push him on it, and we couldn't do that by ourselves so I think a lot of that is that he senses if he just refuses he won't have to do something across the board.

Golnar: How is he graded?

Susan: I mean he doesn't turn in homework but he does turn in major projects. So in terms of the portfolio, he's really good if I give him a rubric that says you need to have these five different facts about the country you are researching…He will find those five facts. As long as I'm not evaluating his writing… his writing is way below grade level; but if I'm evaluating his history knowledge, he will demonstrate what he needed to know. Same thing in math. He will do a problem, he won't explain his work or show it on paper but he will explain it to you out loud and show that he knows the concept. So basically he's generally not assessed through writing, or if he is assessed on a written assignment, his writing doesn't count towards the grade. We just see that he has the information that he needs to have. But everything else, he's doing grade level assignments.
I think when we get people who have taught high school…flexibility is really hard for them, but most elementary teachers have all had inclusion classrooms so they're used to it. If you add up our special education students and our ELL kids, in a lot of the grades, half the kids almost are identified in some way. …So if you're not into inclusion it makes it really hard. That's why we have had five math teachers in the last four years.
(Everything that Noah engaged in or refused to do was in line with his strengths and weaknesses. A student who was very bright and understood challenging math and science concepts could not always complete his work because of his challenges with writing, requiring attention to detail, memory, and fine motor skills all areas of difficulty for Noah. Yet, despite challenges with fine motor skills he was reported to be a great visual artist.)

Golnar: I found him to be a very interesting student.

Susan: Did you interview him? Did he answer any of your questions?

Golnar: I did. I had already heard that it might be difficult so I was careful. I did not pull him out of class to interview him. I just sat next to him in class and talked to him when he was comfortable playing the guitar.
Susan: He would be a school refuser, I'm pretty sure, if he had stayed anywhere else. Actually I think he did that a lot…he did that in seventh grade with us and a lot more in sixth grade when he just wouldn't come… for like a week. This year that hasn't happened. And I think that if he had really just gotten it into his head that he just wasn't going to go to school, he wouldn't be in school.

The information Susan provided shows that despite Noah's superior knowledge of math concepts and physics, the math and science teachers' inflexibility and inability to understand his special needs led them to perceive him as oppositional or lazy. Further, by the eighth grade, Noah had figured out how to hide his areas of weakness such as writing by not engaging in those activities. Though this was a choice he made, his decisions were influenced by his ability to engage in required activities.

<u>Interview with Marta Velasquez (Inclusion Teacher):</u>

Marta: Well, socially I think he's improved quiet a lot, from the beginning of this school year even. So that from there, just shutting himself out, or shutting himself up from everyone else outside…to seeing him now…. I mean I think I can go to him now and ask him to show me that he can do something on paper. Before he would say to me "well I can do it, I don't have to do this." But now I can go to him and ask him to show me how he can do it on paper, and he doesn't argue, he just does it now where before he would say "why do I have to do this?" "I don't want to." …We've talked to him about it, that we need to see that he can do it. It's a part of assessing his knowledge of a particular subject. I think he sees it, because he's doing a lot more. And I see him as being a part of the group now, as opposed to the beginning…

<u>Excerpt from a conversation with Oliver (music teacher):</u>

Golnar: He was having a hard time figuring out what to do with those little, what are those called?

Oliver: Finger cymbals. Yeah I could tell. I came in once where he was very bashful with them… not really sure what to do…But I said something like… "That sounds really good!"

Golnar: Yes the minute you said that…he seemed to gain confidence.

Oliver: He sounded really good; it sounded like an Arabic drumming piece. It had that quality, that *chi chi-chi chi chi chi chi*…. Oh, yeah, I know what it was. It started with… we were stopping, and spontaneously he did something really fast, he was like *chi chi-chi chi chi chi chi*, I said "Man that sounds really good! Can you keep it, can you keep it like that, keep it going that fast?" And he could do it so I said "Try it like that," and then he put his hand down and he went *ku* on the side (of the drum), and that's how… he discovered that it's easier to do it fast like that, than to do *chi chi-chi chichi chi chi*.

(The experimental nature of learning to play music allowed Noah to learn based on his own experiences. In contrast to his academic classes, Noah listened to Oliver's directions, because he was able to follow them and also because Oliver was approving and encouraging.)

Oliver: He was actually more experimental than others in the group. Others would find a beat and just stick to it, but he kept trying these different rhythms. He's really creative, so sometimes that's good, and I think that's great. But sometimes you're trying to organize a performance or rehearse… it's hard unless you incorporate some improvisation where he can be more free. But his sense of rhythm and musicality is fantastic. He did fine with the percussion stuff but then when he realized that it was okay for him to play the guitar… He was totally engaged. He asked me more questions about the music than he's ever asked me before, because he was so focused and curious. Because he would be practicing and if he couldn't figure something out he would ask me, whereas, if I was leading something, he was in my guitar class last year, and I remember he did okay because I gave him a leadership role to help the other students, but, I remember him struggling with the direct instruction for the whole group…But this time, he was totally engaged. He and Patrick on guitar were sometimes so focused that they wouldn't even realize it when I was trying to get their attention.

"Totally engaged" is the way I saw Noah throughout my observations in music class. In a class where he was given freedom and he could use his musical abilities, Noah was confident and cooperative. One day Noah got out of his chair and laid flat on the floor as they were listening to a recording. I looked at Oliver to see if he was going to say something, expecting him to tell Noah to sit in his chair; Oliver

did not say anything. Noah remained on the ground as they listened to the recordings; then a few minutes later, he sat back down on his own.

He was one of the most attentive students in the class, raising concerns and asking questions about Al Jeel music and Arabic drumming. He was musically perceptive. Once, after hearing the rhythm his group composed he stated: "I think this doesn't sound Arabic at all. It's not really following the name of the class Arabic."

Noah did not avoid any of the activities required in music the way he refused to do some of the work required in his academic classes that relied on his areas of weakness, such as writing. Contrary to the inattention and hyperactivity that is characterized by his diagnosis of ADHD, Noah was focused and calm, playing the guitar and the drums in music. He also did not display any oppositional behaviors. He respected Oliver and followed his teacher's suggestions.

Estela

Estela generally walked around with a combination of insecurity and defiance in her body language. In contrast, when I interviewed her, she was shy, sweet-natured, and very cooperative. When she talked to other students, she was bossy but playful in a subversive way, whispering to the girls with a secretive smile; she would suddenly get out of her chair and say something provocative to the boys sitting across the room and laugh. Estela seemed uneasy sitting still and fidgeted, not knowing what to attend to unless they were drumming. I was not sure how she would react to my request for an interview. To my surprise, she was eager to help me.

> Golnar: It's so nice of you to come out of your humanities class for a few minutes. I hope I didn't interrupt your work.

Estela: No, I wanted to come out.

Golnar: Can you tell me about what you think of the arts program at the school?

Estela: Um, I think that music is like, is, I think it's fun. You get to play different instruments. I like music, and I kind of like drama, and art. I like art 'cause I like to draw like how I feel on a piece of paper, or like my idea on paper, and then people can tell me what I could do better.

Golnar: Which classes have you taken most?

Estela: Art and music.

Golnar: You don't like drama?

Estela: No, 'cause I'm not an actor. I don't like to act.

Golnar: How do you like your academic classes?

Estela: I like arts classes better 'cause, math, I'm not good at math…It's just boring, and with music you get to have a little bit of free time.
Golnar: What do you think of the way you learn in the arts?

Estela: 'Cause , I get to like, in academics, they teach you, but in like art and drama you do, you do your own thing, and then like you get to listen to uh, a little, uh, like in music, you get to listen to a little song, or like a beat.Like you have more choice in what you do.

Golnar: How do you feel about the group work you've had to do in music?

Estela: It's okay 'cause like you get to make your own beat, and then like the group, they add their own, but like, I'd rather do group in drama or art, or music, than in academics, and math.

Golnar: Why is that?

Estela: Because like they get their own beat and they do their own, but like in academics, like they expect you to do the work… stuff like that.
(I thought that Estela had a hard time with group work in academics because she did not have the skills required to do the work; her challenges with the work required would make her vulnerable in front of her peers).

Golnar: What subjects do you think you are good at and what do you struggle with?

Estela: Um, I mean, I'm not good at math, but I can, I can get good at it, I mean, it's okay, it's not really hard, but just some questions I don't really get. And like Humanities, writing, I'm good at. But I'm the best in arts. I participate more in arts classes 'cause in academic class, I get distracted, and I don't know…(*mumbles*) Sometimes I'd be like day dreaming.

Golnar: Oh, and you don't daydream in music?

Estela: No. It's fun and it helps your mind relax to think about something different than, work, work, and work. It opens your mind and you'll be thinking differently.

Golnar: How do you feel about what you did in music class this quarter?

Estela: I feel good. Um, we got to do a lot of stuff, interesting, like at the Celebration of Learning (*the final performance*)… it was fun, 'cause we got to show it to the people what we learned in music. I think that they liked it 'cause there was people trying to dance to it.
We tried different things…, especially the drums and rhythm from different countries. It was fun because different countries and different cultures, 'cause we're from one culture, and that, you learn different things. New things and new experiences and stuff like that.

(*She was having a hard time with expressive language, and difficulty coming up with the words she wanted to use; she would pause and when she couldn't come up with the right words she would say "things like that" or "stuff like that."*)

Golnar: Were there any similarities between Middle Eastern music and other music you know?
Estela: Yeah. Similar to Reggaeton and Hip-Hop. 'Cause you get to move to it and dance to it.

Golnar: How does it feel for you to play music? (*Trying to tap into her feelings in order to facilitate her language use and have her tell me more*).

Estela: It feels, I don't know, it feels like you open up to yourself…If you can take your anger out on the drum… Like you're expressing yourself with how you play the beat. You make up a beat and it expresses how you feel in that moment. I think I did good in it. I made up my beat. I'm gonna miss music.

Golnar: Are you going to sign up for music next year in the eighth grade?

Estela: Yeah. Mr. Jenkins (*the music teacher*) …I think he's a nice guy. He was really cool, and nice, he would let us do stuff… (*long pause, trying to come up with more to say*).

Golnar: What grade would you give him?

Estela: Like a hundred. 'Cause the other teachers, they're kind of like…strict and Mr. Jenkins is like a laid back cool person. Like he understands where we're coming from and that we need breaks sometimes. We got to do things we wanted but at the same time did things his way too. I guess that he trusts us 'cause we're getting older and we're coming into adults and teenagers we're supposed to be and he respects that and he once was a teenager so he understands how people feel and what they want…
It's a class where you can have fun, and just enjoy yourself but at the same time do your work and focus on it…,and get the stuff done.

Golnar: Do you enjoy any of your other classes too?

Estela: No. They're strict.

An IEP was just completed for Estella the month before my research began. Twelve years of age, she was evaluated for the first time. She was diagnosed with: Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Combined Type, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Dysthymic Disorder, R/O Bipolar NOS, Cannabis Abuse, Mathematics Disorder, and Reading Disorder. Her evaluation included paragraphs such as "Estela exhibits inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, restlessness, and distractibility, disorganization, and forgetfulness. She also has difficulty finishing projects, planning, and with organizational skills" and is "likely to make careless errors, give up easily, or avoid work altogether… loses things, and has difficulty getting started on projects…experiencing general problems with learning and or understanding academic material that involves reading, spelling, or math skills."

When I asked the special education coordinator why her struggles were not noticed or addressed earlier, he mentioned that her mother had refused to have her tested until she suddenly felt desperate and was open to all the diagnoses on her IEP. Her case exemplified the worst combination: terrible failure on the part of the

education system and the parent to address her underlying language-based difficulties at an early age. In addition to Estela's difficulties with learning in academic classrooms, she had a difficult home life (as explained by her general education and inclusion teachers). I realized that the defiant attitude she generally displayed was a defense mechanism to hide the lack of self-confidence she feels as a result of her tremendous academic difficulties.

In music class where Estela was able to participate successfully, she was not defensive or oppositional. She was engaged in the activities expected of all students. The freedom provided by the structure of the class and through Oliver's pedagogical style respected Estela's needs. Since participation in music did not require her to rely on her areas of weakness (sitting still, processing language, following directions…), she was fully engaged in learning; she did not "day-dream" as she did in her academic classes. She emphasized the importance of freedom and choice as well as Oliver's empathy for adolescents as the reasons she enjoyed being in music class.

I could not reach Estela's mother for an interview. Her mother's involvement in her education seemed sporadic; other school staff had warned me that she would be impossible to reach and often did not return phone calls. Therefore, I was not able to obtain any information regarding her parents' perceptions of her learning or engagement in school.

Interview with Susan Jones (humanities teacher):

> Susan: Estela is a hard kid. She goes up and down. She just got an IEP, like a month ago, but she's always been this way; I don't know why she didn't get one before. Performance wise she is always just kind of on the edge, but, really I think that her attention issues and emotional issues are what's getting in the way more than academic issues. Though I think that in math there are

more academic issues but it's just hard to take it apart because she has so much emotional… like years of failure and drama around it.
She definitely only speaks Spanish at home and mom definitely only speaks Spanish. And she speaks a lot of Spanish with her friends, but also the English that she speaks with her friends and her brother… a lot of her grammar issues are just from the way she talks. You know she is really resistant to reading, so I don't think she is picking up academic vocabulary or grammar. In silent reading I doubt that she reads more than a sentence. Even if you are sitting next to her, the only way to make sure that she's reading is to make her read out loud. Because she just doesn't focus on it. Whatever emotional issues she's having takes over. She has huge self-esteem issues…she has a lot of issues with mom and with dad. With mom there's a lot of conflict, and her dad is in and out of the picture and there's a lot of drama there. I know that her brother also gets into trouble a lot. He's in high school. And then she has half-brothers that are also… I don't know there's a lot of drama. She is a drama queen. She always knows what's happening. If you need to know what the drama is between anyone else you ask Estela what's going on. But she doesn't have any way to shut down thinking about that stuff. So she's always freaking out about something, and if there's any social thing going on, she can't work.

Golnar: It was hard to interview her, not because she was resistant; she was actually very sweet. But it seemed like it was hard for her to articulate her ideas.

Susan: If you asked her what she was studying in any of her classes, she would not be able to tell you. She just isn't that into it. Also on a bad day, she pretty much won't talk to any adult. She feels like she's targeted all the time by teachers…or everyone hates her…we're all out to get her.

Golnar: Does she get counseling?

Susan: Yeah. Both here and at some point outside of here, but I don't know how consistent it is.
She's definitely the kind of kid where in the moment when you teach her skills she can learn the skill, but then the next day, the skill is gone. She doesn't retain. She won't revise her work, or notice problems with commas, unless I tell her to look for it. I don't know… she needs prompting, and then it pops in her head, like "Oh, I need to think about where commas go."She likes positive reinforcement, she likes being told that she did well, but I don't think that she has any motivation to do well in school. That's not even on her priority list I don't think. She has little self-control. If she's had a bad day, you better just forget about her. You better leave her in a room by herself because she is just going to snap at everybody. She is very irritable.

Estela who was diagnosed with a set of disabilities at the age of twelve and had not received any support for her difficulties at home or at school. Her emotional difficulties related to low self-esteem and a challenging home life preoccupied her with social concerns and led to further disengagement from academic tasks. Susan had described Estela's experience with school as "years of failure" that had clearly lowered her motivation to learn. In addition, she did not have the basic skills required to engage in learning in her academic classrooms.

Interview with Marta Velasquez (inclusion teacher):

> …She was just found eligible. Socially, sometimes she has difficulty getting along with her peers, both at her grade level and her older peers. She tries to be in other peoples' business a lot… She's a student who we've had to seriously talk to about talking about things she doesn't see, and spreading information that isn't necessarily what occurs…So she has difficulty with that. But in terms of organizing… there was the middle school dance, and she was into organizing events like that, social events… As long as it doesn't have to do with academics, she's up for it. She'll probably work with you to do it. She has a very hard time focusing her attention on academics. Some of the times in math, I ask her, when I see that she's not focused, if she understands what's going on… if she gets the main points of what her teacher is explaining, and for the most part she does. So it's not like she's sitting doing nothing. She does know what's going on… she gets some of it. But then, when she has to actually begin her work, she doesn't know how to, and she doesn't even attempt to try, so she's always raising her hand and getting a teacher to come and explain it to her when the directions may be written right there. So I started just pointing to the directions and asking her to read them. We started to focus on having her become aware of this difficulty she's having focusing.
>
> Golnar: Is she aware of it?
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> Marta: No. For her, she says that its' boring, it's just boring for her, it's boring. It could be her way of protecting herself. "It's boring, it's hard," I mean it could be avoidance.
>
> Golnar: She is twelve and she's just been diagnosed. It's not surprising that she's learned to avoid academic work if she has struggled with it for so long.

Marta: And she knows how to do it. I mean she goes to the bathroom and we've become aware of how many times she goes to the bathroom or is in the hallway. She's pretty social, so she's in the hallway speaking to somebody or trying to find out what they're doing. Whenever she's having a bad day and I ask her to step outside and talk to me…when I do talk to her and ask her to do something for me, or when I ask for her to show me these three different things in class today, she does try, she does. I do see her doing that. But then there may be other social factors that impact on her being able to focus, and do work, academics, so the outside social factors, either at home or here…like something she heard about, becomes such a huge thing in her head all day or sometimes even longer. And in her IEP one of the goals she has is counseling that would help her deal with those emotions so that they don't impact on her academics.

Golnar: It's interesting that in music she was focused and engaged most of the time. She seemed less distracted than what I have heard regarding her participation in academic classes.

<u>Interview with Oliver (music teacher):</u>

Estela was going through some stuff, like some personal stuff, where sometimes she would walk into the room and she'd be completely shut down. But often times, fifteen minutes into the lesson she would start to get into it. But she never would have, if I said "You have to!" "Take this drum and play it;" …she definitely wouldn't have.
Whenever she worked in a group and she wasn't in one of her moods, she was totally the leader…she would take the leadership role, and if there was another person that was a strong personality and a leader type, then they would play around with each other and joke around but they would work together and create something. She took on a lot of leadership in the class and she came up with some good rhythms. Sometimes she would say "Oh, I don't know what to do, I don't know what to do!" but as soon as she would figure something out she would have fun.

Oliver's description of Estela shows the approach that helped her engage in learning. By giving her time to transition into class and the activities, Estela would "get into it." He knew that she would not be able to work under pressure. Similar to Noah, Estela's underlying sensory integration challenges that had been diagnosed as ADHD made it difficult for her to work on demand; she needed time to transition between activities and could not direct her attention instantaneously. Both Oliver and

Marta (the inclusion teacher) reported that she had difficulty getting started with her work which may be related to her difficulties with attention. However, in music class where she enjoyed the activities, with a little time she was self-directed and engaged in learning; this may be more difficult in academic where she not only struggles with attention and language-based learning.

Though Susan (the humanities teacher) reported that Estela spoke Spanish at home, she was always educated in English at school. In addition, the special education coordinator explained that at UCPCS, staff conducted formal and informal assessments to assure that students who are English Language Learners (ELL), those who learn English as a second language, are not labeled with a learning disability. In Estela's case, her expressive language difficulties seemed more profound than what would be expected of a student whose home language is Spanish but has been in English language classrooms for all her academic learning.

The number of diagnoses on Estela's IEP shows a problematic pattern with labels used to identify students with special needs as they reach adolescence. Her language-based difficulties and sensory processing challenges had not been addressed until she turned twelve. Having struggled, or as her teacher mentioned experienced "failure" for such a long time, it is not surprising that she avoided academic work that required skills she did not have. The normative expectations of standards-based "inclusion" classes override the importance of students' individualized needs. General education teachers often refer to these students' performances in academics as "below standard" and clearly the students themselves realize that their work does not measure up to expectations. It is not clear to what extent Estela's negative

experiences with learning in academic classes contributed to behaviors that led to her diagnosis of "Oppositional Defiant Disorder." In music class where Estela did not have to rely on her areas of weakness to participate, she did not have any behavioral problems or conflicts with her teacher. In fact in her interview she spent more time than any other student expressing her appreciation for Oliver, an adult in her life who provided her with space to have a positive learning experience.

Joey

Joey was dressed well, with every strand of his hair gelled in place. He smiled often and seemed very self-conscious. Throughout my observations, he kept track of my place in the room and would look over to see if I was looking at him. He was very engaged in playing the drums and seemed to enjoy participating in group work in music. Joey's voice was low and I struggled to hear him in the midst of the drumming and movement in the class. A couple of times when I had asked students if they wanted to volunteer to be interviewed, Joey did not raise his hand.

One day, Mr. Jenkins was absent and the students were taken to a nearby playground by a substitute teacher. I used the opportunity to talk to Joey who had asked me to interview other students first. After sometime he told me that he was ready to help me and I thanked him before we sat on a bench at the park. He seemed nervous during the interview and experienced severe difficulty verbally expressing his thoughts.

Golnar: Can you tell me about the arts classes have you taken at school?

Joey: I've taken, ah, this is my first time taking music this year, but I've taken visual arts twice and I've taken drama once in the beginning of the year. Last year I took all three. I always take… well we take arts four times a year, I try

to take at least each one at least once, and then whichever one was better I choose again for the fourth quarter.

Golnar: That's an interesting way to go about it!

Joey: 'Cause it's the end of the year so I save my favorite one for last.

Golnar: So was your favorite one music this year? Why?

Joey: Because we get to play like drums, the guitar, it's more stuff that you can do. Art is also good because you get to paint a lot.

Golnar: What do you like about the kinds of work you do in arts classes?

Joey: I like that we get to work with like groups, like now that in music we're working like in different groups. Mr. Jenkins gives us, uh, he assigns us a group and we get to work with them, and I like that because you get to make better sounds, better rhythm, anything. It sounds a lot better in a group. I mean if you do it by yourself, I mean, you can't really, I mean you can make music but it's not going to be as good. Everybody has their own rhythms, and you put it together, and it creates a better piece.

Golnar: And how do you like your other classes?

Joey: I rather take art, drama, or music, it's better like, I like it a lot more. To me, I would take arts classes because there's more that you can do. You can talk with people, and what you're gonna come up with, and in the [general education] classroom you are more independent. You don't get to work with other people.

Golnar: Do you usually lead in group work or follow?

Joey: I'm one to take lead. Like when I was playing the base drum I was leading the group to doing better.

Golnar: And what to do you think about having arts in school?

Joey: I mean, I would still come to school if we didn't have arts but it wouldn't be fun because in art, we, in art we learn about everything that I don't think we would learn in class…I think art, to me, art, drama, and music are all important because, you can learn stuff that maybe you won't learn in like what you're studying right now… It's different because in arts, you're basically like doing stuff, uh, in class you're also doing stuff but it's mostly too much work, and in the arts you're mostly doing, uh… you're working together doing projects. You can do that in class too, but it's mostly, a lot of work….

Golnar: Do you mean it's more project-based in the arts?

Joey: It's more project-based. There's a lot more to do.

Golnar: And what type of learner do you think you are?

Joey: Visual, I mean I have to see it to learn it, otherwise like I don't know like what part of the drum…I need to look at how he does it, instead of me just trying to get myself to do it.

Golnar: Do you like acting in drama class?

Joey: I'm shy. I mean I like to be the director. I don't really gotta act but I help out with what we're supposed to do. I don't really like acting. I'm kind of shy.

I spoke to Mrs. Fernandez, Joey's mother, in Spanish. When I asked her questions, I noticed that while she wanted to participate and offer helpful information, she seemed to struggle to understand what I was asking for. She was very pleasant and repeated a few sentences about Joey and his interests over and over. Despite my attempts to simplify my questions, the interview was very short. I did not want her to feel uncomfortable or to think that she giving me the wrong responses so I stopped trying to get more information. The following is the little she said about Joey.

<u>Interview with Mrs. Fernandez (Joey's mother):</u>

(Translation from Spanish)
He has little sticks that he hits on the pillows, on the mattress. He likes music and soccer. Reading he doesn't like very much; every once in a while he reads a book. He looks on the computer at how musicians play and tries to imitate them. He also likes the guitar. Since he started playing the drums at school, he spends more time at his friend's house who owns drums and they play together.

Based on Joey's IEP, he was diagnosed with: ADHD, and SLD (Special Learning Disability in Reading). His home language was Spanish, but he was formally educated in English. He had received a lot of attention and assistance at the

school from an early age, including remedial services for ELL students and speech and language therapy. Joey seemed well adjusted and happy in the school environment; he looked comfortable and connected with his friends, and often had a smile on his face.

Interview with Susan Jones (humanities teacher):

Susan: He definitely has a learning disability in written language. He is below grade level in reading but not that far; he's improved a lot. His writing over the past two years got much better. He's pretty good at writing a paragraph with a topic sentence, some of the things that we've done with them millions of times but he's not really able to think outside that that much. And his grammar and spelling are still really big issues for him. He really, up until the second semester of this year he was really, really responsible about getting work done, and then he totally got distracted. And I think part of it is that he really wanted to get into (*names a high school*) and he did so he doesn't have to try anymore.
He's not necessarily motivated academically for pure academic reasons but he likes to do a good job generally… he likes positive reinforcement. He won't participate in the whole group unless he knows he's supposed to or he's going to be held accountable for it….He doesn't have a natural urge to raise his hand but if I call him, he'll figure out what he wants to say. He often will come and check in with me to make sure that he understands the directions for an assignment. He's had an IEP for a really long time. I think he used to have an inclusion teacher come and say "Joey did you understand the directions, do you know what to do?" And now even though no one goes and checks in with him he knows to ask… so he's taken responsibility for stuff like that. He really likes working with kids in group. He gets along well with everyone… I can't think of him ever getting into a conflict with anyone…He's just a very nice guy.

Golnar: He's always smiling.

Susan: He's always smiling, he's always nice… everyone likes him. He loves sports. That's his main focus in what he's interested in... He talks to me a lot about, what school he wants to go to, because he wants to be on their football team. But he sees the importance of academics, or he knows he has to jump through some academic hoops to get to that. I think that a lot of the questions he asks me…it's because he's worried…he's pretty much only been at UCPCS. He has support at home, but his parents aren't going to be figuring out what class he's gonna be in; they speak Spanish. He has an older sister who really gets stuff done, but she will only show up if there's an issue. His mom is really like… she's not going to push back really. I don't think she has

much schooling herself so she always says "Whatever you guys think is fine." The one thing she was very adamant about was that she didn't want him to go to (*names the high school he wants to go to*) because she knew it was so big, and she wanted him to stay here because she knew it and liked it… so I know that was an issue. But he wanted to go because of football. I think he really thought it through, and he thought he would try it and if it didn't work out he would come back here.

(*Though Spanish was his home language, based on my interactions with Joey and his teachers' reports, it seemed that he had language-based difficulties that were related to challenges with verbal expression and not difficulties with the English language. For example, the teacher explained his difficulties starting activities and understanding directions.*)

Socially…He walks around the neighborhood by himself. I think he's a pretty trustworthy kid. He doesn't lie. It's as if he almost doesn't have some of the social senses. I think he has a lot of friends just because he's really nice. He's not socially savvy, he's just really nice. And he's really willing to say "Okay whatever you want," … he's not going to argue anything. He reads sports magazines, he watches sports on TV, that's just his thing.
(*It is not surprising that Joey who was diagnosed with ADHD would like activities that require movement (such as sports), or those that require "doing a lot of things" (as he reported) instead of passive learning experiences. His ability to get along with his peers also explained why he enjoyed group work. He enjoyed the social opportunity in the arts to work with his friends.)*

<u>Interview with Marta Velasquez (inclusion teacher):</u>

Marta: He is a visual learner… He needs I think visual and kinesthetic, being able to work with things, he doesn't do well when you just explain what to do without showing him anything, he needs to visually see what you have. He's usually very organized and he's very neat about his work. He likes for teachers to revise his work constantly, and sometimes we want him to do it on his own. But he has difficulty with that; it's his weakness, catching those things when he writes. He has been developing this anxiety around it, like it's going to be wrong, and he wants us to look at it…
He's well-mannered, always very respectful, gets along with everybody in the classroom. He hangs out with some of the girls outside of the classroom…and he's social with everybody… it's not just one group of kids. He's just everywhere, all the groups, English and Spanish.

Golnar: Does he speak Spanish?

Marta: Yes he does. At parent-teacher conferences he translates for mom. Once we asked them to do their presentations in Spanish because none of the parents spoke English and he was the one who did the best in Spanish. So he

> has pretty good Spanish speaking skills; I can't say that for all the other kids, but he does. He also likes music. He was drumming this morning. The teacher brought in a set of drums and he was drumming.

I asked Oliver what he thought of Joey's participation in music during the MENA unit. His description was similar to my own observations of Joey in music class. In music he was a confident member of the group, participating in all the activities without showing any self-doubt.

Oliver (music teacher):

> Joey was just great. Joey's just so positive and I think that when kids find something that makes them unique, they feel good about themselves and they latch on to it. And for Joey it was the base drum. He loved the base drum.I remember worrying in the beginning whether he could do it but he really did well and he would do transitions. You know he would give signals to everyone in the group to transition.

Joey whose difficulties were addressed from an early age had learned skills to ask for help as he needed to. Yet, as his teachers reported, he continued to experience "anxiety" about whether his work was "wrong;" he doubted his ability to follow directions and produce the assignments required in his academic classes. Similar to his peers who participated in this study, Joey was rated as "below grade level" in areas requiring language skills. Joey's case shows that for adolescents with LD, regardless of their effort and their behavior, they will not be able to perform adequately if they are compared to normative grade-level expectations promoted by standards-based curriculum and testing policies.

Fortunately, Joey had positive relationships with his peers and was well-adjusted in the school setting. In music class, where according to Oliver, Joey had "found something that made him unique," in other words, something he did well and was proud of, he was more willing to participate and offer his opinions in group

work. In Humanities however, his teacher reported that Joey did not raise his hand unless he was called on; then he would figure out what to say. Even for Joey who had positive peer relationships in all his classes, the opportunity to engage in learning without self-conscious anxiety related to "being wrong" helped his confidence as he felt proud of his work in group activities involved in music. This experience enhanced Joey's self-efficacy beliefs and led to his high ratings of his arts classes versus academics.

Patrick

Patrick had an indifferent demeanor. Similar to Noah (with whom he played the guitar during the performances), he had a tough shell; an air of coolness that kept others at a safe distance away. He often chewed gum and seemed to have difficulty sitting still in his chair. He would call out loud when he had something to say and did not seem concerned about what others thought of him. He was an excellent musician and a leader in the class. The first time I talked to him, he seemed somewhat distant and avoided eye contact. But during my interview, when his peers were not around and we had a clear purpose for our conversation, he was able to maintain eye contact. Patrick was very articulate and self-confident as he expressed his ideas.

Golnar: Have you ever taken music before?

Patrick: I've taken music before but that was the first time I took Arabic drumming. I take guitar outside of school but I have taken a lot of music in school.

Golnar: What instruments did you learn to play here?

Patrick: I did Tycho drumming, did garage band…it's like we use the computer to make music.

Golnar: What's your favorite instrument?

Patrick: Well, I mean, I play guitar but I really like the drums.

Golnar: Which arts electives do you usually sign up for?

Patrick: I usually take music, then drama. I'm not really good at drawing so…

Golnar: How do you feel about the work you did in music this quarter?

Patrick: Music just comes naturally. It's pretty fun, like learning about Middle Eastern music. I never really knew what kind of music they had. So it was fun learning about it.

Golnar: What aspect of learning in the class did you like?

Patrick: Probably, like, 'cause he didn't say play this music, play this piece; he let us create our own music so, it was showing that everybody can create that kind of music; it's like everybody can do it. I like to create my own stuff.

Golnar: Do you get the chance to be creative in other classes?

Patrick: Not in like regular classes but in arts a lot of time. In arts you get to create what's your own; there are no worksheets or anything.

Golnar: Do you like doing group work?

Patrick: Yeah.

Golnar: So overall what are your strengths and what do you have a harder time with in school?

Patrick: Probably I'm best in music or math. And I guess I struggle with, um, writing. To me music and math and arts are fun, so it's more, it's more, it's easier to be engaged and do well in it.

Golnar: Writing is not fun?

Patrick: No, no. Not fun. It just seems like too much work; like you have to back up everything you say even though they probably know what you mean anyway.

Golnar: So how would you describe the experience of taking arts classes in school?

Patrick: Well, one, it's like kind of a way to get your creative energy out, 'cause you're like doing classes all day, and [in the arts] you get to express yourself freely. 'Cause a lot of times you have to be silent and stuff in class, it

> gives you time to like, yeah just express yourself and be creative…Also, in other classes there are a lot of tests, like the multiple-choice exams. I don't really believe in tests, 'cause like, anything that happened that day like they're tired, or they didn't get enough sleep, or, like, they just had a fight with someone like their mom or something…so, I think they should like look over everything over time, instead of just basing it on tests.

Patrick's mother told me that he had been diagnosed with sensory integration disorder when he was a child. He was also evaluated in the second grade and was found to have difficulties with attention and writing, but he was generally doing well so he was not officially diagnosed. The previous year, Patrick was beaten and mugged by a gang of boys as he was riding his bicycle in the street; as a result he had developed symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for which he was receiving psychological services outside of school. At the time of my study, Patrick was being tested for a disability in writing and ADHD; therefore I decided to include him in the study. His test results showed that while he has an "academic disability in writing," (meaning that his academic writing was below average), he did not qualify for a diagnosis of a "true learning disability." He was diagnosed with ADHD and "Disruptive Behavior Disorder."

Similar to Noah, Patrick had above average abilities in conceptual understanding of math. Yet he struggled in math class because of the math teacher's strict approach that did not accommodate his need to move around the room. He was considered to have "behavior problems" and "rule-refusal behavior." While Patrick's evaluation results showed a number of strengths, such as "meaningful and supportive interpersonal relationships with others, and good self-esteem and self-reliance, leadership skills, talents in music and sports, and high cognitive ability," his sensory challenges had led to difficulties following classroom rules. His difficulties in school

were attributed to having "overactive behaviors including a need to be in movement and frequent instances of getting out of his seat, restlessness, difficulty adapting to changing situations, and trouble with executive functions, such as getting organized, initiating, and completing projects."

Interview with Susan Jones (humanities teacher):

Susan: I think that his mother is really worried about him going into a big high school and not necessarily getting support with… he has attention issues. I think like he's classic, I don't know, classic boy, classic ADD…I mean he's always the last one talking when I'm trying to get the class quiet. He calls out. He pops out of his seat a lot. He'll go to time out… but he's not defiant…he'll get an eighth grade attitude with you but not really defiant. But academically, he, especially this year more than last year, he can meet the standards just fine. He won't necessarily push himself to go beyond the standard, like he won't pick a challenging book; he won't look at the rubric and try to get a higher score. But he will do what he needs to do to meet the standard and do it without any help. He doesn't like to write, and I think that's what they're testing him for is for writing issues, but his writing is at grade level. In that class the students are way above grade level, and if you compare his writing to other kids in the class, he seems weaker, but if you compare him to the standard, he's fine. I don't think he always was. He's definitely had more spelling and grammar issues and he still does, but especially if he types it he's fine…he uses spell check.
He participates a lot. He definitely has trouble not socializing when he's working in a group. If his group is done he will go interrupt another group in order to talk to them. He wants to be going around talking all the time. Often when he has to work, if I say you can talk quietly while you are working, then in three minutes everyone will be loud talking; he can't handle sitting next to someone he likes and working on his own.
He definitely has friends. He has sibling relationships with the kids in the class. There's this girl Julia in that class that everyone likes and they're friends but they fight like a married couple. He doesn't get in conflicts that would cause trouble, but he definitely likes to argue. I think he had more trouble with behavior in math and science; I think he needs more clear structure and a lot of reminders, and I know that if he's not getting that it's harder for him.

Interview with Marta Velasquez (inclusion teacher):

He is very talkative… The times that I'm in class and I've asked him to stay quiet and stay focused, he responds to my re-direction. Sometimes I think with him, it's who is asking... Something else I've observed is this

> equality…justice… if he's asked to be quiet and stop talking for example, and there're other groups that are talking, then he's not gonna stop talking. He's like "well other people are talking too," so he has this thing about fairness and being just with everybody. But he's respectful; he's not going to stand up and argue with you about it. He's a respectful guy… he's also pretty social.
>
> Oliver (Music Teacher):
>
> Patrick was just incredible. I mean he's a very good musician, and he has a good sense of rhythm, and he's very experimental with instruments. So he can figure an instrument out and figure out good sounds with it and run with it, and he can lead a group and facilitate… he was in the zone.

In music class, I only saw Patrick's strengths. Since the activities in music class incorporated movement and social interaction in group work, Patrick was engaged according to expectations. He wiggles in his seat as he played music and he did call out and talk to others, but since all students discussed their work and shared ideas for composing Arabic rhythms, Patrick was not reprimanded. In music Patrick demonstrated leadership both because of his musical ability and due to his popularity with his peers. He also was engaged in playing the drums and the guitar at all times, activities that for Patrick "just come naturally."

The Actors

Drama Classroom

Alba

Alba looked older and acted more mature than her peers in the eighth grade. In drama she seemed interested in class conversations and raised her hand often to answer questions. Her responses were thoughtful and she connected new information to her prior knowledge as she analyzed elements of Hakawati (Arabic story-telling), comparing it to a popular Latin American folktale that was passed around from country to country. During our conversation about her experiences with the arts, she seemed very shy. She mostly focused on her expertise in dance. She was guarded and offered short answers to my questions despite my efforts to help her relax. According to her inclusion teacher, her negative experiences outside of school contributed to her anxiety, and difficulties with her body image negatively affected her self-esteem. Yet in drama class and during group work she was outspoken.

Golnar: How long have you been at UCPCS?

Alba: This is my first year.

Golnar: Which arts classes have you taken this year?

Alba: First I took art [visual arts], then I took Latin Dance, Musica Latina, then I took drama twice. This is my second time [in drama].

Golnar: What's your favorite art form?

Alba: I like drama… I like dance… I like all of them 'cause all of them are great. Before I came to this school, I took art classes like for two years. I did dance my whole life. And drama I started last year. I have more passion for dancing 'cause since I was a little girl I danced.

Golnar: What kind of dances have you done?

Alba: I started out with Ballet, and then I started with my own culture…One of the more traditional dances is El Baile Foklorico, and the typical Spanish dances, Bachata, Merengue, Punta,…

Golnar: You know all those dances?! Wow that's impressive. Maybe you could teach dance to other kids since there is no official dance elective.

Alba: (Laughs).

Golnar: Did you like participating in the Latin dance class here? (*Oliver had offered a Latin Dance Elective earlier in the year instead of a music class)*

Alba: It was mostly Spanish people in that class so they already knew how to dance it, but I think I had some advantages since I did it since I was a little girl.

Golnar: Would you like to have dance classes at school?

Alba: Yeah but they don't. I do it more outside of school.

Golnar: How do you school in general?

Alba: I like coming to my specials (*referring to arts classes*) 'cause I'm not the type of student that likes math and science 'cause I like more like humanities and reading and arts. I write stories.

Golnar: Can you write a play? Do you write plays at school?

Alba: Yeah we do. I used to do acting and studio theater outside of school.

Golnar: How did you get involved with these different art forms outside of school?

Alba: It's 'cause, I have like my mom, I've always been, like I went to [names an arts-based charter school]… the school of the arts…I went there for like four years. I've been involved in dance before that but they got me more into drama and painting. I've been dancing since I was a little girl.

Golnar: What if you had gone to a school that didn't have the arts?

Alba: Well I would do arts anyway inside or outside of school. Because I'll just start drawing in my notebook. …My mom… I go to the Dance Institute, I go to that, I take Hip Hop there… and I used to go to a center for dance and art.

Golnar: Do you want to pursue arts professionally?

Alba: Let's say what I want to do professionally is to study to be a dance choreographer, 'cause that's what I always wanted to be since I was a little girl…

Golnar: I appreciate you sharing your thoughts with me. Is there anything you want to add about learning arts in schools that you would want people to know about?

Alba: It's important because it helps students like get out their, like you know you get away from math because it gets tiring sometimes, and it gives you time to do something that you like….You get to express yourself.

I talked to Ms. Montoya, Alba's grandmother and legal guardian on the phone. After several attempts to meet in person, she decided that a phone conversation would be more convenient for her since she was in the process of looking for work. She told me that Alba loved dancing since she was a little girl and was very good at it, but since she had been out of work, she could no longer pay for Alba's private dance classes. Aside from a Latin dance elective that Oliver had taught at UCPCS, there was no regular dance class offered; a disadvantage of the school's arts program for Alba.

Alba was diagnosed with Specific Learning Disabilities in math, reading, and writing. In addition to specialized instruction in these areas, according to her evaluation report, she was assigned psychological counseling in order to "stabilize moods and build self esteem so that she may effectively cope with frustrations and stressors".

<u>Interview with Susan Jones (humanities teacher):</u>

Susan: Alba is Estela's best friend. She (*Estela*) just loves Alba. She thinks that Alba is the best. She wrote a love poem about her.
Alba is new. This is her first year here. She also has a lot of… stuff. Friend drama, family drama… She can pretty much compartmentalize it; it's actually pretty impressive. She deals with things very maturely. She can see "my friend is doing that … that's not good…I'm not gonna do that." I don't know if she always does that outside of school. But she seems to be able to keep herself under control very well. She has a learning disability in math and in writing; it's hard for me to tell really what's a learning disability and what's language issues; although her mom speaks English. But she socially likes to

speak Spanish and is now living with grandma who speaks Spanish. But she doesn't have academic skills in Spanish. And she won't read…there are some girls who will read for pleasure in Spanish. Alba will not read for pleasure in Spanish.

I'd say she stays pretty positive and is pretty self-aware about what her strengths and weaknesses are. She participates a lot in class; she's definitely never afraid to speak up… she's very confident; like she bosses people around in groups even if she doesn't quite know what's going on. She will get distracted by social things…it's almost like she needs to be participating…if it's like a debate or something, then she's always looking for her place to participate, then she's really engaged. Anything that's like a conversation or involving talking to other people is very engaging for her. It's harder for her to just sit and work.

I think she has a lot of close friends outside of school, many of whom I think are doing bad things. And I honestly don't know how involved she is in it. She talks a lot about her friends, saying things like this kid got shot or stabbed at the metro and she knew him and was writing RIP. She knows it all. Part of why Estela loves Alba is because she (*Estela*) is under lock down. She's not allowed to go anywhere and she just loves to like hang out in the corner with Alba, and they talk about all the people…there's this whole world of teenage drama she wants to be a part of, and Alba is in it.

She doesn't get in trouble for losing control and getting into fights here. [Her social life outside of school] interferes in the way that, she won't stay after school and get work done because she wants to be out there; but, even when I knew that she was having a lot of family issues, unless she hadn't slept she could participate and was fine. It wouldn't distract her.

<u>Interview with Marta Velasquez (inclusion teacher):</u>

Marta: So Alba is another one who fits in wherever she goes, whatever group she is in. Her friends in the Hispanic/Latina group become jealous because she goes back and forth so much and they don't have that skill. She's so social…she's just a friendly person. I've seen her become more outgoing. She has very strong opinions about different issues we've discussed in class, and she's not shy to share them. She also seems more open about her life in small groups, I mean anyone in the group, she just talks and asks for opinions and all the other girls look up to her, Estela especially.

Golnar: But she seemed so self-conscious in some ways when I interviewed her…it doesn't seem to fit with the social skills you describe. She also explained that in drama she preferred to be the narrator rather than an actress because she didn't want all that attention on her.

Marta: Well, there are a lot of issues going on in her house and that has impacted her…For example, just her weight, I know that that is something that bothers her. She tells me that she used to be a dancer; she would have

> dance class on weekends and she was thinner. Now she's not taking dance although she loves dance; and now she's gained too much and she wants to lose weight, so we talked about… we have sports here so I suggested that she join a club or do sports here for girls and she didn't do that. I think that she's also social outside of school, and not necessarily with the crowds that I'd like to see her in.
> Dance has been a part of her life since… she's brought baby pictures of her as a ballerina dancing. I wish she would have it after school… that time would be for dancing after school…Her situation is so unstable right now after school…I've heard of things that have happened to her… So I don't… I mean I wish it was more stable so those things wouldn't happen to her. …I think she has too much experience; she has experienced too much already, for her age.

Similar to her peers mentioned earlier in this chapter, though she had difficulties with self-esteem, Alba was a social student with many friends. She had more difficulty with one-on-one interaction with me, perhaps because I was a stranger and I had put her on the spot. I felt that based on her teacher's reports of her willingness to speak up, she probably had more to say than I was able to facilitate during our interview. Fortunately, even though she had been at the school for just one year, her teachers seemed to know her well and provide more information.

Linda (drama teacher):

> This is the first time I've ever worked with Alba. She's new this year… I wish we had her longer… I really love her, she's amazing… But she's a new eighth grader so I don't know her that well.
> I think Alba is a little different because she is a girl; because she's a little older… I don't know… She's in eighth grade…I don't know if she's an older eighth grader, if … I don't know if she's repeated a grade…
> On the one hand she's her own person; she believes in herself and she's not gonna let people bring her down. At the same time I see a little bit sometimes with her… like oh is that cool to say? …So I think sometimes she holds back a little bit…or she'll say something from her heart, and then she'll be embarrassed, like are people gonna laugh at me…?
> When we read scenes aloud, she reads beautifully. She volunteered to read; she had no trouble reading. I haven't seen her write because we haven't done much writing with this one but she volunteers her thoughts and her opinions…so I was shocked when I found out she had an IEP….No, I never would have guessed that she had an IEP!

> I think Alba pretty much chose to be the narrator; I mean that was totally her. I think it was partly because she likes to have a script and partly… I think she's not at a point where she really likes being a character. She's okay being up on stage but just reading is a more comfortable thing for her to do than try to be somebody else. Although it's interesting because the one scene with the donkey in the end where she had to be the nosy neighbor, I think she did a great job! (*laughs*). But she obviously wasn't that comfortable with acting.
> I think that Alba is not necessarily as active as other kids. She holds back a little bit.. if we're doing something where we are doing improv on stage…often she's not the kid who raises her hand and wants to play, but when she is in the audience she's offering suggestions…She's engaged, she's just not as physical, as enthusiastic…a more reticent kind of kid, a little more… private is the right word? The only time she'll come for help is when she's not feeling well…she asks if she can sit out.
> Before we were painting [background for the stage]; she's a very competent and confident visual artist so she didn't need help for that.

As mentioned by her humanities teacher, it was not clear whether Alba had a learning disability. Coming from a troubled school system, she may just have missed opportunities to learn. Similar to her friend Estela, Alba was very interested in socializing and being a part of a group. She had leadership skills and was able to participate in verbal discussions in her classes. Yet her emotional difficulties that affected her self-esteem led to her mixed profile; in some ways she was an engaged member of the group and at other times she was reticent as described by Linda. Alba who had many arts-based experiences prior to entering UCPCS and through community-based arts programs was naturally talented in the both visual arts and dance. She reported that when she danced she felt confident. As mentioned by her inclusion teacher, dance classes offered after school would keep Alba engaged and out of trouble on the streets. Unfortunately, the one down side of the program at UCPCS was that there were no opportunities for Alba to participate in her favorite activity. Given the importance of a particular art form for individual students,

including all the arts in school would be beneficial for providing all students opportunities to engage their strengths in learning.

Leo

Leo did not have the typical adolescent attitude characteristic of students his age who are self-conscious and socially aware. He was clearly different from his peers; he looked much younger. Unlike other adolescents, he was uninhibited and natural in his expression. He talked like an adult but behaved younger than his age. Leo was academically wise and socially challenged. He had a gleam in his eyes; his charming smile was appreciated by the adults in his educational environment, but he did not have a single friend. My mind automatically associated him with my son, who was reciting the alphabet at age two, but at four and a half still does not know how to play with his peers; he feels more connected to adults who can understand him better.

In my interview, I asked Leo if he wanted to pick a name for himself (since all the participants in the study had pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity); he chose "Nobody" as his name. Unlike the conversations I had with the other students in this study in which I had to find ways to get more information and have them express their ideas, Leo had a lot to say. He often cut me off and answered my questions before I finished asking them. At times I had to redirect him to the topic of discussion since he had the tendency to get carried away with his thoughts and go off in tangents in our conversations. He spoke in a higher pitch than the other boys and his speech had a musical tone.

> Leo: Oh, ok well I have taken several art classes. I have taken Improv, that was my favorite. Oh, a few years ago I took one called Music Technology

where we made our own sounds using a program on the computer. I have tooken Art classes where we have made like sculptures and stuff, so yeah I have taken, oh yeah and I have also taken a few more drama classes that go without expedition.

Golnar: What's your favorite art form?

Leo: It really depends what we are doing in it. I like them all but if you ask me my two favorite classes I would give you Music Technology and Improv because that is like a fun game class; it's much less controlled… not so much regulated…This one (*referring to the MENA unit)* you follow a script. That one we have no script whatsoever and we just… play a bunch of fun games.

Golnar: Tell me what you like about not following a script?

Leo: Not following a script gives us our way to say really whatever we want as long as it is appropriate and let's see…it also gives us…it also means that… ah... Let's see… it also means that we have a bit more control, and we don't already know what's going to happen. Because anyone can say anything and it's like more real life I guess … you have no idea what could happen… where in a script… you know Romeo and Juliet they're both gonna die, unhappy ending, blah blah blah…I know everyone's gonna die except for Hitler… It's really quite obvious.

Golnar: Is there anything about the script or more structured type of learning that you do like?

Leo: Well…. (*hesitating*) yeah …it is…we get to have like, I guess we get more into the props and how we say our lines and all that, and it's a bit more organized… maybe a bit more, but no but the other one was actually more organized for a Improv class.

Golnar: How is Improv organized if you get to do whatever you…? (*He cut off the ends of my questions- already knowing what I am going to ask*).

Leo: Well, you can't necessarily say whatever you want; you have to say something within the lines of the game we're playing. For example whatever your character… something you could put your own sense into Many times you get to choose your character…or choose someone else's character; for example there was like a dating game which where there's one person and as three people pick characters and they go up, and then the other person goes up there and we each ask them each three questions and tries to figure out who they are and the other thing is that you can answer as long as it goes with your character so…
Yeah we did that this year and Ms. H offers that every year. I would recommend it above all else. It's the best class. You have much more control.

It's certainly much more fun, you get to play games while somewhat learning actually. Also there could be more energy…and it could be much more fast, and stuff like that …and gets much more fun since we always try to make someone laugh; that's the goal of the game, make everyone next to you laugh, and that's actually fun (*he tends to go on and on and has a hard time with stopping himself*).

Golnar: And have you ever taken visual… (*cuts me off*).

Leo: Yeah, I did sculpture.

Golnar: Sculpture… (*cuts me off again*)

Leo: That was okay….. but…Ms. G (*the visual arts teacher*) … oh my God …is like…well, let's see…. Well, it's sometimes that we have to actually, I don't know (*he seemed uncomfortable to say what he was thinking*). There's a lot of …so we have made some pretty fun things… and our art teacher has disencouraged my type of art which is the art of war; so…

Golnar: What do you mean the art of…? (*interrupts again*)

Leo: Ever since I was in pre- k she has seen me draw tanks and explosions and sculptures of explosive weapons etc. so she forced me not to do it. But that was fun. I made a sculpture of the planet Saturn. It might have deflated; I also made a weird collection of blocks that are near each other…it was in a way symmetrical but eventually lost that… it turned into a pile of sticks which is… what Ms. G…

Golnar: Was it a good experience to do something other than a war scene that time or were you…

Leo: It was really fun.

Golnar:…disappointed? So why do you usually do…

Leo: Because I usually do I like to do…

Golnar: …war…

Leo: Because that's what I usually read about Roman history and all that so… If you, if you're doing sculpture and you're into this, wouldn't it seem logical to do something you know about?
Okay, let's say you are a scientist and you are gonna make a sculpture, wouldn't you make a sculpture that, of maybe a planet or maybe the sun? Oh yeah she also banned me from explosion; anything that caused harm…so of course I couldn't make a black hawk..

Golnar: And your interest in these things is because you read about…

Leo: Yeah I write about them.

Golnar: Oh and you write about them too?

Leo: Yeah so of course, I decided let's have my Improv related to it and let's connect everything center around that…

Golnar: And is it more fun for you…

Leo: It's much more fun because it has a bit more meat in it.

Golnar: (*I couldn't help but laugh*) And how do you feel about the different classes you have at school?

Leo: That's very hard since I'm probably the person who likes it a lot. So my least favorite subject is spelling…spelling definitely. I stink at spelling so of course I'm going to say I don't like it! And let's see… I like science, math, and social studies. I'm not a big fan of writing but it's okay. I'm for typing but I'm not well known for handwriting, just ask anyone here. Yeah, spell check!! Wonderful invention!

Golnar: What is your favorite class?

Leo: If the arts count as subjects… then definitely drama. Because one, I usually don't play around. Two, it's actually interesting sometimes, as long as you are doing something, if it has some thought part of it centered near you it's fun for me.
Yeah, I find the arts pretty fun…it's better when we actually get to select the art, when we get to pick the electives, because then I felt like I was being forced into it (*referring to the arts program in the lower grades when students had to take all art forms*). I remember all my time thinking like… At first they made us learn the recorder and I thought this is ridiculous! I don't want to learn the recorder!
But I guess if we had the choice then we would have all picked drama or art if you like sketching back then so all of us… We would have all picked for some ridiculous reasons or for our friends so I guess they kind of had a right to force us otherwise we would have all just followed our best friend, wouldn't we have?
Yeah, so sort of fourth graders are really like… I know my little brother to be really stubborn, that is my favorite word to use for him… Juan is stubborn.

Golnar: Is he at this school too?

Leo: Yes. He would probably agree with me what I'm saying but he wouldn't get it.

Golnar: He has a Spanish name, is your name Spanish too?

Leo: Yes. Our dad is Chilean.

Golnar: Do you speak Spanish?

Leo: Yeah, but let's say Spanish is not again one of my subjects. You see my problem with Spanish and English is that there are so many expectations.

Golnar: What do you mean?

Leo: Like they have rules and exceptions, and all this weird complicated annoying stuff…In fact, do we really need it? Can we just say him? Do we need him and her to be changed to a different word? … It's over-complicating everything, especially when it comes to the arts; you don't need to overcomplicate them, well actually, I actually would enjoy the arts being a bit more complicated but when it comes to academics, like, Spanish language, do not under any circumstances overcomplicate it! I like complicated games; I hate complicated spelling.
In a complicated game, you're essentially adding a new part or an extension to the game; something to make it challenging or easier, or somewhat more active…like an amendment! Would be a good word for it, when you make a game more complicated, when you suddenly let people get out of the game… that often makes people more alarmed and more participating, would be a good word.

Golnar: But spelling…?

Leo: My philosophy is that if I can get it over with quickly I don't have to do it again…So I get it over with quickly and then I forget it ever happened.

Golnar: That's an interesting philosophy! Tell me more about how you feel about the arts …

Leo: Well it makes me feel great because it gives us, well of course, if you want to take it from a college experience point of view, experience. All these things, for example after school plays, I have been assistant director three times in a row and that pretty much just gave my identity away to the whole school so um… and we can pretend I didn't say that, and then of course I put that recently in my recommendation to go to another school…It's extra credentials to say…Oh I've been in an Improv play so it could probably help you get into a school…

I'm going to (*names a private special education school*). My dad has come to the attention that this is not that… that …. Our school is not that challenging in the areas of math, science, and reading, which is where my strong points and also I've noticed that these people that I have in school, don't tell anyone… they are very annoying and they can sometimes be really jerks.

Golnar: What do you mean?

Leo: I remember that in the sixth grade we had a silent lunch for … ask anyone about the sixth grade and our discipline, and they'll tell you it was the worst sixth grade.

Golnar: And how do you get along with them?

Leo: I don't get along with them that much, because… well… I can't get along with… they will just immediately jump to the chance to say blah blah blah blah blah… They'll just jump to the chance with some ridiculous insult which means nothing to me whatsoever and then sometimes they just do it behind my back and of course I know…and there are few I can trust, at least until they are not near their other friends.

Golnar: Why do you think that is?

Leo: I think that they are ridiculous jerks or that they just need attention.

Golnar: Are the social interactions the same in all classes?

Leo: In academics they're either asking me for help, which is usually the case in math, or they're going to just bug me about something.
In arts classes, it's different for sure, because we're all in… especially in drama. I would say, in art what we do is we go through our problems and we have a normal conversation…Like we'll just talk about what we are doing.I like it better 'cause, one, there's less kids with one teacher, so of course there's better observation, and, two, everyone is really much more preoccupied than in the academic studies.
Yeah, I would say that people do much better in the arts especially, I think it's when you grade people on participation and effort, which is actually good because I have just been putting a lot of effort into it, but when you grade on that it's pretty hard to fail in arts. Because of course you are going to participate because it's fun to do so.

Golnar: So I don't want to hold you for too much longer. You may want to join the class activity…

Leo: Don't worry I have done that millions of times! Well, let's do a quick conclusion. Arts are really fun. They are useful like for credentials… I really

enjoy them a lot. And I see that they give …a better social environment. …If we're all laughing together at someone's jokes I don't think anyone's going to have time to insult because… Here's the case, in academics they are laughing at you. In here, (*referring to drama class*) they are laughing with you. …especially in my case.
Because in my case either they don't manage their words and they just simply blah, blah, laugh, laugh, laugh, while in here*(drama class*) we'll all be laughing at something or someone who did something on stage, especially in Improv because everyone's laughing… we're playing a game and you really can't tease people in the game unless they stink; usually I don't stink.

Golnar: Are you saying that when kids are not engaged in class or doing well they are more mean?

Leo: Yeah, because of course it's either, like a different chicken or the egg debate. Either they're mean and that caused them to lose grades or they lose grades and that causes them to be mean. Which came first? The chicken or the egg?

Golnar: You're so smart Leo. Thanks so much for…

Leo: Nobody (*reminding me of his pseudonym*).

Golnar: … That's right... Don't worry I will definitely change your real name.

Getting to know Leo was similar to the shock and irony I experienced when my son who I perceived as the smartest and most engaged child I had ever known was diagnosed with not just any "disability" but with serious enough sensory integration challenges to place him on the "autism spectrum." When I interviewed Leo's mother, she still seemed to struggle understanding her son's difficulties. In our conversation, she attributed his social challenges to finding his peers "boring" because he is smarter than them.

<u>Excerpts from a conversation with Leo's mother:</u>

His grandfather is an artist and he's gone to museums his whole life. He has been assistant director for the school play 3 times.
He's a kid who is very at ease with speaking. No problem getting up in front of people and speaking. He is an unusual child… He's not his own…

intellectuality he is a different age level than his peers. He knows a lot more. He reads about Roman history and listens to NPR.
He talks *at* you not *with* you. He was slow at learning to read. He was also awkward physically with regards to playing sports; he had motor difficulties. *(Again I thought of my son who also talks at me and not with me, and wondered if Leo was also on the "autism spectrum").*
He started at UCPCS the very first year the school opened. They have been good at finding the problem areas and addressing them. My problem with inclusion is that it's very good with pointing out the problems but not at challenging them. They concentrate on weaknesses…those who have problems…those who don't.
He has very little inclusion now (*referring to special education services*). Reading and handwriting were issues. They've been on top of him to make sure he is organized. His locker was disgusting… It's helped him assimilate and socialize… but he's not challenged academically. They spend more time on discipline.
Social things have been very hard for me. He's not unhappy. He doesn't want to socialize with others. He finds them too dumb …making fart jokes. We went to Stanley Greenspan and learned about all kind of his philosophies…go to jungle gyms…join social play groups…Children's Hospital has a good program for social stuff…
He's not pulled out of class any more. He was in the early years, for reading and handwriting. UCPCS has been a very good place for him. Kids respect him for his intelligence. He listens to NPR and doesn't want to be social. Once in a while he hangs out with his younger brother and his friend; his brother also goes there.
It's a physical thing. He's physically awkward; can't play sports, soccer, tennis.
His father is a neurologist. He's obsessed with all that jargon. He thought he had Asperger's *(a mild form of autism)*…There's nothing wrong with the kid. He was like their star student in Improv. Ms. Hudson (*the drama teacher*) chose a few students to go around to other schools and arts educators [to demonstrate] and he was one of them.
Because he is very confident he has been able to excel; those are strengths for him…he can get up and perform in front of a group.
(On his IEP, Leo was diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability in written expression)

<u>Interview with Susan Jones (humanities teacher):</u>

Susan: Leo!! I love Leo!

Golnar: He's endearing; he's like a little man.
Susan: He's another one though that if you try to categorize him… his dad is a neuropsychologist, and he loves to go to meetings and say "he's this, he's

that!" And I think he's none of those things… he's just his own way. He's actually, academically, writing is also his weakness…his writing is actually above grade level in terms of content, style, and organization, like way above grade level. So he can recall a lot of detail, he has a very strong voice, and is very persuasive in his academic writing… he doesn't necessarily have the grammar and punctuation to back it up… he's trying… A lot of our kids who have trouble with writing, they have these short choppy sentences. He has these long sentences, that if he was just speaking, I mean he talks like an adult, so he writes like an adult too but he doesn't necessarily know where to put a comma. He can't spell at all, he's a horrific speller. But if he can spell check, he's fine. He loves to read. He's always reading military history books, or, he told me the book he wants to read over the summer is about N. Korean nuclear intentions or something *(laughs).*
I mean he really is super advanced in terms of history, science, and math too. I think conceptually he is so far beyond what we're doing that none of it is hard for him. As a reader he's interested in, he reads these really intense college level non-fiction books. But if you get him to read out loud, it's clear that he's not…he just keeps going…He hits a word he doesn't know and I ask him what he thinks it might be and he just keeps going. And like sometimes it's right, sometimes it's wrong…He knows enough of the words that he gets through it. So he actually was always above grade level but we have a reading test that they can max out and they can't go any higher and he just did that even though he's been reading college-level books for years. But the reading out loud part, he messes up on, because he just keeps reading, and he'll sub in words that are kind of like similar…or he'll leave out a word that's not that important.

Golnar: Do you know why he was first referred for an evaluation?

Susan: He wouldn't write, and I think he didn't read… I think when he was identified, he was having trouble learning to read, 'cause I think his spelling issues point towards dyslexia. He has trouble with letters. So he had trouble with reading and he wouldn't write for a really long time and would freak out about it. He also was really unorganized and had a lot of social issues, both of which…it's really interesting because he hates to be pulled out of class [for services] or identified in any way. So we have a group of kids who get their binders checked at the end of the day, and he hated being in that group, so he asked "if I always have my binder organized, can I not go there?" And the inclusion teacher would let him show it to her at another time…since then he's totally been organized.
If he's identified as being smart that's okay with him…He wants you to say "Leo is the best at this," …but if you say "Leo has trouble with this" he doesn't like that. And socially…that's really hard for him. He never gets into trouble, and he's actually I think really nice to other kids…Sometimes he'll be a bit overbearing or bossy in a group because he does generally know what's going on more than the other kids. We did literature circles where they had to

take turns speaking; other kids, especially new kids or kids who aren't that confident in English who're really struggling… I said "Leo you really need to make sure that you talk only two or three times," and on the rubric they can get extra points for asking someone else a question, or inviting them into the conversation, and he loved that. He was like "what do you think Maria?" He was always trying to get other people in. That was pretty helpful when I figured that out 'cause otherwise it was like competition…

But he doesn't really have that many friends. The other boys in the class have their own issues, I would say, so he's not necessarily always friends with them. They could get into conflicts… I don't necessarily see that as coming from him, except for that if he's right, he's right, and he's not gonna like…he can't change who he is and that's sometimes sort of annoying to other people. But when he's playing chess or something that he is good at in structured social environments, if he knows there's a game and there's rules, that's good for him. But he's actually looking at private school, I think because, mostly I think it's his request but his mom is also really into it because he feels like he doesn't really have friends here and he really wants to have friends.

He is also very adult focused. Any time we're all sitting around, he'll come and sit next to one of the teachers and say "let me tell you my plan for like taking over the world," but he won't go up to a kid and say that. I think he's recognized that they're not into that. So he thinks let me try someone who has to be nice to me.

He is a little better now. He used to just talk about one thing for a while. It was… electronics …all that he would talk about would be electronics. Now he's had enough obsessions where he can switch between them I think. He also watches the news every night his mother says, and he often will come in and be talking about something and I'll realize that I heard the same thing on NPR. He's really into what's going on and wants to make connections and tell people about it. A lot of that is that he's just pulling it all into his brain. *(Children with sensory integration disorder do "pull it all into their brain." Those with ASD, such as my son, can typically memorize large amounts of auditory information and repeat it back.)*

Golnar: He probably has good auditory memory. Do other students laugh at him a lot?

Susan: I feel like if he were in the eighth grade class he would have had an experience that would be much more like Noah's…But the seventh grade, they can be mean. He sits with the eighth graders at lunch. That's a really high achieving class and they're all watching the news too and want to talk about N. Korea. Not all of them but some of them. And the seventh grade is just… the boys are really, generally immature, but not very into books. They'll talk about video games and sports, and then the girls are in their own world of girl drama and don't even notice him…He just doesn't necessarily want to play their games, or couldn't probably play their games if he wanted too.

Interview with Marta Velasquez (inclusion teacher)*:*

Marta: Well socially, I think that he's comfortable with himself. He's pretty aware that he's a smart kid. But he has a difficult time approaching peers and sustaining conversation back and forth. so it's difficult when you have another seventh grader who may not be reading the books that you're reading, or use the vocabulary that you use. Other students know that he's very smart, but they don't interact with him as a peer. There may be two other students in that classroom who, I have seen the three play chess, or work together on a particular project, but, other than that…I have not heard him have a conversation….when he works in groups I have seen him sort of direct students to "you do this, you do that, and then we'll do this." But it's not, a fifty-fifty kind of thing.

Golnar: Does he get counseling.

Marta: Yeah outside he does.

Golnar: Because he was very aware…he shared with me that he doesn't have any friends…he wants friends, but I don't know if he knows how to communicate with his peers.
Marta: Like he needs some kind of social coaching. We did talk about that to the parents in the last IEP meeting, to maybe look into a social coach. And they took it, so, I haven't spoken to them about it lately but it was something that we suggested.

Linda (drama teacher):

Leo is… you know he'll talk in front of a thousand people he doesn't care! He's awesome like that.
I've known him since first grade so to me as a teacher it just goes to show, especially with kids that need potentially extra support to feel successful, to feel a part of something, and to really be happy, how important it is to really know those kids. I felt like I could support Leo a lot because I could tell when he was not doing well or when he was in a good place and wanted to be the leader. Leo is really into history and warfare…so when we were talking about migration or the Diaspora, he could pop with "Oh, the Roman empire, this or that" … There were times when somebody made fun of him, so he kind of needed to be pepped up or left alone; so it's easier when you know kids very well. He doesn't really have friends.
Leo doesn't ask for help a lot I think partly because…I don't know if it's part of his personality…he's a person whose convinced that he knows a lot, so, sometimes when you offer help, he's like "I got this," "I'm an expert," Or we'll be having a conversation, we'll be talking about ancient Rome through the lens of Shakespeare, Julius Cesar or something and he'll say all this stuff,

> he'll say it in a very confident voice, but you know it's all wrong, but it's so funny and it's hard to say, well actually Leo you know, Mark Anthony…he'll be like "oh no no no…," So, he's very hard to convince sometimes when he's made a mistake, which in a way it's good because, I think he's kind of an eccentric kid. I think given the opportunity, a lot of kids would just step all over him, so I think the fact that he has that confidence…Plus I think he's so smart, and he's so well read… so I think that's good.
> Leo takes drama a lot. He's taken some art, I think he took sculpture this year…he doesn't take a lot of music, his rhythm is a little, some of his larger and fine motor are a little…I would say not necessarily strengths of his. He's always cutting down sports…I don't know if it's a part of a defense mechanism…I think that's a challenge for him.
> Leo is always out, like every time I need a volunteer he's there. He's got lots of energy; he's really great at working with all the different kids, um, again, sometimes, like with the newer kids like (*names a new student*), sometimes Leo is a little eccentric, and everybody else for the most part knows that about him, and accepts that about him and loves it about him, but new kids like (*names the new boy again*), they'll be doing something on stage and (*this boy*) just laughs to the response Leo has; and I think that's a little hard for Leo. Again, I think that he's learned to build up this kind of protective…coating, but yeah he's very enthusiastic, very active, whether you know it's discussions or moving around.
> When Leo is in my class I have to make sure that all my facts are right (*laughs*). Like we'll be talking about how this certain story-teller started in Turkey and then I have to make sure I get the right century because I have to keep up with Leo; he's so well read.

Leo whose greatest challenges were in the areas of social relationships and two-way communication had characteristics that were more common to those on the autism spectrum than students with LD. His uneven development that led to having the mind of an adult with regards to his intellectual capacities, without the social senses of kids much younger than him, was also typical of those identified with Asperger's syndrome (a mild form of autism in individuals who are fully verbal but lack typical social skills). Although Leo was highly verbal, he had difficulties with pragmatics. He also had fine and gross motor challenges evidenced by his handwriting and his avoidance of sports and music. His sensorimotor difficulties

showed through his body language as he often wiggled in his chair and looked at the lights around the room and on the ceiling.

His diagnosis of Specific Learning Disability on the IEP was in part related to his parents' disagreement regarding the source of his difficulties. The problem with the misdiagnosis was that due to Leo's intellectual abilities and "above average" performance in academics, he did not receive services or guidance for his greatest need; to help him socialize with his peers and practice two-way communication. His example shows that even in a relatively safe school environment, students whose differences are greater in scale, preventing them from social inclusion require programming that assists them with the skills they need to be integrated in a general education classroom. Inclusion must have a social component in addition to inclusive academic learning opportunities. Further, other students may need to be educated to include their peers who experience difficulties with social interaction. In a drama classroom vignette presented in the last chapter, Linda who knows Leo well was able to intervene when students laughed at him. Even though all students were laughing at each other's improvisations that day, and it seemed that Leo himself who was deeply engaged in his acting may not have noticed, Linda asked a few of the students to stay after class had ended to discuss the importance of Leo's social safety. These types of interventions are necessary for the protection of students such as Leo, as well as for the general education students' ability to empathize if inclusion is to be implemented successfully.

David

David, similar to his classmate, Leo, seemed emotionally younger than his seventh grade peers; but unlike Leo, he had a group of friends with whom he played silly and boyish games. It was hard for David to sit still and focus unless he was engaged in an activity or a class discussion; he was often uneasy and looks around the room to make eye contact with his friend. He was happy and playful.

I would have never known about his love and dedication to drama through my classroom observations alone; he seemed to lack confidence on stage and it was hard to hear his voice when he was role-playing. He also lacked expression in his language and body movements. However, according to his mother, drama is the most important experience he has had in school. In fact, she reported having chosen the school because of the drama program. I assumed students who love drama are extroverted. I wondered about the nature of David's experiences and his perceptions of his engagement in drama.

Golnar: So David, which arts electives have you taken?

David: I've taken drama, art, and music.

Golnar: And which do you like the most?

David: I like drama better 'cause you get to express more (speaking in a low, soft voice I could hardly hear).

Golnar: You get to express more?

David: Yeah, express myself.

Golnar: How do you express yourself in drama?

David: Like, depending on what elective it is, like some electives are like Improv, we have fun; you express yourself with how you act. Like you can

act like you are sad or you can act bad; or if you're happy, you just act pretty good.

Golnar: And why is expressing yourself important to you?

David: You like feel better I guess (having difficulty coming up with words).

Golnar: Do you get your feelings out?

David: Yeah, like you yell.

Golnar: Do you express yourself in other classes?

David: In math I don't. In science you don't get to move you just stay in one area and do your work. Kind of like the opposite of drama; [in drama] you just have more fun I guess.

Golnar: What's your second favorite art form?

David: Art because you can like show; instead of acting how you feel you show how it is on your piece.

Golnar: Which have you taken more times, drama or visual arts?
David: Drama. I have taken it five times.

Golnar: What else can you tell me about how you learn in arts?

David: I learn better in drama 'cause we're having fun while we're doing it; not just like trying to take notes and memorize it. We are like playing games to help us learn.

Golnar: And what do you consider are your strengths and weaknesses in school?

David: I am like better in writing because I am very creative. But like math is not my strongest one.

Golnar: Are you better at things that you get to create?

David: Yeah, much better.
(I was struggling because the conversation was not flowing)

Golnar: What do you think about having the choice to pick which elective you want to take?

David: I think it's good instead of just staying in one the entire year. Like if you don't like one and you have to stay in it all year that would not be fun.

Golnar: What do you think of the kinds of projects you do in your arts classes?

David: In visual arts you get to express yourself on paper and in drama in acting, and in music you express yourself by how you play.

Golnar: Do you like working alone or in groups?

David: I like working in groups because you share ideas; you can talk …like if my idea isn't good or the others', it's harder if you were alone. It's better if you have a partner you can talk with.

Golnar: Do you tend to participate a lot in your classes?

David: I participate a lot. I participate better in drama than in math. 'Cause in arts there is no wrong answer; but in math there is only one way to answer. And like in arts classes you kind of feel more safer than in like in the math class or science class.

Golnar: What makes you feel safer in the arts classes?
David: It's just the feeling that you get when you are with your friends and you're just doing something that you don't have to do, but something that you choose to do.

Golnar: How do you feel about having arts in school?

David: It makes me feel good. Like on a day that we have arts, if we did bad on like a math test, we would know that we are going to have fun in the arts class. So like it doesn't matter like how bad your day is; it will be better in arts.

Golnar: Is there anything you learn in the arts that is similar to other classes?

David: Like when we do arts, like in drama, when we do Improv, you create stuff in your head, and like if I am writing I think that what can I write that would fit with this? Like in drama what can I do to make this play better.

Golnar: How is your learning in the arts similar or different from other classes? You have told me some things that are different? Are there any similarities?

David: Some classes, like they let us do, like show us that… like in history we were studying Greek and Roman life, so we needed to show that sometimes

they showed us what your life would be like; maybe you would be a peasant, or a king.

Golnar: Is that similar to drama?

David: Yeah because you get to show.

Golnar: Do you like that?

David: Yeah it makes me more attracted and it makes me think more.

Golnar: I see what you mean. So are you going to continue doing arts or drama in the future?

David: Yeah, I just really like the arts; it brings out the best in me.

<u>Conversation with Sara Ramirez, David's mother:</u>

Sara: We chose this school because of the drama program. He has done very well because of it and chooses it each time they have electives. He was assistant director three times! (*proudly reports*)
Well this is David's second year at the school; this is his second year participating in drama. Now he is a co-director, before he was just an actor. And for us it's extremely important… as I mentioned David does great speaking, he can talk his way out of anything, but you know we are helping him to do better at writing, and this helps us because it encourages him more just to be more confident you know? When you come to a school that doesn't have arts or any type of drama program, they're sitting in the classroom. He gets to move around, he gets to get his muscles going, and he's just bloomed; he loves it! He wants to do anything that has to do with drama.

Golnar: Wow, that's great!

Sara: Yeah. I mean, he's really paying attention now to old black and white movies… just the acting part…I think this is sort of his niche…

Golnar: So he talks about his interest in drama at home?

Sara: He wants to watch old movies, because Ms. H talks about old movies and just the real art. And then you know the opera, and just going to plays in the area.

Golnar: So he goes to plays?

Sara: Yes he goes. We try to go but we're a family of four and nowadays these things are just so expensive but we try just to have him experience that a

little a bit. I think if they didn't offer drama we wouldn't have picked this school for him. Because that's how, you know ever since he was small he's been acting his little way… So I think it's very important for him. Yeah that's how he is; he talks before he can walk type of child.

Golnar: Do you mean he talks a lot?

Sara: Yeah he's a big talker. And for him to be able to express himself in drama I think is fantastic. And Ms. H is fantastic as well. She sort of gives him that little space where he can wiggle and do his own little thing, and that's very, very important.

Golnar: And how is he doing in the other classes?

Sara: He has a hard time with reading and writing; we're working with him and the teachers work with him as well. But I think that it's important that he is in art and he is in drama. He likes to draw so that's one of his strengths and he likes drama. I think for the other kids who are more like in the debate team or the math club, or just, you know more educational clubs… This [drama] sort of gives him that confidence that he is part of the club; that he's part of the school. He feels very well connected to school because of it and when they have party nights or when they… the performance night, he is very much involved.
(*Sara asked me if I had any children*).

Golnar: My son who is three has speech and language problems…(*couldn't finish the sentence before she jumped in and seemed more comfortable to share David's story with me*).

Sara: Yeah, well David did and my older son had speech and language problems. David has an IEP because he's ADHD, believe it or not… (*laughs nervously*). I think he's just an average twelve-year-old boy, it's you know…

Golnar: Well there are many labels and ideally they are supposed to help them get their needs met at school. He's diagnosed with ADHD?

Sara: Yeah, yeah… we don't do any medications because we don't know what the studies have shown us… so we have learned as parents to deal with his organizational skills… and that sort of thing. It's a process though; we're still learning.

Golnar: My son has both speech and language problems and difficulty paying attention.

Sara: What I have always told David is that people are different in every ways; people learn things differently. Like if we're learning something maybe

I can learn it by listening, maybe you need to write it, maybe your brother needs to read it back, or you know it's just different ways of learning. So we try not to use a label and say because he is IEP or ADHD, or…

Golnar: Does he know that he has an IEP..?

Sara: Yes, he knows, he knows.

Golnar: And he knows the diagnosis and knows what it means?

Sara: He sort of but it just doesn't click for him yet.

Golnar: You said he was diagnosed a while back?

Sara: He had it from a while back. From the first grade he could read the bible but he couldn't recite his abc's. So he was just anxious to learn, learn, learn, learn, but his building blocks just weren't strong enough because he was too busy trying to learn just everything… He needs to slow down, his organizational skills... but then I look around his room...
Yeah and it's hard because as a parent we try not to label a kid different; or the word perfect, or there's a problem. We see it as no it's not a problem; it's a strength. With drama he's just building off of that; building off and off. They read so he's improving his reading because he wants to read more scripts, in here, and he's listening to old television what he calls black and white movies so there are different words that you don't hear now year 2009 and there was one word… What did he say? …*Impregnated* or something…So there's that relationship with building his vocabulary …

Golnar: So he's thinking about things he hears…

Sara: He's thinking, he's thinking… The word *supper*, he didn't know it meant dinner 'cause people don't talk like that anymore. But I like it… I think it's just helping him grow. And it helps us to see him grow. If there was only a math club or debate club, I wouldn't say no way, but it wouldn't be an interest in David to attend any of those… But drama…whatever Ms. H has he will try out for; and he usually gets in.

Golnar: That's really nice.

Sara: Yeah he's been in two plays, and he's co-directing this one. So good for him; I'm happy. And we're big fans of the Humanities. We have books laying around of philosophy, art history, U.S. history, literature… which I think sort of build who we are socially… so we can talk about some Math… But socially we need to know about the past, and different cultures and how art history helps us learn. Even if it's just him sitting looking through this big old book with beautiful pictures; he's learning.

Golnar: Well he's so lucky that he has such supportive parents.

Sara: It's a learning process especially with our older boy who was four and wasn't talking at all. He had to see the speech therapist before he started school and so he's a year behind. So that sort of, you know…He wasn't feeling too good about himself. But you know, after the years went by and we learned how to support him, he's fantastic…

Golnar: That's great! (*Sara's positive energy and perception of her sons was inspirational*).

Sara: Yeah, he's doing so well. Yeah it starts with parents' support, how can we pull out type of thing… my older boy is doing the Step-Up program which is photography; but the topic is the drop-out crisis. Actually one of his pictures was selected for the exhibit.

Golnar: Wow! That's really great! My son was also not really talking at age three and we thought it was because we had three languages between home and daycare. Now that we know it's a speech and language problem so we stopped speaking other languages. We only speak English to him.

Sara: How old is he?

Golnar: He's three and a half.

Sara: That's what happened with us. They told us it was the language; that he just couldn't pick up both so we cut Spanish.

Golnar: Yes and that's hard. Some people tell you to keep both languages but they don't understand that kids don't all have the same facility with language.

Sara: Now he is, he's picking it up now. And we're trying to do more; we know that he can take it in. His grandparents are Spanish so he's definitely… it's not his first language, but, it's definitely there.
It feels bad and I feel like, that I have to explain myself, but then I'm his mom… I can do whatever I want…But others say "Oh…you have to teach him Spanish"…

Golnar: Yeah they don't understand…

Sara: So it's very judgmental. But it's interesting, he's going to be sixteen (*referring to her older son*), and he's working in a program where he is learning about advocacy, because he's sort of thought of all the challenges that he's met being a Hispanic male growing up in (the city). It's been challenging, you know, and he's like, wow, I've accomplished this much,

going to tenth grade. And we're holding on to him, and just supporting him; supporting both in different ways, 'cause they both have different needs.

Golnar: Well like I said, it's great that you are so aware of their needs.

Sara: Well this is for them not for us. We want them to be all set in the future…Especially the arts; it's the core of who you are.
On David's IEP, he was diagnosed with Specific Learning Disabilities in reading and writing, and ADHD (primarily inattentive).

Interview with Susan Jones (humanities teacher):

Susan: David is a great kid. He has a lot of writing issues, and reading issues. He's pretty below grade level. I mean he's a couple of grade levels below in each area. He's improving in reading; not quite so much in writing. He'll, if you work on something with him he gets it. Actually his writing is interesting and his facts are good. He can organize paragraphs but if you ask him to write an introduction or a conclusion, you're not going to get one. He also has huge organizational issues and he needs help to keep track of things. I don't think he has any social issues; he seems to almost always be incredibly happy and positive; never gets in trouble.

Golnar: His mother had a very positive attitude when I spoke to her.
Susan: Yeah, I definitely see that from her. She just really just keeps plugging even when things are hard…because he had like some other things happen, like some ear problems, and then their grandma died. All these bad things kept happening but you wouldn't know, because he's just always really happy. And he's definitely like immature and silly. But I think that's also just developmental. I mean if you look at him, he's still like a little kid.
He has trouble with multiple-step projects. He needs a checklist; he can't keep it in his head otherwise. I don't know how he is in math; he's pretty interested in science and history but his reading definitely gets in the way of him getting as much information as other kids. But once he has the information he pretty much sticks with them. He has trouble decoding; he stumbles over words and complicated sentence structure throws him off. He is independent at a sixth grade level. He improved a lot in reading this year, because I think mom makes him read at home, and he just keeps practicing and practicing. I don't think he likes being pulled out or labeled; but he's never resistant to help and I often have him read out loud to me and he doesn't mind.

Golnar: He apparently likes drama.

Susan: He loves drama. He loves Ms. Hudson.

Golnar: Why do you think that is?

Susan: I don't know. He's been in a couple of after school plays with her. He's one of those kids that really wants to have a job to do and like wants to be seen as a reliable, helpful person, and Linda is really good at giving kids jobs to do that they can do, and then be like "Good job, you did that."He's also very funny, and I think he probably enjoys watching plays. He's pretty verbal and he enjoys language.

Golnar: So he has good verbal skills?
Susan: I mean he mumbles, so it's hard, he doesn't necessarily speak that way but it's interesting because in his writing you can tell like he'll pick up phrases that people use when they're speaking… When we did Model UN they had to learn point of order…all those parliamentary words. He liked that.

Golnar: So maybe he is more concrete. How would you describe him socially?

Susan: He has friends. They act like little boys; like sometimes they take each other's pencil, sometimes they act silly in class. Greg is his friend who also acts like a fourth grader most of the time but they seem to enjoy each other…

Golnar: What would you say about his participation in class?

Susan: He participates a lot in small groups. He participates a lot when he knows that I am noticing participation. He won't necessarily participate a lot in a large group discussion; but if he knows the answer he will. He certainly won't take a risk or guess. He doesn't really like to speak in front of the whole group, but none of them do really. He likes projects; I think projects are good for him. I think he likes having other people to work with.

<u>Linda (drama teacher):</u>

David is just so, his sense of humor, his comic timing has always been a strength of his so… I mean he chose a scene where he, that was his first choice, the one with "If you were my husband I'd give you poison," "If you were my wife I would gladly drink it," he wanted that right away.
He's one of these kids where he may not feel totally comfortable saying something funny he notices to the whole group but he'll be sitting next to me and a couple of other kids…he will say that "Oh, I noticed that blah blah blah…" and then we'll all laugh. So he's not like a Leo who likes speaking up in front of everybody but he's very…I think he's just very funny.
He loves to be a part of something, so I think that's huge for him. But he's an interesting kid because a lot of kids, from a drama point of view, they either always want to act, or they always want to be behind the scene; David has actually done both. He's been in after school plays with me as an actor, he's been an assistant director, he has done props…He and I have always just… I don't know, I think he really likes stories. I think he really likes working with

> people. He has a lot of good friends; I think a lot of kids really like him because he's very flexible, he's really easy going…He's just affable, and smart, and funny, and easy going; I think that kids really gravitate toward him. I think he really likes that kind of group stuff that happens in drama.
> I want to say this is his third year maybe, maybe second, but we've spent a lot of time together so I feel like I know him well. He and Leo have not yet hit that cool teenage boy thing…They're very young in the sense that they don't care about that stuff. They don't do things thinking what would people think…
> …he won't always necessarily volunteer to do something, but if you say "David, I would love to see you take a turn," or "David what do you think we should do for this scene?" he's like "Okay!"
> Again, David always has a super positive attitude about everything. I've never seen him mad or grumpy. I just think that David has a really healthy relationship and attitude about people. I think partly his parents are so, oh my God they're so fantastic! They're cheerful, and they're glass half full kind of people and they're very supportive with both their boys. And I think he has that, he has a couple of really good friends…

According to David's mother, drama had engaged him in the school community, helped his reading and vocabulary skills and improved his self-confidence. As mentioned earlier, David was not an extroverted student who I would have thought would be benefiting so much from drama. But his sense of humor as well as his love for stories and creativity attracted him to drama. Similar to Joey, David responded well to active learning processes where he was not supposed to sit still and remain quiet. He enjoyed the social aspect of group projects. David also benefited from the concrete representation of language through acting in drama. His mother reported that learned new vocabulary by watching old movies or plays. David was also motivated to learn because of Linda's pedagogical style and relationship with him. She reported that she understood him and perceived him in a positive light; David was seen and appreciated by her. In his general education classes David "won't take a risk," perhaps because he is "a couple of grade levels below in each area," and he's afraid of making a mistake. In drama he's asked questions that do not

have a wrong answer and tap into his creativity: “David what do you think we should do for this scene?” Even students such as David and Joey who have supportive families, who have friends, who are motivated to learn, will continue to be “below average” or “below grade level” in standards-based inclusion classrooms where they are bound to feel inadequate. The arts offered all the student participants a setting where they were included in learning through equal opportunities for engagement and understanding.

Summary:

While my focus was on exploring the benefits of arts education for the student participants, each of them compared their learning in the arts to learning in academic subjects. Their reports showed that in addition to the intrinsic benefits of the arts, students also valued the opportunity to engage in a classroom that did not rely on their areas of weakness for learning. They reported that academics are “work, work, work…;” in the arts students seemed to experience more meaningful learning experiences that they enjoyed. Based on these reports, I interviewed their general education and inclusion teachers at the end of the study, in order to understand how the arts benefited students based on their overall learning opportunities in school and with reference to their strengths and weaknesses. The humanities and inclusion teachers who understood the students’ difficulties and worked hard to teach and accommodate them, were still bound by standards-based curriculum and testing, an educational framework that placed these students in categories such as “below average,” “far below grade level,” or performing “below standard.”

Although a number of the student participants had strengths in conceptual understanding in areas such as math and science, the overreliance on language-based learning and assessment, especially through writing, limited these students' positive experiences even in subjects where they had strengths. Almost every student had serious challenges with writing; students diagnosed with LD and ADHD experience tremendous difficulty with the writing process which requires short-term memory to translate one's thoughts into words prior to the mechanical production of the printed word; (some students had additional fine motor weaknesses that led to experiencing the mechanical aspect of writing as an additional challenge.)Writing also requires organizational skills, attention to detail, as well as semantic and pragmatic language skills. Therefore, using writing as the main tool of assessment in inclusion classrooms was placed the student participants at a disadvantage and impeded their ability to show their knowledge.

Another noticeable pattern among the students was that those who did not receive attention for their special learning needs early in their education experienced greater frustration and displayed more negative or task-avoidant behaviors than those who had learned coping skills and knew how to seek help. Others who were misdiagnosed or did not get adequate support even though they had IEP's from an early age continued to struggle and resist work in their areas of weakness. As a result, participants in this study whose primary challenges were in language development or sensory integration disorder displayed behaviors that were perceived as oppositional or disruptive, gaining them additional labels such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) or Emotionally Disturbed (ED) in their more recent IEP's. While the current

special education system in the United States relies on labels to allocate funding, in some cases (Estela, Noah, and Patrick) these additional labels are unnecessary and misleading as the distract attention from students' primary areas of need and focus attention on the behavioral side effects of their disabilities. A holistic understanding of the side-effects of the students' primary disabilities, and services that address the various aspects of their difficulties (including emotional, social, and motivational challenges) would reduce the need for these additional labels that portray students in the most negative light.

Chapter 6: The Benefits of Engagement in Learning through the Arts

> From a pedagogical perspective the most important question is always "How does the child experience this particular situation, relationship or event?" Experience can open up understanding that restores a sense of embodied knowing. (van Manen, 1991, pp. 9-11)

The findings in this chapter represent the synthesis for discussing unique types of learning opportunities offered in arts-based classes and their benefits for adolescents with LD. The themes presented in this chapter are primarily derived from conversations with seventh and eighth grade students who participated in music and drama classes and shared their arts-based experiences with me. Their parents and teachers added important background and contextual information about each student. While Chapter 5 profiled each student and gave a detailed description of their diagnosis and classroom experiences, this chapter revisits some of the observations and illustrates specifically how the arts program enhanced their learning. The students who participated in this study were diagnosed with Specific Learning Disabilities (LD); most of them also had Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and a few had other additional diagnoses (explained in sections relevant to each participant's strengths and weaknesses). In line with the goal of this study, to investigate the importance of the arts for adolescents with special needs based on their own perceptions of their experiences, the findings relied heavily on students' narrative accounts; this chapter places these narratives alongside major contributions from the literature. Upon inductive analyses of students' quotes regarding their engagement in the arts, I derived three overarching themes that encompass experiences most common to all seven students and are related to meeting their

particular learning requirements. Their words, included in the titles of the themes, are the representation of the meaning they attribute to learning in the arts and are presented to demonstrate their integration with the social-constructivist theory of learning; *Theme 1*: "It feels like you open up to yourself,"(The Importance of Nonverbal, Embodied Engagement in Learning); *Theme 2*:"You get to create what's your own;" "it has some thought part of it centered near you," (Student Ownership of the Learning Process); *Theme 3*: "In arts there is no wrong answer;" "it's a safer social environment," (Social and Pedagogical Context of Learning).

The first theme, *"It feels like you open up to yourself,"* describes each of the students' experiences of engaging their sensorimotor system in learning in the arts through which they "open up" their areas of strength. This theme is the longest section as it represents the most significant finding of this study – "embodied engagement". A large portion of students' accounts of what they valued about their experiences in the arts had to do with non-verbal learning opportunities, or what I call embodied engagement; the opportunity to engage various sensory systems in learning instead of relying on language-based abilities alone to process information. The non-verbal sensory systems included in the arts were visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and affective domains of learning. To explain this theme I include excerpts from students' profiles presented in Chapter 5, and refer back to the classroom vignettes (Chapter 4) to explain the importance of students' learning and performance through non-verbal receptive and expressive modalities within their overall educational opportunities.

"You get to create what's your own," also expressed as *"it has some thought part of it centered near you,"* is the second theme that emerged and refers to students' opportunities to learn in ways that include their own ideas and creativity. Related to this theme is the concept of student ownership of the learning process. Thirdly, *"In arts there is no wrong answer;""it's a safer social environment"* points to the learning environment in the arts where students participated in learning without stress created by the fear of failure. Theme three demonstrates that the social environment created in the arts classes was safer for students with LD and ADHD because they had the opportunity to engage their strengths in learning and contribute to group work at equal or even superior capacities as their peers. In this more inclusive context, they experienced greater parity in risk-taking and vulnerability involved with participation, than in competitive academic settings where there is a wrong answer.

Taken together the analyses of the these three themes relate to the literature in Chapter II, further elaborated on in order to situate this study and integrate it with prior research on adolescents with LD, inclusive education, the importance of motivation and engagement in learning, and arts education. This study is rooted in a social constructivist perspective on learning, and hence the aspects of education embedded in these various lines of research, (such as individual characteristics, teaching styles, and the social environment of learning), all influence these students' learning opportunities in school. The literature review influenced the various types of information I collected in order to reach a holistic understanding of the importance of the arts for adolescents with LD within a social constructivist lens, while this chapter

summarizes the insights gained from this research; the following chapter concludes, discussing the policy implications of the findings.

Theme 1: The Importance of Non-Verbal Embodied Engagement in Learning

"It feels like you open up to yourself"

Students' statements regarding their experiences in the arts revealed that the most commonly perceived benefit of the arts were attributed to non-verbal opportunities that include affective, auditory, visual, and kinesthetic means of learning and performing in a classroom setting. I refer to these opportunities as *embodied engagement* in learning. These additional means of engagement are necessary means of learning, particularly for students with language-based disabilities and those who are perceived to have challenges related to attention and hyperactivity in order for them to have equal opportunities to process information and express their knowledge. In contrast to the difficulties students experienced in academic classes (described in detail in Chapter 5), where learning in large part relies on their areas of weakness (i.e., sitting still, attending to instructions on demand, following directions, processing verbally presented information, and showing their knowledge through verbal or written forms of expression), the arts provided them with opportunities to engage their strengths through kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and affective domains of learning.

This research shows that the arts provide opportunities for learning through the body, such as dancing, drawing, playing an instrument, listening to music, using facial expression and physical gestures. The vignettes of students and comments from their teachers and parents illustrate that engaging additional sensory processing

systems in learning provided opportunities that were not offered in language-based classrooms where students in this study are at a disadvantage. These learning opportunities explained one student's belief: "In arts we learn about everything that I don't think we would learn in class; … it's more stuff that you can do." As students engaged various parts of their sensory processing systems, through their bodies, learning became a meaningful experience and increasingly represented something they "can do."

Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) cognitive theory brings to light the importance of sensorimotor experiences in learning. In their theoretical framework, mind and body are simultaneously involved in all experiences; *cognitive* refers to visual processing, auditory processing, memory and attention, and all aspects of thought and language conscious or unconscious (p. 11) included in learning. Applying this perspective, sensorimotor experiences in the arts enhance students' conceptual understanding as they engage in learning. While individual neurological characteristics determine how one learns, sensorimotor experiences provide opportunities for new pathways of processing information, and in turn affect cognitive understanding. Observations of students in their classrooms showed how the arts have the potential to enhance conceptual understanding by allowing students to use additional modes of reasoning through engaging various sensory systems and learning through their areas of strength. In the words of one student in the study, the arts "open your mind and you'll be thinking differently; you open up to yourself".

A framework used for understanding the benefits of the arts is Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of "multiple intelligences." According to his perspective,

there are seven areas of intelligence: linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Gardner, 2004). Applying Gardner's theory to the students' narrative accounts implies that students found opportunities to engage in the arts based on strengths in one or more of the areas involved in arts-based learning (visual-spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, and interpersonal). In fact, students in this study often chose a particular art form in accordance to their area of strength.

Rabkin and Redmond (2006) point to the connection between cognitive and affective gains in learning. They describe recent developments in cognitive science and neuroscience to support their view:

> [The] mind is embodied…the brain and body make up a single, fully integrated cognitive system. Scientists have found that most thought occurs on a level well below our conscious control and awareness and involves the processing of a continual stream of sensory information. We consistently represent the abstract through metaphors that we associate with physical experience and emotions. We speak, for example, of numbers going 'up' and 'down' or of ideas 'flowing' from person to person. Physical sensation and emotion are essential components of the mind, as integral to thought and learning as logic is. In fact, logic may not be possible without them. (in Rabkin & Redmond, 2006, p. 63)

In addition to engaging various sensory systems, the expressive opportunities provided in music and dramatic arts allowed students to "open up" the affective aspects of learning that both influence and are influenced by their engagement. Greenspan (1998) also describes the importance of affect for children with sensorimotor challenges that disturb their regulatory system. He notes that children's attention is drawn to non-verbal communication and social interaction through affect and these are linked to symbols to give the symbols purpose and meaning. In his Floortime approach to therapyfor those with language and other sensory processing

challenges, children's activities of interest and therapists' affective expressions are used to attract their attention and engage them in learning.

This research shows how the arts offer similar opportunities for engaging adolescent students with LD and ADHD who have difficulty participating in inclusive classrooms where the curriculum is based on typical language development and according to expectations that are based on typical sensorimotor and language abilities. The learning processes observed in drama and music enhanced these students' engagement by tapping into their interests and affect. For example, (as described in Chapter 4), Linda, the drama teacher, used laughter to enhance students' conceptual understanding of the scripts they read. She helped students interpret their reactions to stories they read by thinking about why and how they laughed, and referring back to the story to discuss the meanings of "antihero" or "wise in his foolishness and foolish in his wisdom." We observed how Linda used the students' explanations of their laughter to expand their vocabulary, such as introducing the word *foolish* as a synonym for *dumb*. In this process students began to articulate their ideas with fewer prompts from Linda. They had learned to translate their affective reactions to thoughts about the story. As they improved their reflective skills, the students automatically began thinking about why they were having a particular response to the stories and were able to put their reflections into words.

As shown by this example, laughter in drama was a meaningful vehicle for connecting affect to learning; affect enhanced learning by attaching meaning to the stories that were read. While class discussions are held in some non-arts classes, the use of affect and the opportunities to role play stories that are related to the human

condition improved students' conceptual understanding by attaching meaning to language. Engaging affect in learning is, therefore, one of the benefits of the arts for students with language-based disabilities and those with challenges paying attention to verbally presented information.

Following, I draw from students' narrative accounts, to show how they perceive affective and embodied engagement as a benefit of arts-based learning. I also refer back to important aspects of their strengths and weaknesses in learning discussed in detail in Chapter 5 that explain why and how the arts provide them with inclusive learning opportunities, ones in which they are not "disabled."

Estela

> …it feels like you open up to yourself, if you can take your anger out on the drum… like you're expressing yourself with how you play the beat. You make up a beat and it expresses how you feel in that moment…'cause you get to move to it and dance to it…I think that music is… fun. You get to play different instruments. I like music, and I kind of like drama, and art. I like art 'cause I like to draw like how I feel on a piece of paper, or like my idea on paper…
> It's fun and it helps your mind relax to think about something different than, work, work, and work…it opens your mind and you'll be thinking differently.
> ..It's a class where you can have fun, and just enjoy yourself but at the same time do your work and focus on it, and get the stuff done. We got to do a lot of stuff, interesting, like at the Celebration of Learning; it was fun 'cause we got to show it to the people what we learned in music.
> ...I'm the best in arts. I participate more in arts classes 'cause in academic class, I get distracted, and I don't know, sometimes I'd be like day dreaming.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Estela was evaluated a few months before the start of this study. At age twelve, she was diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Combined Type, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Dysthymic Disorder, R/O Bipolar NOS, Cannabis Abuse, Mathematics Disorder, and Reading Disorder. Her evaluation reported "inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, restlessness,

distractibility, disorganization, and forgetfulness…difficulty finishing projects, planning, and with organizational skills; likely to make careless errors, give up easily, or avoid work altogether……experiencing general problems with learning and or understanding academic material that involves reading, spelling, or math skills."

Estela's case was the worst combination of problems. She had a language-based disability in addition to sensory integration disorder (captured as ADHD) that led to challenges processing information and regulating her attention and activity levels. These underlying conditions alone explain why she would have difficulty in classrooms where participation is based on receptive and expressive language skills and the ability to sit still and modulate one's attention on demand. Given this large gap between her ability and classroom expectations, it is logical that she could not "understand academic material" or start and finish projects that required skills that were in her areas of weakness. Once her difficulties had resulted in emotional and behavioral problems that could no longer be ignored, her mother finally gave consent for evaluations and accepted special education services.

Estella's difficulties had led to disengagement because she did not have the skills to participate in academic classes. Years of academic failure had lowered her motivation to learn and her teacher reported that she had "very low self-esteem." Therefore, she spent a lot of time "going to the bathroom or in the hallway."Her inclusion teacher further reported that "she has a very hard time focusing her attention on academics," but she is willing to help with organizing social events such as the middle school dance; "as long as it doesn't have to do with academics, she's up for

it.”It was clear that Estela was not included in her academic classrooms based on the discrepancy between her skills and the requirements of grade-level standards.

Stanovich (1986) found that specific but developmentally limited cognitive deficits lead children to struggle with acquiring key academic skills; this in turn leads to decreased motivation, more task avoidant behavior, and, eventually more generalized set of deficits (in Sideridis et al., 2006, p. 216). He describes this trend as a “negative Matthew effect” or the “behavioral/ cognitive/motivational spinoffs’ of early academic failure” (p. 389). Sideridis et al.’s (2006) research on motivation found that self-efficacy or self-concept measures were significantly correlated with LD diagnosis. This prior research on the importance of self-efficacy and motivation in learning explains Estela’s disengagement from her academic classes.

In stark contrast, my observations of Estela in music class showed her in a more positive light; she was engaged in all the activities and did not have oppositional tendencies. As she explained, in music she could channel her feelings of “anger” by playing the drums; she also valued the opportunity to express her feelings through drawing in visual arts. Similarly, Stevenson and Deasy’s (2005) research found that the arts allowed students to express and share their feelings, thereby decreasing their negative behaviors.

The affective component of the arts “opened up” a way for Estela to express herself, decreasing her behavioral problems due to the negative effects of seventh-grade curricular demands on her self-efficacy. Despite her severe ADHD symptoms, she reported that in the arts classes where she had freedom to move, she could “focus,” and “get stuff done.” Her references to fun and enjoyment show that

learning in the arts is a positive experience for Estela. Finally, she reported that in the Celebration of Learning which was their final performance, she had the opportunity to *show* what they learned in music. The ability to have a product that *shows* what she is capable of speaks to the importance of non-verbal projects for students who have tremendous difficulty with verbal expression.

Oliver's description of Estela's participation in music also shows a positive portrayal of her engagement in learning:

> …She would take the leadership role, and if there was another person that was a strong personality and a leader type, then they would joke around but they would work together and create something. But she took on a lot of leadership in the class and she came up with some good rhythms. Sometimes she would be like "oh, I don't know what to do, I don't know what to do!" but as soon as she would figure something out she would be fine.

A classroom context that allowed non-verbal participation, movement, and freedom facilitated a positive student-teacher relationship evidenced in Estela's description of Oliver:

> I think he's a nice guy. He was really cool, and nice, he would let us do stuff… [I would give him] like a hundred. 'Cause the other teachers, they're kind of like…strict; he understands where we're coming from and that we need breaks sometimes. We got to do things we wanted but at the same time did things his way too. I guess that he trusts us…and he respects…how people feel and what they want.

Oliver's teaching style and respect for Estela's freedom, coupled with her ability to participate in music, took away the need for her to be oppositional. Estela participated in all activities without any behavioral problems or negative encounters with her teacher. In Estela's case, the arts offered the only inclusive school-based opportunity in which her ability to participate motivated her to engage in learning alongside her peers.

Noah

> Probably guitar is my strength and my favorite. Arts is more free. You get to do more stuff. It's easy to express yourself and stuff.
> This was actually the first chord that I learned… Blues is really easy to play… I just like the scales and the tunes.
> (*Most of my interview with Noah consisted of him playing music and using the guitar to communicate).*

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Noah's diagnoses on his IEP's had changed over the years. He was first diagnosed with Speech and Language Delays, then "Emotional Disability" and finally, ADHD Combined Type, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and LD in reading, math and written expression. This sequence of labels is in line with Stanovich's (1986) findings mentioned earlier that attribute behavioral and motivational "spinoffs" of early deficits, in this case in speech and language based on central auditory processing disorder (according to Noah's evaluation report). These difficulties had led to a later diagnosis of LD in all areas requiring language. In addition, his sensory integration and regulatory problems that were only diagnosed in his latest IEP explain the behaviors that were attributed to oppositional or "defiant" tendencies.

For both Noah and Estela, one label led to another. It is not clear why ODD is used as a separate diagnosis, when many students who have regulatory and sensory challenges show some degree of oppositional behavior. As evidenced by the information collected in this study, in addition to serving as a protective sensory mechanism, oppositional, defiant, or "task avoidant" behaviors are also in response to expectations that require the engagement of an individual's areas of weakness. This avoidance is greater at adolescence, a time when social concerns make it more

unlikely for students to engage in activities that show their weaknesses to their teachers and peers.

In Noah's case, in academic classes where learning relies on receptive and expressive language required in reading and writing, he was at times "oppositional."

> He didn't want to participate with other kids on things, and he would often not participate in anything, he totally doesn't like writing… he won't do it. …In general he is really resistant… he used to refuse to do any work and hide under the table in sixth grade.

Noah's father explained "What's really going on is that he is terrified of failure." Writing, the area of greatest difficulty for most student participants in this study, requires expressive language, working memory (to remember and translate ideas to words on paper), concentration, and sitting still. Even in math and science, areas in which Noah had superior conceptual understanding, the verbal and written modes of learning and assessment placed him at a disadvantage and prevented him from being fully included.

Noah's engagement in non-verbal learning in music class was a stark contrast to his general attitude of indifference towards school that served as a protective mechanism. The change in Noah's affect from the beginning to the end of the curriculum unit in music was one of the most powerful transformations I witnessed in the course of my observations. Noah's initial affect of a stereotypical disengaged adolescent changed into full engagement and a positive attitude toward learning. Throughout the semester, he seemed to come out of his shell; he engaged in music with confidence, often smiling and commenting on the activities. The following is from my observation notes of Noah rehearsing for the final performance:

Noah is playing the guitar on stage. He holds the instrument like an experienced musician, like a professional guitarist. He looks confident, his body moves to the beat, he is lost in the music.

His father explained Noah's strengths in non-verbal, embodied learning in his description of the importance of the arts for tapping into "a different part of the brain:"

> I know he is very artistic and does well in arts. He played the recorder, took cello lessons, flute, self-taught guitar… Ask him to play the guitar for you. He sometimes composes. He likes cartooning and drawing. He needs to be in a setting that makes learning relate in a real and fun way… gets the kids engaged in learning... using a different part of the brain.

In music where Noah was able to successfully participate in learning, there were no instances of oppositional behavior or power struggles with his teacher. He participated enthusiastically, paid attention to details and asked more questions than other students in the class. Noah who had difficulties verbally expressing his ideas communicated the importance of his experience in music by playing the guitar and demonstrating his pride in his musical ability as we talked. This positive experience was important for Noah to counter-balance the years of perceived failure in classes that did not take into account his learning profile in designing instruction.

Joey

> If we didn't have arts…it wouldn't be fun because in art, we, in art we learn about everything that I don't think we would learn in class.
> I rather take art, drama, or music. It's better like, I like it a lot more. I like that because you get to make better sounds, better rhythm, anything…
>
> I have to see it to learn it; otherwise like I don't know like what part of the drum…I need to look at how he does it, instead of me just trying to get myself to do it.
>
> Art is also good because you get to paint a lot.
> To me, I would take arts classes because there's more that you can do. …we get to play like drums, the guitar… it's more stuff that you can do.

Joey was diagnosed with ADHD and Special Learning Disability in reading. He had received speech and language therapy as well as support for English language learners. Though some of the students in the study, such as Joey and Estela spoke Spanish at home, it was clear that they had an underlying language-based disability that affected their receptive and expressive language skills. At UCPCS, where a lot of students came from Spanish speaking homes, those diagnosed with disabilities were thoroughly evaluated to make sure their challenges were not due to speaking English as second language. In my own conversation with Joey it was evident that he struggled to express himself through language, especially when he wanted to communicate complex thoughts. Based on his humanities and inclusion teachers these difficulties manifested themselves in the following ways:

> He definitely has a learning disability in written language. He is below grade level in reading…His grammar and spelling are still really big issues for him. He's not necessarily motivated academically for pure academic reasons…He won't participate in the whole group unless he knows he's supposed to or he's going to be held accountable for it. …He often will come and check in with me to make sure that he understands the directions for an assignment.
>
> He likes for teachers to revise his work constantly…he has difficulty with that; it's his weakness, catching those things when he writes. He has been developing this anxiety around it, like it's going to be wrong, and he wants us to look at it… He needs visual and kinesthetic, being able to work with things; he doesn't do well when you just explain what to do without showing him anything. He needs to visually see what you have.

As Joey himself explained, he was a visual learner; he had to "see it to learn it." He experienced "anxiety" when confronted with academic activities that relied only on verbal and written language. Despite his academic difficulties that were attributed to LD and ADHD, Joey's social connection helped him have a positive attitude toward school. Nonetheless, he showed a strong preference for sports and

participation in arts classes where he used his visual and kinesthetic strengths to learn and perform.

Joey described the importance of his experiences in the arts with an emphasis on opportunities to *do*; he had a clear preference for activities that are physically engaging. Music offered active learning processes that engage the sensorimotor system, such as playing the drums or the guitar. In their review of research on motivation and achievement, Thousand et al. (1997) report that student motivation is enhanced when teachers promote active learning strategies as opposed to instructional strategies such as whole-class lecture, which relegate students to being passive learners (Flavey & Grenot-Scheyer, 1995). Active learning that tapped into Joey's visual and kinesthetic strengths motivated Joey to participate in music with confidence. As Oliver reports, he was not only a participant but a leader:

> …He really did well and he would do transitions! You know he would give signals to everyone to transition! …. I think that when kids find something that makes them unique, they feel good about it and they latch on to it. And for Joey it was the base drum. He loved the base drum.

In the final piece, Joey played a steady beat on the base drum to lead the group through transitions. In contrast to his writing skills in which he had difficulty paying attention to details, he was able focus and attend to other instruments by looking at his classmates to figure out where they were in the piece, knowing when to speed up and when to slow down. His motivation to excel in music where he had the prerequisite skills increased his ability to perform. In contrast to his academic classes where Joey did not participate unless he was held accountable, he was fully engaged in music with greater effort and enthusiasm.

Patrick

> Music just comes naturally! …It's like kind of a way to get your creative energy out, 'cause you're like doing classes all day, and [in the arts] you get to express yourself freely, 'cause a lot of times you have to be silent and stuff in class. It gives you time to like, yeah just express yourself…. It's pretty fun, like learning about Middle Eastern music. I never really knew what kind of music they had. So it was fun learning about it.
> I'm probably best in music or math. And I guess I struggle with, um, writing. To me music and arts are fun, so it's more…it's easier to be engaged and do well in it.

Patrick was diagnosed with sensory integration disorder as a child. Based on his recent school-based evaluation, he was diagnosed with ADHD and "Disruptive Behavior Disorder" (DBD). Since I had never come across "DBD" prior to this study, I researched the term to learn what this label represented. Based on the information I found, similar to "Oppositional Defiant Disorder," "DBD" often coexisted with ADHD. In addition, the year prior to this study he was attacked and mugged by a street gang and subsequently showed signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Though this incident was reported on his recent evaluation, there were no connections made between his "disruptive behavior" and possible PTSD symptoms. His behavior and participation in the humanities class was described as:

> …he's always the last one talking when I'm trying to get the class quiet. He calls out. He pops out of his seat a lot. He'll go to time out… He likes to argue. I think he had more trouble with behavior in math and science. I think he needs more clear structure and a lot of reminders ... He wants to be going around talking all the time. …he can't handle sitting next to someone he likes and working on his own. He doesn't like to write…He won't necessarily push himself to go beyond the standard…

The perception of Patrick as disobedient or disruptive is a common view of students who have sensory and regulatory challenges (ADHD). His inclusion teacher reported that he is seeking "justice" when he questions rules he does not understand.

Students with regulatory disorders have difficulties sitting still and following directions; their sensorimotor system explains their impulsivity and challenges with self-regulation. Rules that require students to behave in ways that they are unable to are not inclusive; highly structured and disciplined classrooms create a context in which students such as Patrick are set up to be disruptive. Patrick had noticed this injustice when he questioned the rules that were imposed on him in his general education classes. Negative responses to his behavior had a negative impact on Patrick's motivation to engage in academics despite his "above average" cognitive ability reported on his educational evaluation. Other research shows that adolescents who experience a history of failure to meet curricular demands demonstrate lower motivation to engage in the learning process(Deshler, 1998).

In music, Patrick was a successful student who was fully engaged in learning. He valued the opportunity to "get your creative energy out" and "express yourself freely, 'cause a lot of times you have to be silent" in other school settings; he did not display signs of "Disruptive Behavior Disorder" during my observations. Patrick's musical strength engaged his mind and body for the duration of classroom activities. The looser structure of group work in music allowed the freedom to move and talk to his peers as they composed rhythms and played the drums. In music Patrick's sensorimotor challenges did not impede him from learning; he was able to engage in the activities expected.

The ability to "maintain cognition, affect, and behavior in order to achieve personal goals" is referred to as "self-regulation" (Zimmerman & Bembenutty, 2003). Baum et al. (1997) also found that students' self-regulation improved in the arts as

they engaged in activities they enjoyed and were able to do. Patrick's natural musical ability maintained his cognitive, affective and behavioral engagement in learning. Greenspan (1998) explains that emotions and intent provide the sense of purpose and organization that regulates the sensory system towards goals and purpose. Unlike his disengagement from academic learning where "he won't necessarily push himself to go beyond the standard," in music Patrick was able to experience being "in the zone" (or in a regulated sensory state) through the engagement of his sensorimotor system and the application of his musical strength.

In contrast to descriptions of Patrick in general education classes where he was often reprimanded for being out of his seat or talking to others, Oliver's reflection of Patrick in music portrays him as a motivated and engaged student:

> Patrick was just incredible! I mean he's a very good musician, and he has a good sense of rhythm, and he's very experimental with instruments. So he can figure an instrument out and figure out good sounds with it and run with it. And he can lead a group and facilitate, and that was like… he was in the zone!

Patrick's engagement in music exemplifies Greenspan's description of the importance of emotions and intent for organization and purpose. Patrick reported that his positive learning experiences in the arts made it "easier to be engaged and do well."

Leo

> I would say that people do much better in the arts…because of course you are going to participate because it's fun to do so……you get to play games while somewhat learning actually.
> Also there could be more energy…and it could be much more fast …and gets much more fun since we always try to make someone laugh, that's the goal of the game; make everyone next to you laugh……we got a lot of laughs…It was really interesting.

> We really learned a lot about Arabic culture…the map, so we learned a little of academic stuff along with having a lot of fun acting it out
> … I enjoy drama …[Improvisation] is like a complicated game; you're essentially adding a new part or an extension to the game, something to make it challenging or easier, or somewhat more active, like an amendment! Would be a good word for it… when you make a game more complicated, when you suddenly let people get out of the game…that often makes people more alarmed and more participating, would be a good word.

Though Leo had characteristics common to Asperger's, he was diagnosed with Specific Learning Disability in written expression; his diagnosis only captured his academic difficulty, when his greatest area of challenge was pragmatics and social interactions. His humanities teacher describes his writing:

> …He talks like an adult, so he writes like an adult too but he doesn't necessarily know where to put a comma. His writing is actually above grade level in terms of content… …very persuasive…He has really complex sentence structure; he doesn't necessarily have the grammar and punctuation to back it up… He can't spell at all…

Leo was advanced in most school subjects such as history, science and math and reported that the other students resented him for his academic superiority.

> …He reads these really intense college level non-fiction books. But if you get him to read out loud…when he hits a word he doesn't know and I ask him what he thinks it might be … he just keeps going.

It was very challenging for Leo to make friends because he had difficulty controlling his impulse to take over conversations; most of his communication at school was with teachers who were more willing to listen to him.

> …He would only talk about one thing for a while. Now he's had enough obsessions where he can switch between them…he watches the news every night and he often will come in and be talking about something, and I'll realize that I heard the same thing on NPR. He's really into what's going on and wants to make connections and tell people about it.

Obsessive tendencies to repeatedly talk about one topic, difficulties with social interactions, and a strong auditory memory are characteristics of individuals on the autism spectrum. Greenspan (1998) explains that such children often seem to lack a basic sense of purpose: some "can use words, and perhaps imitate the words of others, but cannot guide those words into purposeful intentional communication" or "make their needs known to others, to respond to the ideas of others, and to hold coherent, logical conversation; the basic sense of purpose that organizes the child's behavior is challenged" (p. 107). Greenspan's explanation sheds light on Leo's reliance on academic and concrete knowledge, or his repetition of ideas or information presented on NPR, as ways of connecting to others when he really does not know how to hold an intentional, purposeful conversation.

> I think he's kind of an eccentric kid. I think given the opportunity, a lot of kids would just step all over him… (Linda).

Leo was an uninhibited, natural actor. Being "eccentric" in drama was a positive quality. His enthusiasm and energy made him stand out and shine on stage. The following descriptions by Leo's mother and Linda, the drama teacher describe his success in drama.

> He's a kid who is very at ease with speaking; no problem getting up in front of people and speaking. He is an unusual child…He was like their star student in Improv.

> Leo is, you know he'll talk in front of a thousand people he doesn't care! He's awesome like that. …Every time I need a volunteer he's there, he's got lots of energy…he's very enthusiastic, very active, whether you know it's discussions or moving around…

Unlike most adolescents, Leo who talked like and adult and acted like a much younger child than his age was a self-motivated student. As shown in Linda's

description, being “active” and “moving around” are allowed and seen as positive forms of engagement in drama. Similar to his previously mentioned classmates with sensory integration challenges, sitting through academic classes is an oppressive expectation of someone with Leo’s level of energy; when he was not engaged in an activity, he constantly moved around in his chair, swinging his feet back and forth as he stared aimlessly around the room. He reported the value of opportunities for movement in drama: “There could be more energy…and it could be much more fast …” not “so regulated.”

Leo was very verbal and expressive, qualities that along with his lack of inhibition made him a great actor, whereas his pragmatic language difficulties had a negative impact on his ability to have two-way communication. He tended to obsess with his own ideas and go off in tangents in conversation without taking the others’ point of view into account. Activities, such as improvisation (Leo’s favorite drama class) guided Leo’s disorganized mind by creating structure for his creativity. The rules of the games they played set boundaries that he may otherwise not be able to impose on himself, as he had the tendency to get carried away with his ideas and obsessions. Leo describes the rules of the game for improvisation:

> Well, you can’t necessarily say whatever you want, you have to say something within the lines of the game we’re playing… for example whatever your character… something you could put your own sense into it; many times you get to choose your character which is another thing, or choose someone else’s character…

Leo’s description shows the balance between structure and freedom in the way Linda designed students’ experiences. Leo needed the rules but he also needed to make choices and express his creativity. The guidelines for improvisation allowed

Leo to choose the character he wanted to role play, but he had to think about his lines to make sure they matched the character. Drama provided an excellent opportunity for Leo to enhance his pragmatic understanding through acting and role playing emotions and affect that are appropriate to a set of circumstances. Greenspan explains that while "for most of us this ability to connect our feelings with our behavior and words is automatic," as "underlying our choice of words, facial expressions, body postures, and other behavior are our desires, wishes, and inclinations," many children, especially those with autistic tendencies lack this ability (p. 108). Greenspan explains that children with these difficulties need more opportunities to integrate their emotions in purposeful communication. Engagement of the sensorimotor system to act out dramatic scenes enhances the conceptual understanding of emotions underlying actions and provides a medium for pragmatic discernment for children or adolescents like Leo.

In Leo's case, the standards discourse and way of implementing inclusion and conceptualizing educational opportunities has created a context in which his obvious needs with regards to developing his own sense of purpose and communicating his desires is overlooked. His diagnosis of LD in writing shows the way students are diagnosed based on the symptoms of their disability evidenced by difficulty in school-based skills, rather than through a holistic view of the individual's learning requirements according to the source of his/or her struggles. Because of his academic superiority, Leo's tremendous difficulties with communication that had a severe impact on his social and emotional life were not addressed in school. His terrible social isolation was secondary to his "above the standard" academic performance.

David

> I just really like the arts; it brings out the best in me.
> I like drama better cause you get to express more …you express yourself with how you act…you can act like you are sad or you can act bad, or if you're happy, you just act pretty good…like you yell……[in visual arts] you can like show, instead of acting how you feel you show how it is on your piece…you get to express yourself on paper and in drama in acting, and in music you express yourself by how you play…because you get to show….yeah it makes me more attracted to that and it makes me think more.
>
> Like on a day that we have arts, like if we did bad on like a math test, we would know that we are going to have fun in the arts class, so like it doesn't matter how bad your day is; it will be better in arts.

David was diagnosed with ADHD and Special Learning Disabilities in reading and writing. His mother described his academic difficulties in the subsequent paragraph.

> He has a hard time with reading and writing. He had it from a while back. From the first grade …he was just anxious to learn, learn, learn, learn, but his building blocks just weren't strong enough because he was too busy trying to learn just everything… He needs to slow down… his organizational skills…

David's supportive family was a great asset that helped him cope with his difficulties and offered him a level of protection against emotional harm from his learning differences. According to his humanities teacher, he was not yet as concerned about the social issues typical to adolescents. She described David as:

> … a great kid. He has a lot of writing issues, and reading issues. He's pretty below grade level. He's improving in reading; not quite so much in writing. If you work on something with him he gets it. …Actually his writing is interesting and his facts are good; he can organize paragraphs but if you ask him to write an introduction or a conclusion, you're not going to get one. He also has huge organizational issues and he needs help to keep track of things. He has trouble with multiple-step projects. He needs a checklist; he can't keep it in his head otherwise.

Even for David, a motivated student who did not experience social or emotional problems, the academic classroom was a place where though "he's

improving" and if "you work with him he gets it," he is "pretty below grade level."His case shows that even in the best of circumstances, a student with sensory integration and language-based difficulties will not measure up to the "standards" that are predetermined and based on expectations of "typically" developing students. Regardless of progress made at an individual level; students with special needs will continue to perform "below the standard" in "inclusion" classrooms.

When I first observed David in drama, he did not fit my stereotype of an outgoing, expressive student who would love drama and acting. I often struggled to hear him on stage and assumed that he was shy. Yet in classroom discussions and rehearsal she was very engaged and focused. He often laughed and really seemed to enjoy acting. As Linda explained:

> He's one of these kids where he may not feel totally comfortable saying something funny he notices to the whole group, but he'll be sitting next to me and a couple of other kids, he will say that "Oh, I noticed that blah blah blah…" and then we'll all crack up. So he's not like a Leo who likes speaking up in front of everybody but he's very…he won't always necessarily volunteer to do something, but if you say, "David, I would love to see you take a turn," or "David what do you think we should do for this scene?" he's like "Okay!"
> His sense of humor, his comic timing has always been a strength of his so…he chose a scene where …the one with "if you were my husband I'd give you poison. If you were my wife I would gladly drink it;" he wanted that right away.
> But he's an interesting kid because a lot of kids sort of, from a drama point of view, they either always want to act, or they always want to be behind the scene. David has actually done both. He's been in after school plays with me as an actor, he's been an assistant director, he's done props… I think he really likes stories…

David's story showed that the arts are not only beneficial for the students who may be natural musicians or actors, or those who are artistically gifted and talented, but for students like David who love and enjoy the arts, and whose learning style

matches the activities in an arts-based classroom. The arts allow David to integrate his sensory needs in learning. With regards to movement, David explains:

> In science you don't get to move you just stay in one area and do your work. Kind of like the opposite of drama.

His mother also emphasized the importance of movement and embodied engagement in drama to for David:

> We chose this school because of the drama program. He has done very well because of it and chooses it each time they have electives…I think this is sort of his niche…
> When you come to a school that doesn't have arts or any type of drama program, they're sitting in the classroom. [In arts] he gets to move around, he gets to get his muscles going, and he's just bloomed, he loves it! He wants to do anything that has to do with drama.

In addition to freedom of movement in learning in drama, David's mother reported the importance of acquiring language-based skills, such as vocabulary and reading through activities involved in or inspired by his engagement in drama:

> With drama he's just building off of that…. They read so he's improving his reading because he wants to read more scripts, and he's listening to old television, what he calls black and white movies, so there are different words that you don't hear now year 2009 and there was one word, what did he say,… *impregnated* or something, so there's that relationship with building his vocabulary…

Other research also showed the improvement of literacy skills through arts integration in the curriculum (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). Acting in drama enhanced David's conceptual understanding of vocabulary; the use of affect in dramatic performances attached meaning to linguistic symbols (Greenspan, 1998). Hence David was motivated to learn beyond classroom requirements by watching movies and reading scripts. As Linda explained, David "loves stories;" the stories read and

acted out in drama, created context for words and concepts presented through the written word, making reading a more engaging activity.

Similar to his peers, Estela and Joey, David mentioned the importance of active learning processes and *showing* your work in drama.

> I learn better in drama 'cause we're having fun while we're doing it; not just like trying to take notes and memorize it. We are like playing games to help us learn.

David's appreciation of the activities involved in drama shows the power of the arts to engage students with language-based and regulatory challenges. David's statement shows the importance of conceptual understanding through sensorimotor, embodied engagement in learning. The visual components of *seeing* or *showing* in the arts enhanced David's cognitive engagement; "It makes me think more." Jorgensen, et al.'s (1997) study of inclusive curricular elements point to the importance of tapping into a variety of intelligences as a way to assure that each student can engage in learning and show their understanding through projects that allow students to use their preferred learning style. In drama, David was included in learning through his visual strengths; the opportunity to *see* or *show* enabled him engaged deeper by reflecting on what he had learned. In language-based classrooms, LD students' struggles with learning prevent them from opportunities to engage their metacognitive skills, or understanding of their knowledge (Hresko & Reid, 1981). As students in this study reported, reading and writing requires so much "work" for them; the extra effort these students spent on simply completing tasks in their academic classes prevented them thinking about or enjoying their learning experiences. David reported:

> [In visual arts] you get to express yourself on paper and in drama in acting, and in music you express yourself by how you play…because you get to show….yeah it makes me more attracted to that and it makes me think more.

Non-verbal and affective means of learning in drama provided a medium that facilitated metacognitive engagement for students like David who struggled with language. According to his mother:

> … for him to be able to express himself in drama I think is fantastic. And Ms. H is fantastic as well. She sort of gives him that little space where he can wiggle and do his own little thing and that's very, very important.

The "space to wiggle" is important for David, who similar to his peers, Patrick, Noah, Leo, Estela, and Joey, was diagnosed with ADHD and experienced difficulties regulating his mind and body.

In sum, David who was funny but not overly extroverted, and who similar to most of his peers in this study had difficulties with attention, restlessness, and language-based academic tasks found inclusive learning opportunities in drama where he was able to engage his sense of humor and body through active learning processes; according to his mother, drama enabled him to grow intellectually and socially.

Alba

> I have more passion for dancing cause since I was a little girl I danced… Well I would do arts anyway inside or outside of school, because I'll just start drawing in my notebook….
> [In arts] you get to express yourself…dancing… it's just a natural thing and it's expressive… I can really get into a song …if it's slow or fast. I also know rhythm. I do better when I can really get into something.

Alba was diagnosed with Specific Learning Disabilities in math, reading, and writing. She was new to the school and looked older and more mature than her same-age peers. Her teachers did not discuss the ways in which her learning disabilities

affected her academic work but in my conversations with Alba, I noticed that she had difficulties with expressive language; she offered short answers and seemed to struggle to come up with words to express herself. Alba reported that she preferred to attend arts classes because: "I'm not the type of student that likes math and science."

Her humanities teacher explained that Alba needed to be engaged in debates and have a leadership role in groups because "it's hard for her to just sit and work." Her teachers' reports focused on their concern for Alba's involvement with negative social peers after school, though she knew how to "compartmentalize" her social and emotional concerns and "keep herself under control very well" in school.

> I think she has a lot of close friends outside of school, many of whom I think are doing bad things. I honestly don't know how involved she is in it. She talks a lot about her friends, saying things like this kid got shot or stabbed at the metro and she knew him and was writing RIP. She knows it all.
>
> Her situation is so unstable right now after school…I've heard of things that have happened to her… I wish it was more stable so those things wouldn't happen to her. …I think she has too much experience; she has experienced too much already, for her age.

Fleming et al. (2002) found that LD students had significantly higher levels of involvement with negative peers than those without (p. 56). The authors suggested adolescents with LD were more susceptible to negative peer influences because they experience difficulties socially integrating in school, where they feel inferior to their peers because of their academic difficulties. Similar to Estela and Noah who were emotionally mature and aware of the social implications of their learning differences, Alba's academic challenges had a negative impact on her self-concept. According to her IEP, Alba received counseling services "to stabilize her moods and build self esteem so that she may effectively cope with frustrations and stressors."

I did not notice Alba's areas of weakness in drama where she seemed confident and engaged. Linda was also surprised that Alba had learning disabilities:

> When we read scenes aloud…she read beautifully; she volunteered…she had no trouble reading… so I was shocked when I found out she had an IEP….No, I never would have guessed...

The story-telling component of drama tapped into Alba's social strengths; she was able to follow social stories at an advanced level. She reported that she liked to read and write stories. Though she participated in class discussions and volunteered to answer questions, she was not comfortable with acting. Linda explained:

> Alba is…not necessarily as active as other kids; she holds back a little bit, if we're doing something where we are doing Improv on stage…often she's not the kid who raises her hand and wants to play; but at the same time she's always active in that when she is in the audience she's offering suggestions…She's engaged; she's just not as physical, as enthusiastic,…she's much more…reticent …a little more… private…?

In the final performance, Alba chose to be a narrator. She was more engaged in story-telling and discussions in drama. She explained that she did not like to be an actress; her problems with expressive language supported her choice to participate as a narrator, reading from a script.

Alba expressed herself through visual arts and dance. Linda reported that Alba was a talented visual artist who painted the stage sets for their plays. Alba explained that she most enjoyed dancing: "I have more passion for dancing 'cause since I was a little girl I danced." She knew a range of dances from ballet to hip-hop, and her favorite Latin dances such as Bachata, Merengue, and Salsa. She mentioned that she was willing to perform on stage if dancing was involved. King (2003) explains that students' perceptions about themselves and the tasks involved in the classroom environment influence students' motivation to engage. Self-efficacy leads

to behavioral, cognitive, and motivational engagements in learning which in turn affect future feelings of self-efficacy (Pintrich & Linnenbrink, 2003).

While the arts program at UCPCS did not include dance classes, Oliver, offered a Latin dance class as part of the music electives in which Alba participated. Alba described:

> It was mostly Spanish people in that class so they already knew how to dance it; but I think I had some advantages since I have more experience.

In dance class, unlike her general education classes that involved language-based activities, Alba felt confident. Given difficulties with self-esteem, having superior skills in a classroom context provided her with a positive experience where she could engage through her kinesthetic and expressive strengths. While UCPCS offered music and drama classes after school, other than the Latin Dance class offered once a year by Oliver, there were no other opportunities for Alba to participate in dance. In addition, Alba's grandmother reported that she could no longer afford to pay for Alba's dance classes outside of school since she was currently unemployed. Dance classes at school would enhance Alba's self-esteem and help her feel included in the school context. Alba's case confirms the importance of inclusive learning opportunities provided through various forms of non-verbal, embodied engagement for students with LD and/or ADHD.

In sum the students' statements are reflections of their experiences with embodied engagement and non-verbal learning opportunities in the arts. The teachers' and parents' reports contextualized the value of these experiences within the students' overall learning opportunities in school. These narrative accounts showed that students who have difficulties with expressive and receptive language, attention

and hyperactivity, and social/emotional challenges, (problems that often coexist for students with special needs), find unique learning opportunities in the arts.

In contrast to the common expectation to sit silently and learn through verbal and written language in most traditional classes, in the arts the students had the opportunity to move and engage their bodies in active learning processes. The non-verbal nature of activities in the arts (playing an instrument, drawing, and including gestures, affect, and movement) opened avenues of learning in which LD students could successfully engage. As stated by the students, in arts classes they learn by *seeing* and *doing* and they can *show* what they have learned. The opportunity to express their feelings and knowledge within the non-verbal/ affective components of learning in the arts decreased their oppositional resistance developed from negative experiences with standards-based curriculum and normative expectations.

Classroom environments that allow students to engage various parts of their sensorimotor system increase their opportunities to learn. These experiences in turn enhance their overall learning in specific areas, such as improvements in literacy and vocabulary within the additional context provided through stories, bodily engagement and visual displays. The arts also increase students' cognitive, behavioral and motivational engagement through activities that tap into their strengths and enhance their self-efficacy beliefs, as supported by prior research based on the social cognitive theory of learning (Pintrich & Linnenbrink, 2003).

Theme 2: Student Ownership of the Learning Process

"You get to create what's your own;
it has some thought part of it centered near you"

Similar to the earlier data presented in the student's narrative accounts, Baum et al. (1997) found that students' success in the arts was related to the nature of arts instruction which relies on a mixture of both verbal and nonverbal teaching. The authors report that parallel to the sequence advocated by cognitive developmentalists (Piaget and Brunet), in arts instruction nonverbal instruction often precedes the verbal and is given more emphasis. Findings from this study demonstrated that the opportunity to learn and perform through non-verbal means was an important benefit for students who had language-based difficulties. Importantly Baum et al. (1997) also found enhancements of self-regulatory skills from participation in the arts.

A similar finding in this study was students' ability to monitor their own learning in the music class. The sense of responsibility for one's own learning was a related to a) students' ability to independently engage in the activity (playing the drums), b) the opportunity to participate equally or through their areas of strength alongside their peers without the fear of failure, c) Teachers' respect for adolescents' need for independence and delegation of responsibility through trust. For example, Noah who at the start of my observations seemed disconnected as shown by his flat affect became a motivated participant in music when he was given the freedom and space to experiment and improvise on the drums and guitar. Though the activities I observed in the drama class were more structured, in their narrative accounts students referred to opportunities to integrate their creativity as they wrote scripts and improvised in drama electives offered previously in the year.

Finally, the students' stories support the importance of self-efficacy and motivation in learning found in other research on adolescents with LD. Similar to

Swanson and Deshler's(2003) findings, the students in this study were negatively affected by the challenging standards-based curriculum and testing environmentwhich created a context in which they struggled and had more experiences of failure than their same-age peers. As evidenced in the humanities teacher's descriptions of the student participants' performance in academic classes, they were often "below" or "far below" the standard (for the grade level). This current implementation of inclusion disempowers LD adolescents and decreases their motivation and engagement in learning.

Torgesen (1989) found that the characteristics emphasized in the literature on adolescents with LD (i.e., low self-concept, lack of motivation, deficits in cognitive strategies) are consequences rather than causes of their learning disability. He found that these secondary traits are not less important for understanding the instructional requirements of adolescents with LD than primary, or specific characteristics, because once acquired, they can act causally in further limiting the student's ability to acquire new information an skills (Torgesen, 1989, p. 167). Therefore, the opportunities to enhance students' self-concept, motivation and cognitive understanding through their engagement in the arts have an important impact on their overall learning and achievement in school.

Conversely, this section shows how arts education can be a powerful tool for developing self-efficacy through ownership of learning. In the following statements, the students describe one of the benefits of the arts as the opportunity to engage in activities that allow them the freedom to create *what's their own*:

As long as you are doing something, if it has some thought part of it centered near you, it's fun for me. You kind of make up the story yourself. It gives you a lot of control over it. (Leo)

If you ask me my two favorite classes I would give you music technology… where we made our own sounds using a program on the computer …and Improv, because that is like a fun game class; it's much less controlled; not so much regulated…you have much more control. (Leo)

Not in like regular classes but in arts a lot of times…in arts you get to create what's your own. There are no worksheets or anything….I think I am better [at creating]…it's like kind of a way to get your creative energy out, 'cause you're like doing classes all day, and [in the arts] you get to express yourself freely…it gives you time to like, yeah just express yourself and be creative. (Patrick)

Like when we do arts,like in drama, when we do Improv, you create stuff in your head; and like if I am writing I think that what can I write that would fit with this? Like in drama, what can I do to make this play better? I am like better in writing because I am very creative (David).
In musicyou get to have a little bit of freedom to do what you want...'cause like you get to make your own beat, and then like the group, they add their own… (Estela)

'Cause , I get to like, in academics, they teach you, but in like art and drama you do, you do your own thing …Like you have more choice in what you do. (Estela)

I just like the scales and the tunes… and you can do basically whatever you want.(Noah)

Not following a script gives us our way to say really whatever we want as long as it is appropriate … it also means that we have a bit more control and we don't already know what's going to happen… because anyone can say anything and it's like more real life I guess … you have no idea what could happen… where in a script you know Romeo and Juliet they're both gonna die, unhappy ending, blah blah blah …[I like] something you could put your own sense into it. Many times you get to choose your character…
We each got like a prop and we each had to make something new with it. (Leo)

…If you wanted a part you would just pick it, and then you tried to add to it… (David).

> Let's say what I want to do professionally is to study to be a dance choreographer, 'cause that's what I always wanted to be since I was a little girl…(Alba)

In their examples, the students expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to "create what's your own" in the arts. They also valued ownership of the learning process, mentioning the importance of making "our own sounds,""your own beat," and the chance to "have more choice in what you do" and "put your own sense into it." This much valued space and time to create *what's their own*, is in part created by the nature of the activities in the arts, but is also highly influenced by teachers' pedagogical styles. The most remarkable aspect of these classes was the students' ability to take ownership and responsibility for their work in independent group activities where they directed and integrated their creativity in learning. When Oliver gave them time to work in groups without his direct supervision, the students were highly motivated and monitored themselves and each other; Oliver served as a guide in *their* learning process.

Processes that allowed them to integrate their unique sensorimotor strengths, their affective expression, and their ideas in the activities in music and drama provided a space for students to fully engage themselves in learning. The importance of the opportunity to make choices, create projects, and show their strengths in the process cannot be overemphasized for students with LD and/or ADHD. Given the overwhelming focus on "standards" and prescribed goals and expectations for each grade level, these students spend most of their time in classes in which they struggle to keep up with the requirements for participation and success. At times they fail to understand why their teachers require so much from them; as they report, in academic

classes you "work, work, work,…" This "work" takes a lot more effort on behalf of students with special needs for whom the standards in general education classes were not designed. The focus of inclusion programs on students' weaknesses deprives them of opportunities to engage their strengths and experience success. As reported by a parent who participated in the study:

> My problem with inclusion is that it's very good with pointing out the problems but not at challenging them. They concentrate on weaknesses. The chance to think and create their own ideas gives students ownership of the learning process; the opportunity to integrate their strengths in learning enhances students' self-efficacy beliefs and empowers them to take responsibility for their learning.

In their research, Stevenson and Deasy (2005) also found that students' arts-based experiences allowed them to use their imagination in learning; this experience "mattered to students" and "students felt like they mattered in their schools" (Ibid, p. 18). They concluded that "mattering" was the central concept that teachers, students, and school administrators expressed when they described the impact of the arts on student learning. Similarly, this study showed that the provision of opportunities to create and own their learning experience in the arts motivated adolescents with special needs by giving them a chance to show their strengths within the school community. The school director described the power of "arts as an incredible motivator" in an example of one such student's successful experience in the arts where he had the chance to show create and perform his own play:

> The motivation…you could see that from the way he put the whole program together by himself, and he wrote the script himself. I feel like [the arts are] an incredible motivator for kids and it's an entry point that lets them practice other skills, where they may not be as strong, through something that they are successful with. …

Based on my experiences with these students, those with underlying sensory integration challenges often have creative minds. Their weaknesses based on executive functioning and regulatory disorders lead to less structured experiences and perceptions that can have artistic qualities. In addition, those with sensory integration challenges do not necessarily have difficulties with sensory perception; some have exceptional strengths in visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or musical sensation and perception. For example, Leo's strong visual and auditory memories allow him to memorize large quantities of information. Others such as Patrick and Noah have exceptional musical talents. These characteristics can lead to more creative minds and unique perceptions that cannot always be expressed within the standards-based curricula of general education classes; whereas in the arts they have the chance for "getting their creative energy out" and engaging in work that shows their unique abilities and perceptions. This experience in turn empowers students with special needs by showing them that they have something of value to contribute in a school setting.

In addition to the nature of the activities in the arts, teachers' pedagogical styles have a tremendous influence on the amount of freedom for creativity and ownership of learning students are provided with. Linda, the drama teacher and arts director at UCPCS sees the importance of making choices and having opportunities for creative expression for students with special needs.

> For me it comes down to choice. I think, the Responsive Classroom Model, one of our school's pedagogies is hugely about choice. So I think it's one of the few things we can help kids with, and I think especially some kids…there are kids that are good at anything; they would be successful and happy in anything. But we have some kids where, … it's not as easy for them to feel

> successful and happy, so I think they should get to choose what makes them feel successful and happy. (Linda)

One example of providing students with choices in drama was allowing them to pick characters, narrate, direct, or work on the stage.

> I think Alba, she pretty much chose to be the narrator. …that was totally her. I think it was partly, she likes to have a script, and partly I think she's not at a point where she really likes being a character. She's okay being up on stage but just reading is a more comfortable thing for her to do than try to be somebody else. (Linda)

Students were also allowed to change scripts, as Leo described, "put their own sense into it." These choices provided opportunities for students to engage their strengths and avoid activities that were uncomfortable. Similar to the findings of this study, Jorgensen et al. (1997) report the importance of teachers providing choiceas an opportunity for students to use their favored learning styles as an important component of inclusive education (p. 7).

Oliver also understood the value of freedom and choice in the arts. He explained:

> …if they feel free to be themselves and to experiment with different things, the students learn more, they progress more, they grow more… their natural creativity is released and all this amazing stuff happens in the classroom!

As Oliver and I reflected on the MENA unit, I asked him what he found to be the basis for the students' high level of motivation and engagement in the class.

> I think for seventh and eighth graders, being respected as young adults, and feeling respected as intelligent beings is really important…when given the opportunity, they rise to the occasion. Number one, it's feeling trusted and respected by your teacher to use your time efficiently, and, at least the kids that I worked with this year, they responded very well to that opportunity…amazingly well. And so, I think that when they feel trusted and respected by their teacher, that's one thing that makes them feel excited about

> doing something special; so they really go after it…with a passion. They feel like they've been empowered…

Based on my prior experiences teaching individuals with sensory integration challenges, and as evidenced by students' and teachers' narrative accounts from this study, these students have a great need for autonomy. As previously mentioned, the rigid curricular demands in most academic classes place them at a greater disadvantage due to their difficulties with regulating their bodies and their thoughts, impinging on their sense of autonomy. In contrast, as Oliver explained, the freedoms of choice as well as the time and space to experiment help them feel empowered and passionate about learning. The following statement by Estela, validates Oliver's assessment of the importance of choice and autonomy for adolescents, especially those who have more difficulty following rules and structures:

> We got to do things we wanted but at the same time did things his way too. I guess that he trusts us 'cause we're getting older and we're coming into adults and teenagers we're supposed to be and he respects that, and he once was a teenager so he understands how people feel and what they want. 'Cause the other teachers, they're kind of like…strict… and Mr. Jenkins is like a laid back cool person. Like he understands where we're coming from and that we need breaks sometimes.

It is important to acknowledge that not all arts teachers allow similar opportunities for creativity as those granted to UCPCS students in their music and drama classes. Teachers' pedagogical styles vary with regards to how much freedom they allow. Arts teachers have an advantage; unlike academic subject teachers working within the framework of NCLB standards and testing requirements who have to prepare students for tests in their particular subject area, arts teachers have the flexibility to allow for more creativity and experimentation in their classes.

> I feel like because we don't have the pressure of testing, and we don't have the pressure of curriculum and the benchmarks on us, it's a little easier for us as specialists to be less structured. (Oliver)

During the last two decades, there has been a growing emphasis on standards for all subjects, including the arts. However, arts teachers are not required to implement the standards as rigidly as other teachers; they have more freedom mainly because there are no high-stakes standardized assessments in the arts. While the skills that students learn in arts classes are important, for the students who participated in this study, the space to create *what's their own* is even more crucial as it may only be offered in the arts. This is an important consideration for both arts teachers and administrators designing arts programs. As the standards movement grows, similar to other areas of learning, the arts standards rather than students' needs and interests may drive arts education curriculum planning. Other than the possible influences of national standards for the arts, individual teacher's preferences and pedagogical styles play a role in the opportunities they provide students. For example, as described in Chapter 4, the visual arts teacher adopted a more structured skills-based approach compared to the music and drama teachers:

> I use the national standards, and I really believe that at that age level there are some skills that kids should be exposed to and able to practice; the next year you can work upon that and so on and so forth. … I actually begin by painting still life's in pre-K, and it kind of goes up to fourth grade before they get to choose electives, and you can see every year how much their skills develop and the language develops, simply because you are exposing them all the time (Allison).

Alison also values students' creativity but feels limited by her perception of her responsibility as a teacher or the expectations represented by the standards she calls "checklists:"

> And this (*holding up an abstract painting done by a student*) is like a breath of fresh air! In every grade level I try to have just one project where it's purely either abstract, or where they're kind of relating to a piece or representing a piece…and just being in the paint with a creative touch… and that is just a pure kinesthetic connection to their materials. …so I really try to create a little bit of space where kids can kind of use art as pure expression without being literal. But then again you know I have all the other checklists I have to get through as well.

Allison who had a lot of experience with students with special needs was able to "meet them where they were at." Though she did not provide them with as much space for creativity or ownership of learning, she taught in ways that were considerate of their learning styles. Yet based on the findings of this study regarding students' perceptions of the value of choice, her self-imposed curriculum may lower students' motivation to engage if there are predetermined rules of engagement in the arts. For students with both language and regulatory challenges, their difficulties processing verbal explanations, sitting in silence, and directing their attention to the teacher excludes them from learning opportunities that require these abilities.

Oliver explained the competing priorities between standards-based approaches to teaching the arts and the looser pedagogical approaches that give students the space to explore:

> As a teacher, you have to find a balance between helping somebody make a personal connection to an art form, and giving them techniques and skills to pursue it. It's an art, to find the balance between teaching things, but also letting kids discover.
> Truthfully, if a person hasn't tapped into that sort of personal connection, then in my opinion, all the skills and all the technique and all the terminology that you have developed doesn't mean a thing. Whereas, if somebody has tapped into a real personal connection to something, and really believes that they could do it, then all of that will come.

Patrick, representing a student's perspective supports Oliver's approach:

> Probably, … 'cause he didn't say play this music, play this piece; he let us create our own music so, it was showing that everybody can create that kind of music, it's like everybody can do it. I like to create my own stuff.

As students were engaged on their own terms, they connected to Arabic drumming by feeling that they "can do" what it takes to create the rhythms. The freedom to choose enhanced students' self-perceptions of success and decreased their resistance. In my observations, I did not witness any situations in music or drama in which learning was disrupted to deal with a student's behavior; when students were fully engaged in learning, they did not have an incentive or the time to be oppositional because they were participating in activities of their choice. Oliver reported that the more he allowed for choices in his class, the more students learned and the better they behaved.

> It makes me be able to focus on what's important, rather than focus on behavior…You know there are a lot of kids who have struggled with [the rules] in the past who really thrived, and I didn't have any trouble with them at all… really active kids like a few of the kids who just can't stop talking or banging or …Patrick, Estela, and James… they are some of the most active kids I know, as far as having a hard time sitting, listening, following directions... But you put them in a situation…in a group with four of their classmates, and you give them privacy to work, and they just become leaders! They can put together an amazing mini production with their classmates

Cooper and Valli's (1996) application of a social constructivist approach to inclusion supports the findings of this study with regards to inclusive learning environments. The authors explain that participation is enhanced through engagement in "active processes in which students construct and interpret social and cognitive aspects of learning" (p. 143). Baum et al. (1997) also found that students assume greater responsibility for their learning through active learning processes in

the arts where they can set their own goals and try new skills, than in classrooms where they are expected to adopt more passive roles.

In sum, based on this study's findings, the freedom to make choices and engage creativity in the arts are important benefits of the arts for students with LD and ADHD. Teachers' pedagogical styles are mediating factors that determine the extent to which students are provided with these opportunities. When students' creativities and preferred styles (often in line with their areas of strength) are engaged, they experience ownership of learning. The resulting sense of empowerment decreases negative behaviors. The opportunity to choose in arts-based classes creates inclusive learning opportunities for students with special needs, especially for adolescents who are less likely in activities that forecast failure or embarrassment. The push for curricular standards even in the arts jeopardizes these mentioned benefits related to choice, creativity, and freedom for students who most need them.

Theme 3: Social and Pedagogical Context of Learning

"In arts there is no wrong answer; it's a safer social environment"

> I participate a lot. I participate better in drama than in math. 'Cause in arts there is no wrong answer, but in math there is only one way to answer. And like in arts classes you kind of feel more safer than in the math class or science class. (David)
>
> Classes is all work and tests, and, right and wrong… and I just don't like Humanities…in humanities, well there's grammar which is right or wrong, but you don't know if it's right or wrong because it has weird rules. And in math it's just right or wrong, one plus one is two; it's not four, it's not three, it's two. (Noah)
>
> I actually would enjoy the arts being a bit more complicated but when it comes to academics, like, Spanish language, do not under any circumstances

> overcomplicate it! I like complicated games; I hate complicated spelling! In fact, do we really need it? Can we just say him? Do we need him and her to be changed to a different word? (Leo)
>
> I like coming to my specials [arts electives] 'cause I'm not the type of student that likes math and science… (Alba)
>
> I like arts classes and I think that it is safe 'cause in other classes like math, I'm not good at math; it's just boring. (Estela)
>
> [Writing] no, no; not fun. I don't know. It just seems like too much work like you have to back up everything you say even though they probably know what you mean anyway. (Patrick)
>
> It's different because in arts, you're basically like doing stuff you can do; in class it's mostly, a lot of work, and in specials [arts]…. there's a lot more to do. (Joey)

The third theme was related to students' positive experiences of the socially safe environment of arts classes where they could participate in learning without the fear of failure. Wang (1997) found that important aspects of inclusive learning environments include appropriate level of task difficulty for students, and positive student-teacher interactions that contribute to students' self esteem and foster a sense of membership in the school. The students in this study experienced positive interactions with their teachers in music and drama because they had the ability to successfully engage in these classes, and because of the teachers' pedagogical tact and thoughtfulness with regards to their needs. The students' statements show that the arts offered a "safer learning environment," by providing them with opportunities to engage in activities that they *can do*.

Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) sheds light on the importance of learning opportunities that are within students' reach. He defined ZPD as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined

by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In other words, the concept refers to the distance between what students can already do and what they need to learn with guidance. Based on this theory, tasks that are too challenging can frustrate students and decrease their motivation to engage. Vygotsky recommended educational experiences that are in students' ZPD in order to encourage their engagement in learning. This study shows that the arts provided experiences that were within LD students' ZPD. The skills required for participation in activities in drama and music were at levels that allowed LD students to engage and further their learning without creating stress that they experienced in other classes where they did not have the necessary basic skills. At the same time as music and drama were safer learning environments, the teaching methodologies as well as learning through modalities that engaged LD students' strengths facilitated their progress towards more advanced cognitive understanding and performance in various areas. For example, Linda's scaffolding methods of teaching concepts such as *antihero* and "Wise in his foolishness and foolish in his wisdom" advanced students' vocabulary and cognitive understanding beyond what they already knew. The progression through their ZPD was facilitated by the context provided in drama where students had the opportunity to *experience* these concepts through physical and gestural expression involved in *acting* and *seeing* their meanings through their own recreation of the stories on stage.

In music class, Oliver guided students in their ZPD by engaging their interests in the learning process. Since students' interests often coincide with their areas of

strength, giving them the freedom to choose their own means of engagement through a preferred musical instrument, or allowing them to create their own rhythms within the structure of Arabic music invited students to reach beyond what they already knew how to do comfortably. In this context students were self-motivated and their engagement in the creative activities in music allowed them to experiment, learn, and reach a higher level of performance. These experiences in turn enhanced their self-efficacy by providing the opportunity to create something new and of value that *showed* the result of their new learning, a musical piece that they owned. Therefore, in the arts students with LD and ADHD learned through their ZPD and were guided beyond their comfort zone through meaningful educational opportunities in a safer social environment that reduced their vulnerability to disengagement that results from learning only in their areas of weakness.

Wolf (2007) explains that multiple modes of representation, multiple modes of expression, and multiple forms of engagement in learning in the arts provide students with disabilities the *opportunity to understand*. Similarly, Stevenson and Deasy's (2005) found that in the arts students are included in lessons and classroom activities for which they may otherwise lack the basic skills required for participation through different ways to access the curriculum that may be more in line with their areas of strength. As mentioned, these processes allowed the student participants to engage their strengths and take part in classroom activities and discussions based on their ability to understand and live up to their teachers' expectations.

In line with findings from prior research, the students in this study benefited from the positive social and environmental context of learning in the arts. Their

narrative accounts point to the "safer social environment" created when "there is no wrong answer," compared to their general education classes:

> "There's grammar which is right or wrong, but you don't know if it's right or wrong because it has weird rules. And in math it's just right or wrong;" "in arts classes you kind of feel more safer than in the math class or science class;" "I'm not the type of student that likes math and science;" "I'm not good at math;" "I hate complicated spelling."

In their statements, students showed that the safety of the classroom environment depended on their self-efficacy beliefs about whether they had the required skills to successfully engage in each class without the fear of being *wrong*. In contrast to their general education classes, in the arts it was safe to engage because *there is not wrong answer* and *there's a lot more* they *can do.* The opportunities to engage in learning in the arts allowed students to have access to learn in their ZPD, thereby increasing their motivation to learn based on the possibility of success. Baum et al.'s (1997) study of the general student population also reported that students who engaged successfully in the arts and who had particular strengths in nonverbal intelligences- (musical, kinesthetic, and spatial) were "eager to attend to tasks that emphasized those abilities (i.e., tasks that forecast success)" (Ibid, p.37).

Research on LD students' self-esteem (Deshler, 1978; Swayze, 1980; Swanson & Deshler, 2003; Wylie, 1979) and my own experiences as a teacher show that years of academic struggle by the time they reach adolescence negatively affects their self-efficacy beliefs and their motivation to engage in learning; in this context students lose motivation to engage when classroom activities rely on their areas of weakness and learning becomes a frustrating experience. This study shows that students' low self-efficacy resulting from their struggles to understand and perform

according to expectations in general education classrooms make it less likely that they would take risks by participating among their non-disabled peers. Therefore in line with prior research, in this study, students' disengagement that was a consequence of their learning disabilities further limited their ability to engage in learning and acquire new information an skills; (Pressley et al., 1992, in Deshler, 2007; Schumaker, 1992; Sideridis et al., 2006; Torgesen, 1989; Wagner et al., 1993) the requirements within the classroom environment greatly influenced students' engagement in learning in light of adolescents' social concerns.

For example, Estela and Alba who could not successfully engage in learning in their general education classes were more involved in social "drama" both inside and outside of school. Raviv and Stone (1991) explain that some adolescents with LD rely more on social life in order to compensate for their academic frustrations. Fleming et al. (2002) also found significantly higher levels of involvement with negative peers for students with LD than those without due to their marginal social status at school (p. 56). Both Alba and Estela were involved in possibly dangerous social activities outside of school. At the time of the study, her humanities and inclusion teachers expressed great concern for Alba's safety after school: "She has too much experience; she has experienced too much already, for her age."Even in drama that offered a safer environment, Linda reported that Alba's social concerns affected her participation:

> I see a little bit sometimes with her like, oh is that cool to say…? So I think sometimes she holds back a little bit like that, or she'll say something from her heart, and then she'll be embarrassed, like are people gonna laugh at me…(Linda)

Alba explained that she had chosen to be the narrator in the final performance because:

> I'll be so nervous [on stage] because everybody is watching. Unless there's dancing. I like to take charge in dancing, because I'm more into dancing and I started when I was a little girl so I have more experience.

Alba's statement shows the complexity of students' choices regarding their decisions to engage. It further shows that students' self-efficacy beliefs are specific to the skills involved in a given task; perceptions of the possibilities for success or failure influence their willingness to engage in a given activity. Similarly, Noah whose underlying challenges made writing a strenuous, and test-taking a meaningless and unsuccessful experience, avoided these tasks all together by not handing in writing assignments and filling in random choices on multiple-choice exams. Therefore the students' resistance to engage in given activities required within the context of their general education classes was a mechanism to protect them from further emotional harm caused by tasks that forecast failure.

Other than involvement with negative peer groups and social activities, Fleming et al. (2002) found that students with LD reported feeling more personally anonymous in school. Leo whose communication skills were the most troubling aspect of his school life was the most socially isolated student in the study.

> I don't get along with them that much, because… well … they will just immediately jump to the chance to say blah blah blah blah blah… they'll just jump to the chance with some ridiculous insult which means nothing to me whatsoever and then sometimes they just do it behind my back and of course I know. There are few I can trust, at least until they are not near their other friends.[In academics] they're either asking me for help, which is usually the case in math, or they're going to just bug me about something.
> Either they're mean and that caused them to lose grades, or they lose grades and that causes them to be mean. Which came first? The chicken or the egg?

Contrary to Estela and Alba's coping mechanisms, Leo relied on his academic success to compensate for his social shortcomings. He was proud of his knowledge and believed that other students made fun of him because he was "smarter" than them. His mother was also aware of Leo's social difficulties and his unhappiness. She explained "He doesn't want to socialize with others. He finds them too dumb …" Based on my observations and Leo's narrative account, he wanted to socialize with his peers but he did not have the necessary communication skills. According to Leo, drama class provided "a better social environment:"

> I like it better 'cause, one, there's less kids with one teacher, so of course there's better observation; and, two, everyone is really much more preoccupied, and maybe hopefully cherish more than in the academic studies. Other than the smaller class size in the arts electives where teachers were able to notice student interactions and intervene if needed, Leo referred to the benefit of the arts for engaging students in an activity they "cherished", and guiding their attention away from teasing him. Referring back to Leo's reference to the chicken and egg theory, it seems that in an environment in which students feel relatively safe and are happily engaged in learning, there is less reason or opportunity for them to "insult" Leo.
> Well, if we're all laughing together at someone's jokes I don't think anyone's going to have time to insult because… Here's the case, in academics they are laughing at you, in here [drama] they are laughing with you; especially in my case. Because in my case either they don't manage their words and they just simply blah, blah, laugh, laugh, laugh, while in here *(in drama)* we'll all be laughing at something or someone who did something on stage, especially in Improv because everyone's laughing. We're playing a game and you really can't tease people in the game unless they stink; usually I don't stink (Leo).

The arts also provided a safe and positive learning environment based on the opportunity to collaborate with peers in group work. Unlike group work in general education classes where students with LD did not have the confidence to equally contribute alongside their peers, the experimental and creative processes involved in music and drama provided a medium for collaborative learning in which it was safe for students to share their ideas and learn from each other.

> … in arts classes you kind of feel more safer than in like in the math class or science class…It's just the feeling that you get when you are with your friends and you're just doing something that you don't have to do, but something that you chose to do. I like working in groups because you share ideas, you can talk; like if my idea isn't good or the other's, it's harder if you were alone. It's better if you have a partner you can talk with (David).
> In arts classes, it's different for sure, because we're all in… especially in drama; I would say, in art what we do is we go through our problems and we have a normal conversation… (Leo)

Finally, the arts provided opportunities for LD adolescents to belong to the social context of school. For example, David's mother described:

> He loves to be a part of something, so I think that's huge for him. I think for the other kids who are more like in the debate team or the math club or …more educational clubs…this [drama] sort of gives him that confidence that he is part of the club; that he's part of the school. He feels very well connected to school because of it and when they have the performance night, he is very much involved.

The arts offered students the means to engage in school in ways that built their self-esteem through the experience of belonging to a greater community. This finding supports research by Stevenson and Deasy (2005) who also showed that "the arts created positive interpersonal relationships and conditions for learning through which a sense of community was formed" (p.10). Dawn, the director of UCPCS described an example of a student who experienced belonging to the school community through a successful play he wrote and performed that offered an opportunity to show his strengths to his peers:

> He was able to not only express that here, but really to be recognized by his peers and others. And I think that he had this sense that I don't think he's had in school, that he's really good at something that's acknowledged by the school…to feel like you're good at something that maybe your classmates and your teachers acknowledge and value as much as other academic disciplines, I think has made all the difference.

In sum, the arts provided students with a "safer social environment" that enhanced their opportunities for engagement in learning. This finding supports a social constructivist perspective of learning that highlights the important influence of the classroom climate and activities on engagement in learning. As explained by other theoretical and applied work, students' cognitive, motivational, and behavioral engagement is a prerequisite to learning(Pintrich & Linnenbrink, 2003). Similar to Baker et al.'s (2004) findings, this study also found that students' self-perceptions of success enhanced their engagement in learning by decreasing their fear of experiencing the social implications of failure. Based on this information, the social environment has a significant effect on students' willingness to engage in learning, especially for adolescents with LD (or other special needs) who are more self-conscious of their academic struggles.

Summary

The analyses of students' experiences showed three overarching themes that explain the benefits of arts education for adolescents with LD (and ADHD) placed in inclusion settings. Theme 1 showed the importance of nonverbal, embodied engagement in learning in the arts; Theme 2 was regarding the value of student ownership of the learning process; Theme 3 showed the positive social and pedagogical context of learning in the arts.

Students' nonverbal, affective, and embodied engagement in the arts provided opportunities for them to include their sensorimotor system in learning. Activities that incorporated students' various sensory systems and their body (such as drawing, acting, and playing instruments) as well as chances for students to move and

communicate with others enhanced their ability to successfully engage. The various modes of engagement allowed students to learn through their areas of strength in visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and musical senses instead of having to rely on their weaknesses in receptive and expressive language. Through these types of engagement that enabled students to learn, they practiced skills such as auditory memory and attention, group work and collaboration, vocabulary, reading, and writing, perseverance, and conceptual understanding (such as time, space, and cultural understanding). The arts provided a medium for learning skills by allowing access and providing context through body language, affect, stories, and class discussions.

As described, the second theme showed the importance of students' ownership of the learning process through opportunities to apply their ideas in their work. Composing their own rhythms in music as well as acting and improvising in drama provided the chance for students with LD and ADHD to apply and express their imagination and creativity, enhancing their motivation to engage. In addition, students valued making choices regarding the nature of their engagement (i.e., choosing the type of musical instrument, acting versus narrating…). These choices further enabled them to use their strengths and have successful learning experiences that enhanced their self-efficacy beliefs. Ownership, freedom, and choice created opportunities for students with underlying sensory integration disorder to take responsibility for and guide their learning; this self-motivation created the context for being "in the zone" and enhanced students' regulation and engagement of their minds and bodies (referred to as self-regulation in other studies).

Finally, the positive social and environmental context of the arts classes observed further led to students' successful participation in the arts. These benefits included a classroom context where students had the chance to learn within their ZPD in the arts compared to the frustrations they experienced in their academic standards-based classrooms. Students were more willing to engage with their peers in group work and participate in class discussions without the fear of failure because as they reported *in arts there are no wrong answers.* Positive social interactions among students and between students and teachers in drama and music further helped those with learning differences feel included in the classroom context. The more students were engaged in learning within a positive social context, the less they felt socially isolated or ridiculed by their peers. Given the importance of social concerns in adolescence, building a learning community through the arts in which students with disabilities felt a sense of belonging has the potential for lessening their feelings of isolation and marginalization and decreasing the chance of their involvement in negative peer groups.

The arts were perceived as their greatest strengths and preferred learning activity, for all the student participants. For some it was their main or only connection to school. This study found that the arts have the potential of creating an inclusive setting for adolescents with disabilities based on the benefits described in the themes of this chapter. The changeable influential factor that affects the degree these students benefit from the arts is related to teachers' pedagogical styles and flexibility. Teachers that are understanding of LD students' special needs and

provide more opportunities for multiple modes of engagement as well as spaces for creativity and movement enhance the inclusive learning environment.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

> Our transformative pedagogies must relate both to existing conditions and to something we are trying to bring into being, something that goes beyond a present situation. (Greene, 1995, p. 51)

Engaging adolescents with LD

During my first year teaching as a bilingual special education teacher, I spent the initial few months trying to address a problem my Ivy League M.A. in special education had not prepared me for; how to engage adolescent students with LD. I had thirty-five students who came to me in groups of eight for forty-five minutes a day. They had all been diagnosed with LD, speech impairment, and/or ADD. They did not have basic reading and math skills but were placed in general education, standards-based, grade-level classes. I could not use the strategies or lesson plans from my Masters program to teach them phonics-based instruction in reading, or basic math skills using colorful manipulatives. My students had "persuasive essays" to write for their humanities teacher, or pre-algebra math problems to hand in. On most days it did not matter what my lesson plan was because the students were impossible to engage. One of them once said to me: "Teacher don't waste your time trying to teach me to read; I can make so much more money selling drugs." I felt powerless in the face of the tremendous task of teaching them basic skills to help them meet grade level standards, when they had no motivation to learn. I did not blame these students for feeling discouraged when they could not do any of the work expected of them in their inclusion classrooms, where they were in fact excluded.

With nothing to lose, I decided one day to read *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis with my disengaged middle-schoolers. Not having grown

up in the United States, I had not read the book until that year. I loved it; it inspired my visual imagination. It was mysterious, symbolic, and well-written. It spoke to the child in me and though my students did not have the decoding skills to read it, I wanted them to have the same mystical and imaginative connection to the story. I decided that I would copy the chapters of the book (since there were no funds for me to purchase a class set), and they would follow along as I read to them. Since they always asked me to let them watch movies in class, I took along the movie as an incentive. I told them that after reading each part of the story, we were going to watch the movie and talk about how the book and movie compared.

To my surprise, the students became very involved in the story and we decided to role-play the characters in the book. They were all able to sit and follow along except for Ariel, who was often out of his seat and bouncing around the classroom. One day when we were reading the story, Ariel moved to the front of the class and seemed to be scribbling on the blackboard. Since I was facing the students and reading, I decided to ignore him, thinking that this was part of his attention-seeking behavior. After a while, the students started yelling, "Maestra, maestra!" "Look!" as they pointed to the blackboard behind me. I turned around to witness a detailed three dimensional drawing of the chapter we were reading on the board, carefully crafted by Ariel. His artwork was impressive. The students were amazed. Ariel was paying attention and following the story all along; he just could not sit still. He was a talented visual artist and chose drawing as his form of engagement. Reading, acting, and drawing *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, was the

beginning of my pedagogical relationship with that student group, inspiring me to incorporate arts-based experiences in my teaching.

Throughout my 10 years of experience working in different settings with students who were diagnosed with various cognitive and emotional "disabilities", I have used music, art and drama in different ways, more out of instinctive than with a pedagogical purpose. For instance, when I conducted my fieldwork in psychology at a therapeutic day school that provided combined treatment and education services for vulnerable youth groups, Ahmad and I would drum when he was overcome with rage and wanted to throw furniture. In the same setting, I would play pop music for the students during recess; a good excuse to let them move and dance, which was the only degree of freedom I could provide from the strict behavioral program they were placed in. When I was an assistant teacher at a private school for children with autism, I invited a local band to the school to perform for the kids. Children who were often detached and without expression joined in and danced to the music, playing the percussion instruments lent to them by the musicians. When I taught Spanish to high school students with LD and ADHD, we put together a performance of tango combined with a love story that they created on their own as their final project. There were many more instances when I used the arts with my students without thinking about it formally or really understanding why they responded so well.

Reflecting on the larger policy environment of LD adolescents' educational opportunities, I have come to the conclusion that the primary problem for these students is disengagement from learning in classrooms where they do not have the

required skills to participate successfully. While the NCLBA and standards-based reform are concerned with including students with disabilities in grade-level curriculum and testing in order to provide them with equitable educational opportunities, this goal is detached from the daily reality of LD students' struggles in school. The gap between grade-level expectations and these students' ability to engage has a demoralizing impact on their motivation to learn.

In light of LD adolescents' disengagement within the current implementation of inclusion, I studied the potential of arts education as an inclusive curricular component or pedagogical method, with a primary focus on the nature of students' engagement with learning in the arts. My goal was to contribute to the arts education literature by focusing on its possible benefits for adolescents with LD, and at the same time gain a deeper understanding of the complex nature of various curricular and pedagogical dimensions involved in implementing inclusive education. The findings of this study do not suggest that arts education should replace academic subject learning in reading or math; rather, arts education can contribute to deepening LD adolescents' engagement in school generally, and offers inclusive pedagogical methods of teaching these students that are valuable both for learning the arts as well as for their application to teaching other subjects.

Summary of Findings in Relation to Prior Research

In my research, the goal was to study LD adolescents in arts-based classrooms to see whether and to what extent the arts could engage these students in learning. I designed a case study to further investigate the potential impact of arts-based education on this particular student group. The study was premised on the observation

that the current implementation of inclusion within the standards-based curriculum and testing policy has had a negative impact on LD students' engagement in learning due to the discrepancy between the policy goals promoted and student's individualized educational needs. As a result of their repeated experiences with academic failure, adolescent LD students tend to disengage from learning; many drop out of school or otherwise fail to earn a high school diploma. Therefore, the overarching question that guided this study was: What are the learning processes involved in an arts education setting and how do they affect LD adolescents' engagement at school?

An inclusion public charter school with a quality arts program served as an instrumental case study; the small school size allowed for the collection of detailed information about the student participants from teachers who knew them well. Employing qualitative research methods within a case study design, I looked in-depth at a snapshot of LD adolescents' engagement in the arts by observing a number of LD students from the school in drama and music classes during a curriculum unit on the arts from the Middle East and North Africa. The study focused on seven students diagnosed with LD and/or ADHD who were receiving special education services. These students had underlying sensory integration challenges that interfered with typical receptive and expressive language development, as well as difficulties modulating their attention and regulating their bodies and emotions.

In conducting my research I interviewed students, parents, teachers, and the school director to construct an understanding of the relevance of the students' participation in the arts to their overall educational experiences, with a focus on how

their strengths and weaknesses play out in the arts classroom context. I interviewed the drama and music teachers at length to gather detailed information on the student participants, as well as to gain an understanding of their pedagogical styles as key factors that influence the quality of students' experiences.

The cross-cutting themes found in the study are derived from the analyses of students' own perceptions of the benefits of the arts (presented in Chapter 6). In keeping with the social-constructivist framework applied to the research design, I collected and integrated detailed information regarding the school setting, classroom contexts, and teachers' pedagogical styles (Chapter 4), as well as the students' individual profiles and their narrative accounts (Chapter 5), to reach my findings. My analysis of the students' experiences reveals three recurring themes that represent the benefits of arts education for adolescents with LD and ADHD:

- *Theme 1:*"It feels like you open up to yourself;" (the Importance of Nonverbal, Embodied Engagement in Learning)
- *Theme 2:*"You get to create what's your own; it has some thought part of it centered near you;" (Student Ownership of the Learning Process)
- *Theme 3:*"In arts there is no wrong answer; it's a safer social environment;" (The Social and Pedagogical Context of Learning)

In the following paragraphs, I address each theme related to the benefits of the arts for adolescents with LD/ADHD in light of prior research in arts education, learning theory, the educational needs of adolescents with LD, and inclusive education (reviewed in Chapter 2).

The benefits of the arts found in this study include enhanced student/teacher interactions, social/behavioral attributes, and motivational/affective components of learning, all found to be essential components of inclusion (Wang, 1997). Based on these findings, arts education can provide adolescents with special needs inclusive opportunities for engagement and learning by offering them: a.) additional means of learning and expression; b.) enhanced conceptual understanding through non-verbal, sensorimotor opportunities to learn; c.) participation in activities that allow students to show their strengths and creativity; and d.) opportunities for success in the social context of classroom learning.

Theme 1: "It feels like you open up to yourself;" (the Importance of Nonverbal, Embodied Engagement in Learning)

Perhaps the most important benefit of the arts as demonstrated by this study was that they provide opportunities for non-verbal, embodied engagement through activities that incorporate students' sensorimotor system and affect in the learning process. Prior research in cognitive science supports the importance of sensorimotor experiences for conceptual understanding (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). For LD students who have language-based difficulties, non-verbal means of engagement through visual, kinesthetic, musical, and affective means can open opportunities for learning and expression. For students diagnosed with ADHD who have difficulties with attention and self-regulation, sensorimotor experiences in the arts can accommodate their need for movement and communication through kinesthetic, musical, and affective means of engagement.

The importance of opportunities to engage in learning through various modes of reception and expression established in this study supports similar findings from

prior research on the value of these inclusive curricular components for students with LD (Jorgensen et al., 1997). My findings also highlight the importance of the arts for inclusive education as a means of providing students with opportunities to understand (Wolf, 2007).

As evidenced by the student and teacher reports and classroom observations I conducted, these inclusive opportunities improved students' ability and willingness to engage in learning by enhancing their self-efficacy beliefs and motivation (see Chapter 4-6 for examples). The application of qualitative research methods sheds light on the learning processes within the arts classes, as well as students' experiences that led to improved motivation and engagement in these settings. These insights help to explain the claims of enhanced affective domains of learning attributed to the arts in prior research. Integrating various sensory systems in arts-based activities allows students who have non-verbal strengths to experience success in learning; the opportunity motivates students to engage and serves to counterbalance the negative emotional effects of the struggles they faced in academic classes where learning mainly relied on verbal and written skills. The aforementioned benefits in affective domains of learning are especially important for adolescents with LD who have low self-efficacy beliefs and motivation due to their academic struggles (Deshler, 1978, 1989; Sideridis et al., 2006).

The findings from this study also support research within the social-cognitive framework of learning that shows positive self-efficacy beliefs lead to increased engagement and motivation; these improvements further lead to enhanced self-regulation (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Schunk, 1989). Further, the study's

conclusions regarding the importance of sensorimotor opportunities to learn through the arts adds a new dimension of engagement to those previously explored in prior research within the social-cognitive framework (cognitive, behavioral, motivational), which has been primarily focused on academic classroom learning (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Schunk,1989).

Finally, for students diagnosed with ADHD, the opportunity to engage their bodies in learning lessened the likelihood of receiving negative feedback from their teachers for being out of their seats, or talking at the wrong time. In this context, those labeled as "defiant" or "disruptive" did not display such behaviors in their arts classes because they were fully engaged in learning in ways that were appropriate for their needs. This observation affirms prior research conducted through the social constructivist perspective demonstrating that students who are deeply engaged in constructing and interpreting social and cognitive aspects of learning are less likely to need classroom management (Cooper & Valli, 1996).

Theme 2: "You get to create what's your own; it has some thought part of it centered near you;" (Student Ownership of the Learning Process)

The second theme related to the benefit of the arts is the chance *to create what's your own*. Student participants explained that in the arts they have choices and opportunities to use their own ideas in their projects. Students with LD who may not be able to express their creativity in language-based classrooms, can *show* their imagination in their artistic work. Students reported that the opportunity to use their creativity further "attracts" them to learning and "makes [them] think more." In addition to using their sensorimotor system to learn in the arts, opportunities for

creativity engaged students in powerful ways, as illustrated by their positive attitudes and affect in music and drama.

In the arts classrooms I observed, students were actively engaged in creating music or acting on stage with opportunities to integrate their own ideas. As described by one of the students, when "it has some thought part of it centered near you," or when you are not held to a predetermined script, "you have more control." Based on my experience teaching students with ADHD whose chaotic sensory system leads them to feel less control over their bodies, they often seek more control over their activities, perhaps to align environmental demands with their sensory needs. Demanding greater freedom and control, however, can be interpreted as unruly or oppositional behavior, especially by teachers who do not understand the sensory requirements of adolescents with LD/ADHD. Offering these students the chance to make choices on their own terms thus reduces their anxiety and lessens their oppositional tendencies.

Ownership of the learning process led LD students in this study to take responsibility for their work. Baum et al. (1997) reported similar findings in the arts; the authors referred to students' ability to direct their learning as self-regulation." In their music and drama classes, student participants with LD showed such self-regulatory skills described by Baum et al. (1997) as paying attention, following directions, setting their own goals, and carrying out independent practice with confidence in their abilities. Enhancement of self-regulation is particularly important for students with LD who face greater challenges monitoring and regulating their learning and problem-solving efforts (Campione, 1989). Similar to Baum et al.'s

(1997) findings, enhanced self-regulatory skills observed in drama and music classes in this case study were not explicitly taught; they were a consequence of the learning processes and context of the arts classrooms.

The present study contributes to a better understanding of enhanced self-regulation referenced in prior research in the arts. Based on my observations, self-regulation and metacognitive thinking skills come naturally to LD students when they are able to deeply engage in learning. The arts provide opportunities to adolescents with LD for learning within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (explained in Chapter 6); in the music and drama classes I observed, students were invited by their teachers to reach beyond their prior capabilities to higher levels of performance. Giving these students a medium within which to use their ideas and creativity, make choices, and be able to move as they learned (especially for students with ADHD), creates the conditions for improved self-regulation. The more room for choice in classroom activities, the more students were engaged and took ownership of their work.

Theme 3: "In arts there is no wrong answer; it's a safer social environment:" (The Social and Pedagogical Context of Learning)

The last theme is that of the safer social environment created in arts-based classrooms. My analysis of the students' statements suggests that their participation felt "safer" in part because "in the arts there is no wrong answer." Student and general education teachers' reports revealed that the students felt insecure and anxious in their academic classes where they did not always understand verbal or written directions, and thus often did not know what was expected of them. This anxiety prevented them from full engagement in learning, and in some cases, led to

avoiding tasks that forecast the possibility of failure in order to escape embarrassment in the presence of their peers. In the arts, however, students reported "feeling more safe" because the opportunity to learn through musical, kinesthetic, or visual modes offered them the chance to engage in activities that they felt they could do. This led to reduced anxiety, which meant they could pay better attention. The ability to better follow class discussions enabled students to have the courage to raise their hands and contribute their ideas. The students described the positive social environment in the arts as a place where they had the chance to "share ideas," "talk" and learn from each other. They reported enjoying the chance to work with their friends, composing music or improvising in drama where they "got a lot of laughs."

In addition to opportunities for creativity and ownership of the learning process related to the second theme, the degree of safety in the social classroom environment is mediated by teachers' pedagogical styles. In this case study, the teachers' sensitivity towards LD students' needs, concerns for their safety, and positive feedback enhanced the social context of the classrooms observed. These encouraging social experiences in their arts classes further enhanced students' self-efficacy beliefs and had a constructive influence on their feelings towards school in general. As one student participant observed, "If we did bad on a math test….it doesn't matter like how bad your day is…it will be better in arts."

Though arts education offers similar benefits for the student population at large, the significance of self-efficacy, motivation, and self-regulatory skills gained is especially important for adolescents with LD who have difficulties in these areas. The alignment of the experiences offered in the arts with these students' affective

needs provided them with inclusive learning opportunities not available to them in academic, standards-based instruction. The unique individual and environmental benefits of the arts enhanced their learning processes, allowing students with LD and ADHD to participate on a more equal footing with their other peers. For the students who participated in this study, the experience of engagement in the arts was a unique occasion during the school day in which they could achieve success and receive positive feedback. All seven students in this study reported feeling more engaged and successful in the arts than in any other setting at school; for some it was their only connection to school.

In the final sections of this chapter, I examine the implications of this study's findings for the design and implementation of inclusive arts-based programs as well as inclusive education in general. I conclude by discussing the potential lessons for education policy.

Implications for the Design and Implementation of Inclusive Arts Education Programs

Based on the findings summarized in the preceding section, there are four dimensions of the inclusion arts program studied that promote positive learning opportunities for students with LD and ADHD: a.) mixture of verbal and non-verbal instruction; b.) opportunities for movement and conversation; c.) choice within the arts program and within the classroom context; and d.) teachers' pedagogical styles and orientation toward students with special needs. Each of these areas should be taken into account when designing inclusive arts education programs for adolescents with LD and/or ADHD. I address each of these in turn.

A balanced mixture of verbal and non-verbal instruction and activities are necessary components of inclusive arts programs for students with language-based disorders. While the use of language by the teachers in the study varied in degree, the students I studied were most engaged during the non-verbal activities. Based on this observation, it is important for arts education teachers to consider LD students' difficulties with language processing: lessen the amount of time spent providing verbal directions and offer students non-verbal opportunities to learn and perform.

The student participants in this study also reported the importance of opportunities for movement and conversation. Both classes observed provided students the freedom to move and collaborate with peers as they learned. Particularly for students with ADHD who have difficulties regulating their impulsivity and movement, integrating such opportunities provided them with a positive experience of classroom participation and group learning not offered in settings where they were expected to sit silently and work. An important lesson from this finding for arts education teachers is to maximize the time allowed students to have hands-on learning experiences and collaboration with peers. To provide such occasions requires teachers' understanding of LD students' underlying sensory needs and accommodating them by integrating active-learning processes in the classroom.

Another important aspect of the arts program studies was the choice allowed students in selecting an art form to study. Starting in the fifth grade, the arts program was designed to allow students to choose an art form for each of the four cycles of electives offered throughout the academic year. These choices provided students with LD the ability to better engage their strengths at the same time as gaining exposure to

various art forms. In addition, the drama and music teachers offered various opportunities for engagement by giving students a chance to choose among various roles and activities within each classroom. For example, a student taking theater who was not confident or comfortable acting on stage could choose to be the director. The range of options in the arts allowed LD students to participate in ways that were within their reach. This enhanced their self-efficacy by providing them the chance to create or perform successfully. Therefore, based on these findings, the degree of choice offered within a school-based arts program is a key component of offering students with LD/ADHD inclusive learning opportunities through the arts.

In addition to the design of the arts program, teachers' pedagogical styles determine to a great extent the degree of choice granted to students to incorporate their creativity in learning. Arts teachers who are more structured or have predetermined, skills-based goals, may not be as effective at providing opportunities for students to make personal connections in class and express their ideas effectively. Freedom of expression and creativity are crucial for adolescents with LD and/or ADHD, who may otherwise be unable to engage their imagination and show their ideas in language-based classrooms. The same is true for those students who have difficulty following specific guidelines and rules for participation. For students with emotional challenges, the freedom to express their feelings through artwork provided them with a medium to channel their emotions in positive ways. Teachers' in this study created an inclusive learning context by taking into consideration students' affective domains of learning, such as their insecurities and need for autonomy.

Finally, a popular theme under investigation in arts education research is the transferability of gains from the arts to other academic areas, as advocates for the arts make a case for their importance in education. With regards to academic gains for adolescents with LD/ADHD in this study, arts-based benefits transferred indirectly to other areas of learning that affect academic achievement. Explained in the words of the school director:

> Having a program that is well-rounded and addresses the whole child is ultimately going to help your test scores and help you have a strong school... The challenge is that you have a lot of schools, especially struggling schools, that want something really quick and immediate and directly linked to increasing your reading or math scores… and that's not always what you're going to have with an arts program. But when I think of what our kids are able to do, particularly in literacy, there's a strong connection to the arts…

In this case the school director attributes enhanced literacy skills to the arts, especially drama. In our conversations, she also described a case in which a student with LD who was at risk of dropping out of school had the opportunity to direct a school performance in which he also acted, providing him with the only occasion in which he could show his strengths to the school community. She attributed his decision to stay in school to improvements in self-efficacy gained through his positive school-based experiences in the arts. The importance of self-efficacy beliefs and its transferability to academic gains is highlighted by research in the social cognitive framework that shows enhanced self-efficacy leads to cognitive, motivational, and behavioral engagement that improves students' ability to self-regulate; this ability in turn increases learning and achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Schunk, 1989).

In sum, these findings show that the arts have the potential to provide a powerful context for meeting the affective and cognitive needs of adolescents with LD in inclusion settings by providing an environment and curriculum that is not based on normative expectations. The lessons from this study are important as there is a standards-based movement within arts education, promoting principles that are contrary to the benefits of the arts for students with special needs mentioned in this study. The National Standards for the Arts framework includes guidelines for skills students should learn at each grade level. These predetermined benchmarks set normative expectations and interfere with the aspects of arts education that create inclusive opportunities by offering choice, a space for students' creativity, and ownership of the learning process. Standards influence teachers to direct learning toward the enhancement of a set of skills rather than inspiring students to make their own connections to the arts through individual strengths. Therefore, while arts education has the potential to offer inclusive learning opportunities, the explained variables related to the design and implementation of an arts program influence the degree to which students with special needs can benefit from the arts in schools.

Lessons for Inclusion

The findings from this study show that despite NCLB and IDEA policy goals to hold teachers and schools accountable for LD students' academic achievement, the current implementation of inclusion does not lead to inclusive learning opportunities for adolescents with special needs. Student, parent, and teacher interviews in this study revealed that LD adolescents experience anxiety and task avoidance in response to the normative expectations of general education classrooms where they lacked

skills and confidence to meet grade level requirements. Given the overwhelming emphasis on language-based skills for learning and expressing themselves within general education classrooms, students who had difficulties in these areas were at a great disadvantage compared to their same-age peers without disabilities. All students reported serious difficulties with writing which requires expressive language, working memory, attention to detail, organizational skills, and sitting still (areas of weakness for those with LD and ADHD); yet writing is used as evidence of learning in most of their classes and on their standardized tests.

The curricular goals as well as the classroom activities and expectations designed for typically developing students do not take into account the needs of LD adolescents for multiple means of processing and expressing information, or their need for hands-on learning and movement. In this context they are perceived as below average or performing "far below the standard," even if their cognitive understanding is above average, as demonstrated in the cases of Patrick and Noah who participated in this study. Noah, who was able to understand college-level physics, struggled in math and science where assessment relied on writing, an activity he resisted because of his difficulties in this area. David, who had a good understanding of mathematics and reported it as one of his favorite subjects, also had difficulties in his math class, especially with the teacher who did not understand why he could not sit still and remain quiet. In classrooms where teachers were inflexible, not trained in special education, or less knowledgeable about the particular needs of students with LD or ADHD, students were reprimanded for their impulsivity or inability to follow directions and their academic strengths were ignored. The

negative messages the students received led to secondary social and emotional problems, the avoidance of particular school-related tasks, or in some cases, total disengagement from learning. The injustice of setting up students to experience inadequacy regardless of their efforts points to the disability of the education system to provide them with appropriate educational programming. It is important to consider the harmful effects of this context on students' self-esteem and motivation to engage. Normative assessments and expectations are not inclusive pedagogical practices for students who have language-based disorders or sensory processing challenges.

This study shows that in addition to academic requirements, in order for school programs to be inclusive, they must take into account the affective and sensory characteristics of students with special needs in designing curriculum and instruction. Based on these findings, ideal inclusion offers multiple modes of communication and expression, flexibility and choice with regards to activities and assessments, and opportunities for sensorimotor engagement (through nonverbal, hands-on activities and movement). Inclusive education is also highly influenced by teachers' pedagogical knowledge and compassion for the struggles of students with emotional or learning disabilities whose experiences within school structures and rules are particularly difficult. Skillful teachers who are able to see students' strengths alongside their areas of weakness, can accommodate and encourage them to engage in ways that take into account their vulnerabilities within an inclusive classroom where students compare themselves to their non-disabled peers.

Importantly, this study sheds light on the particular significance of the school curriculum by showing the inclusive opportunities that can be offered through arts education for adolescents with learning differences. Inclusive education requires diversity in the school curriculum to allow students to have multiple opportunities to process information and engage their areas of strength in learning. The arts in particular offer unique opportunities for nonverbal, embodied, and creative engagement in learning, which are areas of strength for many students with LD and ADHD whose uneven sensory systems may result in stronger visual, auditory, or kinesthetic abilities and unique perceptions.

Based on this study, the arts also offer learning environments where these students are not "below average" as assessed through normative standards; performance-based assessments that do not require their linguistic areas of weakness are more inclusive forms of evaluating their knowledge. Finally, hands-on, active-learning processes that integrate movement and affect can be integrated into the school curriculum through the arts to provide students with LD and/or ADHD educational opportunities that meet their needs. Altogether, these benefits of the arts provide an inclusive learning context by offering more equitable opportunities through which LD adolescents do not feel inferior to their peers without disabilities, thereby increasing their motivation to participate willingly in classroom activities and experience success in the school setting.

Another lesson for inclusion from this study addresses the importance of small schools, such as charter schools, in providing adolescents with LD a learning community in which teachers know them well and have more opportunities to

communicate with each other about students' needs. Teachers in this study reported that the small school size and relatively small classroom size in the arts enhanced their ability to get to know the students' strengths and weaknesses and accommodate their learning needs. In addition, small schools provide students with special needs a sense of community. Students from this study who were anonymous in larger less-personalized settings were helped by teachers who knew them well and knew to ask them questions when the students did not know how to help themselves or engage in learning. The teachers interviewed understood their students' needs, taught with flexibility in the forms of assessments used, facilitated students' abilities to communicate their needs, and allowed them time and space for movement. These components of inclusive education for students with LD were found important in prior research (Wang, 1997; Thousand et al., 1997).

Finally, lessons from the arts learned in this study can be applied to implement inclusive education in other subject areas. Many programs such as those reviewed in Chapter 2 offer arts-integrated curriculum and instruction in which visual, musical, or kinesthetic means of engagement are included in teaching literacy, history or mathematics. These arts-integrated programs which were found to be successful for at-risk students in general can be studied in light of their specific benefits for adolescents with special needs.

Policy Implications

As mentioned in Chapter 1, research shows that the high school dropout rate in America has not improved during the last few decades of standards-based curriculum and testing (Bridgeland, 2006). Students' decisions to drop out result

from a slow process of disengagement from school, including a lack of connection to the school environment, a perception that school is boring, feeling unmotivated, and due to academic struggles (Bridgeland, 2006). This study also shows that LD adolescents disengage from learning when they do not have the prerequisite skills for participation and when they are unmotivated to learn within classrooms implementing standards-based curriculum that is beyond their reach. Accordingly, these are among the students most at risk of dropping out of school. Therefore, the consequences of policy implementation at the school level with regards to students' lived experiences are worth considering in designing policies that intend to help all students.

A historical perspective of education policy (reviewed in Chapter 2) shows the alignment of IDEA and the NCLBA with regards to accountability for the education of students with disabilities was not designed through a deliberate and rational process; rather the focus of these policies resulted from the confluence of various trends in education. As explained in Chapter 2, focus on high standards was a consequence of alarming reports on the status of America's public schools, described in *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983. In this context, 1994 passage of Improving America's Schools Act (IASA), (first enacted in 1965 as Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and currently revised as the NCLBA) changed the fundamental purpose of Title I from funding programs to assist disadvantaged students to meeting standards for all students.

NCLBA's goal of holding schools accountable for the same standards and testing requirements for all students is contradictory to the original purpose of IDEA to provide students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education (FAPE)

based on their individual learning needs. Given the discrepancy between standards-based instruction and testing, and the individual needs of students with LD, it is not surprising that 77 percent of the nationally representative high-school students with LD performed in the bottom quartile of performance on standardized tests in reading comprehension (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007).

The unresolved contradiction between general and special education policy goals also has practical implications for the implementation of inclusion at the school level. Through the implementation of the NCLBA's accountability requirements, teachers and principals are responsible for the performance of students with LD and other disabilities on standardized tests, guiding teachers' instructional time and focus on test preparation (Center for Education Policy, 2008). In the case of adolescents with LD, some of whom are performing up to three years or more behind grade-level standards, they may need to solidify their basic literacy skills prior to being held to curricular standards. Therefore the harmful effects of norm-referenced assessment criteria and testing requirements include holding teachers accountable for delivering instruction of predetermined, grade-level content information rather than meeting students' individual educational needs.

Another problem at the school level is that the NCLB accountability model narrows the curriculum by creating incentives for principals and teachers to focus on areas tested. Charter schools and other small school reforms designed to offer students a variety of educational opportunities are also limited as they are held to NCLBA's use of testing for accountability, statewide standards-based curriculum, and challenging, predetermined graduation requirements; these reform initiatives

were in part intended to offer alternative and more creative means of educating students than traditional public schools.

As previously explained, inclusive education requires a diverse school curriculum with multiple opportunities for engagement in order to allow students with disabilities to learn and experience success. This study shows that when offered these conditions, adolescents with LD are motivated and capable of deep engagement in learning. The NCLBA and recent reauthorization of IDEA intended to enhance learning opportunities for students with disabilities by providing them access to the general education curriculum and holding schools accountable for their academic achievement through their norm-referenced test scores. However, these policies lack consideration for the complex and multidimensional requirements of inclusive education required for students with disabilities to learn. The current implementation of inclusion within this context can impede students with special needs from having access to equitable learning opportunities. Therefore, a close look at students' lived experiences within schools described in this study provides lessons worth considering in the upcoming reauthorization of the ESEA (NCLBA).

Conclusion

Embedded within the findings of this study is a redefinition of inclusion from its normative requirements to a broader discussion of inclusive pedagogical approaches that have the potential to meet the motivational needs of a diverse student body (including adolescents with special needs) placed in inclusion schools. The findings point to the aspects of inclusive education that are left out of the standards-based perspective of academic achievement, and highlight the importance of the

multidimensional aspects of LD students' experiences within schools as a primary source of information needed to improve their educational opportunities.

Given the described context of public education for adolescents with LD, my overall professional goal is to investigate possibilities for improving the current implementation of inclusion through experiences that increase students' engagement in learning. As part of this greater aspiration, this particular study looked at the possible benefits of the arts for providing educational opportunities that engage students with LD in learning by addressing their needs.

Based on the results of this study, arts education holds the promise of providing an inclusive environment that enhances students' self-efficacy and motivation to learn by offering unique modes of engagement that allow students to tap into their individual areas of strength. In addition, the arts make learning a meaningful and engaging experience by integrating affect in the learning process. Through gestures, body language, and the integration of students' feelings in the ways they express themselves, the arts allow students to engage in learning. The arts also provide opportunities for students to use their creativity and take ownership of the learning process through the choices they make. Finally, successful learning experiences lessen LD students' fear of engagement in group activities, and create a safer social learning environment for student participation

The social constructivist paradigm applied to this research allows for a holistic perspective on the individual and environmental factors that influence educational opportunities. This bigger picture is often missing in research that applies a narrow lens on isolated aspects of students' learning in schools. A social constructivist

perspective captures the complexity of designing inclusive educational opportunities for adolescents with special needs and provides a comprehensive view of various influential factors that shape students' experiences in schools. This framework also highlights the contradictions between the goals of special education policy as it was originally intended to meet the individual learning needs of students with special needs, and the NCLBA's focus on academic outcomes measured by normative standardized assessment.

In sum, as this study shows, a broader perspective of educational opportunities opens ways for improving the current implementation of inclusion policy. The findings add to the literature on the importance of arts education; it also shows that inclusive education requires consideration for the affective domains related to learning. The findings shed light on various factors that inclusive educational programs and policies can take into account to address LD students' strengths and weaknesses in order to ensure they have equitable opportunities for successful learning experiences.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: Observation Protocol

	Descriptive Notes	***Reflective Notes***

Individual Student Characteristics:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Interests
- Affect
- Attitude toward learning
- Preferred modes of engagement
- Perceptions of learning in the arts
- Perceptions of overall educational opportunities
- Student-teacher interactions
- Social interactions with peers

Teacher's characteristics:

- Objectives
- Priorities
- Pedagogical style
- Teaching methods
- Feedback and assessment
- Activities
- Understanding of students' special needs
- Attitude towards students with special needs

- Ways of accommodating different learning styles
- Interactions with students

Contextual Factors:

- Setting
- Social climate
- Opportunity to understand
- Opportunities for engagement
- Opportunities for collaboration
- Choices
- Variety
- Exchange and response

APPENDIX B: Document Review Guide

The following questions will guide my review of school-related documents:

I. What is the philosophy of education?

   a. What was the original purpose of the charter school?

   b. What is the philosophy of student learning?

II. What programs are implemented to achieve those goals?

   a. What types of educational programs/school curriculum are implemented?

   b. What is the balance between academic vs. non-academic programs?

III. How is inclusion conceptualized and implemented?

   a. Which categories of disability are served?

   b. How is inclusion implemented?

IV. What is the role of the arts in the school?

   a. What is the described purpose of the school's arts program?

   b. What are the components of the arts program?

   c. How are the arts implemented?

The following questions will guide my review of student evaluations and Individualized Education Plans (IEP's):

I. What is the student's diagnosis?

   1. What are the trends in the student's educational history?

   2. What are the student's characteristics?

II. Why are they receiving specialized instruction?

   1. What are the student's strengths?

   2. What are the student's weaknesses?

III. What are the recommended services?

APPENDIX C: Interview Questions

Note: This study will be conducted through qualitative methods of data collection through narrative inquiry. The goal is to write narrative accounts of the participants' experiences with the arts program in relation to LD adolescents' learning. Therefore, following interview questions are intended to guide open ended narrative inquiry with the goal of allowing the participants to construct their stories about the arts program. In other words, the researchers will use these questions to guide the direction of the narrative accounts offered by the participants.

School Director:

1. When did the arts become an integral part of the curriculum?
2. Why?
3. How do the arts fit in with the overall mission of the school and the educational approach?
4. What is your opinion of the influence of the arts on LD adolescents' motivation?
5. Do you think that the arts have and affect on LD adolescents' engagement in learning and in the school in general?
6. What do you consider to be the benefits of the arts for students in general and for LD adolescents specifically?

Inclusion Specialist and General Education Teacher:

1. What are the student's strengths and weaknesses in learning?
2. How do their strengths and weaknesses play out in the context of general education inclusion classroom learning?
3. What is the nature of the student's level of participation or engagement in academic classes?
4. What is the nature of the student's social interactions with peers and teachers?
5. What are the modes of instruction and assessment in academic classes?

Arts Teachers:

1. How do the arts affect student engagement in learning?
2. What is the nature of the work they engage in or produce?
3. What is your perception of teaching LD adolescents through the arts?
   a. How do you adjust your teaching to meet the specific needs of LD adolescents based on your understanding of what their needs are?
   b. How do you assess student's work and their learning in your class?

c. What is your perspective regarding the value of arts-based education for LD adolescents?

Students:

1. What are the benefits of the arts?
2. What is your favorite art form?
3. How do you feel about the work you do in art class?
4. What kinds of projects do you do in your art class? How do you like the work you do in the class?
5. Do you prefer to work alone or with other students in a group?
6. What are your strengths and weaknesses in learning?

Parents:

1. What do you think of your child's involvement in the arts at school?
2. Did the art program at the school influence your decision to send your child to this school?
3. How do you think that the arts affect your child's learning? Do you think they learn different skills in art classes? What are those skills? How do you think the skills they learn in the arts help them in life or with learning other things?
4. Do you think your child is talented in any of the arts? In what ways?
5. Is your child interested in the art class? What do you think he/she likes about the class?
6. Do you think that your child is more or less motivated to learn in the art class compared to how they feel about other classes?
7. Have you attended any performance or exhibition at the school? Did your child participate in the performance or exhibition? How did you feel about their work?

APPENDIX D: Parent Permission Form

Project Title	***[Exploring the Potential of Art-Based Education for Adolescents in an Inclusion School: A Case Study of Engagement in Learning Through the Arts.]***
Why is this research being done?	• This is a research project by Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin at the University of Maryland, College Park. • We are inviting your child to participate in this research by observing his/ her engagement in the arts and asking him/her questions about learning in an arts-based classroom. • The purpose of this research is to study the influence of the arts on students' engagement in learning.
What will I be asked to do?	• Give permission for your child to be a part of this study. This means that the researcher can observe your child's involvement in the arts in his/her classroom, and ask him/her questions about their experiences with learning in the arts.
What about confidentiality?	• We will do our best to keep all personal information confidential. • To help protect your child's confidentiality, we will not write his or her name in the reports. • We will not share the information with anyone. • All the information collected will be in a password-protected personal computer or locked file cabinets. • The information will be stored for 10 years and then destroyed. • Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. • Please let me know if your child is allowed to be audio and/or video recorded (to be used only by the researcher to review information. Audio or video tapes will not to be shared with others.) ___ My child is allowed to be tape-recorded in art class. ___My child is allowed to be video-taped in art class.
What are the risks of this research?	Participating in this research project has no known risks.
What are the benefits of this	• This research is not designed to help your child. • The information may help the researchers learn more

Project Title	***[Exploring the Potential of Art-Based Education for Adolescents in an Inclusion School: A Case Study of Engagement in Learning Through the Arts.]***	
research?	about how the arts can help students placed in inclusion schools. • We hope that in the future other schools and students will benefit from this study by learning if and how the arts can help students engage in learning.	
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	Your child's participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all. If you decide that your child can participate in this research, you may change your mind at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not lose anything (nothing will be held against you or your child).	
What if I have questions?	• This research is being done by Dr. Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin in the Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education Department at the University of Maryland, College Park. • If you have any questions about the study itself, please contact Golnar Abedin at (202) 365-7253 or by email: gabedin@umd.edu. • If you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.** • This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	By signing this form you confirm that: • You are at least 18 years of age. • The research has been explained to you. • Your questions have been fully answered. • You freely give permission for your child to participate in this research project.	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT**	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

APPENDIX E: Parent Consent Form

Project Title	***[Exploring the Potential of Art-Based Education for Adolescents in an Inclusion Program: A Case Study of Engagement in Learning Through the Arts.]***
Why is this research being done?	• This is a research project by Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin at the University of Maryland, College Park. • We are inviting you to participate in an interview to give information about your child's involvement in the school's art program. • The purpose of this research is to learn if and how the arts improve student's motivation to learn • The information you give is important because as parents you know a lot about your child's motivation and interests.
What will I be asked to do?	• Participate in 30 minute interview at your child's school. • The interview will be scheduled when you are available. • I will be asking you about: 1. Your child's educational history. 2. His or her strengths and weaknesses. 3. Your ideas about what he or she needs to succeed in school. 4. Your opinion about your child's involvement in the arts program at the school.
What about confidentiality?	• We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. • To help protect your confidentiality, we will not write your name or your child's name in the reports. • We will not share the information with anyone. • All the information collected will be in a password-protected personal computer or locked file cabinets. • The information will be stored for 10 years and then destroyed. • Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
What are the risks of this research?	Participating in this research project has no known risks.

What are the benefits of this research?	• This research is not designed to help you • But the information may help the researchers learn more about how the arts can help students with learning disabilities. • We hope that in the future other schools and students will benefit from this study by learning if and how the arts can help students with learning disabilities.	
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may change your mind at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not lose anything (nothing will be held against you or your child).	
What if I have questions?	• This research is being done by Dr. Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin in the Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education Department at the University of Maryland, College Park. • If you have any questions about the study itself, please contact Golnar Abedin at (202) 365-7253 or by email: gabedin@umd.edu; • If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.** • This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	By signing this form you confirm that: • You are at least 18 years of age. • The research has been explained to you. • Your questions have been fully answered. • You freely choose to participate in this research project.	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT**	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

APPENDIX F: School Staff Consent Form

Project Title	***[Exploring the Potential of Art-Based Education for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities: A Case Study of Engagement in Learning Through the Arts.]***
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin at the University of Maryland, College Park. The purpose of this research is to explore the possible benefits of the arts for adolescents with learning disabilities (LD). We will be asking you about your students' learning needs including your ideas about students' engagement and motivation. We will also ask you your opinion about your students' involvement in the arts program. The information you provide is important because you can provide insights about the influence of the arts on their learning.
What will I be asked to do?	We will be asking you for 1-3 interview sessions approximately 30 minutes long to be conducted at the school. The appointment will be made based on your availability. We will ask you questions regarding your opinion about the students' educational needs and about whether and how you think the school's art program affects their engagement in school and in learning.
What about confidentiality?	We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, we will not disclose your name or the students' names in the reports or articles written about this project. We will use identification codes to keep track of the information you provide and we will not share the information with anyone. All the information collected will be in a password-protected personal computer or locked file cabinets. Transcripts will not have any identifying information. Data sill be stored for 10 years and then destroyed.
What about confidentiality?	This research project involves making audiotapes and/or videotapes of you. Audio or videotapes will be viewed only by the researchers to provide an opportunity to review information that may have been missed during the interview or observation. No one else will have access to them and they will be stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed after 10 years. ___ I agree to be videotaped / audio-taped during my participation in this study. ___ I do not agree to be videotaped / audio-taped during my participation in this study. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.	
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally. We hope that the information can benefit other schools and students through improved understanding of the holistic nature of LD students' educational requirements and the aspects of their education that can be addressed by including the arts in inclusion programs.	
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify	
What if I have questions?	This research is being conducted by Dr. Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin in the Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education Department at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Weible at 301-405-3583 at the Education Leadership, Higher Education and International Education Program at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
	Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT**	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

APPENDIX G: Assent form for Student Participants

Project Title	***[Exploring the Potential of Art-Based Education for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities; A Case Study of Engagement in Learning Through the Arts.]***
Why is this research being done?	• This is a study being conducted by Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin at the University of Maryland, College Park. • The purpose of this research project is to learn how the arts affect your learning in ways that are different from other academic subjects. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because the information you provide is important in understanding the importance of the arts for students with learning disabilities.
What will I be asked to do?	• I will meet with you 3 times for around 20 minutes at school during a time that we plan together and will not keep you away from other important school work. • I will ask you about your areas of strength and weakness at school, you interests and goals in education, and you experiences in your art classes.
What about confidentiality?	• I will not use your names on any of the reports I write. • I will not tell your teachers information you share with me under your name. • All the information will be saved in my password-protected personal computer or in locked file cabinets. • This research project includes making audiotapes and videotapes of you. • Audio or videotapes will be viewed only by the researcher to review information from our interview. • No one else will have access to them and they will be stored in a locked cabinet. ___ I agree to be videotaped / audio-taped during my participation in this study. ___ I do not agree to be videotaped / audio-taped during my participation in this study. (Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities only if you or someone else is in danger or if I am required to do so by law.)
What are the risks of this research?	Participating in this project does not have any known risks for you.

What are the benefits of this research?	• This research will not help you personally, but the information you share about your experiences with the arts help the researchers learn more about the advantages of arts education.	
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	You may choose not to participate at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time if you change your mind. If you decide not to participate in this study at any time, you can let the researchers know. Participation in this study is not a class requirement. Your grade will not be affected by your participation.	
What if I have questions?	• This research is being done by Dr. Tom Weible and Golnar Abedin in the Education Leadership, Higher Education, and International Education Department at the University of Maryland, College Park. • If you have any questions about the study itself, please contact Golnar Abedin at (202) 365-7253 or by email: gabedin@umd.edu; • If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678.** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.	
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent	• By signing this form you show that the research has been explained to you, your questions have been answered, and you freely choose to participate in this research project.	
Signature and Date	**NAME OF SUBJECT**	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

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