

THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY-BASED ART EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON YOUTH  
IN LOW SOCIOECONOMIC COMMUNITIES

by

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**ABSTRACT**

Community-based art education (CBAE) programs have minimal research conducted that explore the benefits gained by youth who live in low socioeconomic status (SES) communities versus youth from higher ones. The purpose of this research is to study the benefits, extent of those benefits, and the values of community-based art education programs in areas with low-SES youth compared to areas with high-SES youth in the southern region of Charlotte, NC.

The research questions leading this research are: (1) What are the benefits of participating in a community-based art program? (2) How does participation within a community-based art program differ for students from lower-SES backgrounds versus those from higher ones? (3) Does race contribute to the benefits gained from participating in a community-based art program?

This research is intended to be a glimpse into the complexity and intricate design that goes into the intention, purpose, framework, and mission of a CBAE program, particularly those located in low-SES communities. The opportunities these youth experience within a CBAE program go beyond the creation and exploration of art; their experiences can also be life-altering.



THE EFFECTS OF COMMUNITY-BASED ART EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON YOUTH  
IN LOW SOCIOECONOMIC COMMUNITIES

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the School of Art and Design  
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by

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this research is to study the benefits, and the extent of those benefits, from youth who participate in community-based arts education (CBAE) programs within low socioeconomic (SES) communities versus those from higher ones in Charlotte, North Carolina. Youth who live in low-SES communities, particularly People of Color, benefit the most from participation within CBAE programs. For the purpose of this study, *People of Color* will be used solely to denote race, having no impact on economic status or job distinction. This study is centralized around the following research questions: (1) What are the benefits of participating in a community-based art program? (2) How does participation within a community-based art program impact students differently for youth from lower versus higher SES backgrounds? (3) Does race contribute to the benefits gained from participating in a community-based art program?

Community-based art education programs provide an incredible opportunity to truly educate students beyond the arts with experiences and skills not received in many school environments. Teaching in this environment goes beyond measuring outcomes solely based on artistic progression and academic performance (Americans for the Arts, 2014). The approach puts the focus on the whole child and how they connect with their peers, community, and the outside world.

In myriad school districts across the country, particularly in inner cities, the arts are seldom viewed as essential. Most public and private schools do not consider art to be a core subject, rather, an elective or non-academic class. Art programs are also

consistently the first to lose funding whenever there are budget cuts. “If the arts are not considered an integral part of education, then why are students who are actively involved in the arts four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement” (McGaha, 2019, para. 4)?

Several studies show that children become more engaged in their studies when the arts are integrated into their lessons. Other studies have shown that at-risk students often find pathways through the arts to broader academic successes. All students deserve a comprehensive arts education, and it is the students facing the most barriers that have the greatest need for this instruction. The 25% of students who are most socioeconomically challenged are five times more likely to graduate from high school and twice as likely to graduate from college if they are significantly active in the arts compared to their peers with little or no arts participation (McGaha, 2019).

Youth involvement in a community-based art education program will promote art advocacy. This promotion is one of the many paths that can be taken to initiate effective change toward community and political support in low-SES neighborhoods. Ranging from city council and political members, school board members and administration, to community leaders and parents, the educational outcomes are discernibly (and historically) unfair, biased, and subjective; strongly influenced by money, power, and sociopolitical positioning (Goldson, 2016). Continual community support for art advocacy, and its benefits for youth in low-SES communities will add positive influence on the minds of political and community leaders when making critical decisions encompassing arts education.

In addition to the examination of scholarly research studies and reputable community-based art programs, this research assesses the thoughts and responses of 40 participating, minority youth regarding their experiences, the benefits they have gained, and the impact CBAE programs have had on their lives.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the American Psychological Association, SES is defined as “the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation” (American Psychological Association, 2010, para. 1). Typically, SES is divided into three levels: low, middle, and high. This particular research study will only focus on the effects of CBAE programs within low- and high-SES communities. **Low-SES communities** often consist of lower-income households, lower performing schools, a higher ethnic minority presence, and higher crime rates. **High-SES communities** are often the complete opposite of low-SES communities, consisting of majority white residents, higher performing schools, lower crime rates, greater access to resources, and greater political influence. Examinations of SES often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power, and control. The influence SES can have on educational opportunities and career skill development on youth is also significant. Fortunately, CBAE programs are a viable and highly recognized option for all youth, particularly from low-SES communities to level the playing field with access to crucial benefits and skills ascribed to higher-SES communities.

Considering the various definitions of community, it is imperative to clarify how it will be utilized as it correlates to this research study. This study will utilize the definition found in *Community Art in Action* (Congdon, 2004a). In that explanation, community is expanded into three main situations in which people share: (1) a specific location/site, (2) a personal group/group identification, and (3) a common purpose or set of beliefs. What is also important to understand is how communities strongly affect community-

based aesthetic choices. These aesthetic decisions may range from how a neighborhood or local park is designed, to the way an artist may create a specific sculpture in an urbanized or gentrified community. Sometimes the community-based aesthetics from one group may be more extreme or demanding than others.

For example, a school in a specific community may push for programs and technology that surrounding schools do not offer or see as a necessity (Congdon, 2004a). The implementation of CBAE programs may be perceived in the same manner. Some communities may warrant and be accepting of its establishment, while others may be more hesitant and reluctant. Nevertheless, Congdon (2004b) believes the establishment of a CBAE program is not created through force or coercion, rather, through purposeful research, effective communication with community members, and building relationships with local schools and businesses.

The scholarly journal, *Art Education*, includes an article “Three Initiatives for Community-Based Art Education Practices” which discusses and elaborates upon the importance and purpose of community-based art programs, and the many benefits of its implementation (Lim et al., 2013). Community-based art activities are “socially relevant purposes of postmodern art while expanding the classroom beyond the borders and walls of the school” (Innella, 2010, p. 51). The article makes connections with art, art education, and the real world. The article also demonstrates the importance of self-reflection and personal growth, which contribute to the well-being of the participants’ individual experience and the program’s effectiveness within the community.

To improve the quality of learning that takes place within community-based art programs and the benefits gained, it is necessary to be educated and kept abreast of

other scholarly research studies, including a variety of well-known art programs around the country. The following examples are reflective of past and current research studies on nationally recognized art programs that serve youth in low-SES communities, have proven track records, including strong financial support, profound ties to the community, and perpetual advocacy for the arts.

## **Community-based Art Education Programs Serving Low-SES Youth**

### ***The Arts Empowerment Project***

An example of a city that leads the way, providing its youth multiple opportunities to engage in art related experiences in communities of high poverty, is Charlotte, North Carolina. Charlotte is home to more than 400 non-profit organizations (NPOs), with 50 of the organizations relating to arts and culture, and 37 of those specifically focusing on youth. These arts and culture youth organizations impact areas ranging from education and youth development to health and community. Many of the organizations also support causes such as abused and neglected, chronic illnesses, civic engagement, and dropout prevention.

Since 2011, the Charlotte-based NPO, The Arts Empowerment Project (TAEP), has been a stellar example of how community-based programs can change lives through the arts. TAEP believes in the transformative power of art to heal and inspire children impacted by neglect and abuse. This organization matches at-risk youth, predominantly from low-SES communities to existing arts and enrichment programs in the Charlotte area (The Arts Empowerment Project, 2011). According to Lawton (2010), art educators should be concerned with teaching their students to make critical



connections between the classroom and the outside world, something TAEP does particularly well. Those who participate in TAEP's program have access to a plethora of options ranging from visual and fine arts to culinary experiences at local universities. These artistic experiences have introduced students to contemporary global, cultural, and racial issues, and provide a platform in which students may devise plans about how to approach these challenges.

### ***East Bay Center for the Performing Arts***

The East Bay Center for the Performing Arts provides a successful model of community-based art programs in the East Bay region of central California, which has a strong multicultural basis, with over 90% being People of Color. From its initiation in 1968, originating in a high-SES community, to five decades and \$15.4 million later, this program is one of the most successful in the country.

East Bay Center impacts a variety of areas for youth, such as access to high-quality arts education, and connecting youth to their communities. Youth are connected to their communities through the youth resident companies and advanced Center students, which reach local audiences of 25,000 through presentations at 70+ community gatherings annually (East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, 2009). Productions of new music, dance, and theater works – many in deep partnership with civic and neighborhood groups – help tell East Bay's story and build long-term social capital for students, families, and the East Bay community.

The East Bay Center provides high-quality arts education through their school partnership programs that provide hands-on music, dance, and theater instruction to

over 3,700 Title I students at 17 strategically linked local public schools, housing project sites and community centers. Over 88% are People of Color. Ninety-one percent are from socio-economically disadvantaged families. These direct instructional services are enriched by professional development workshops for classroom teachers in arts integration techniques that help to engage a full range of learners and leverage school improvement (East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, 2009). This program exemplifies how a concept can start from nothing, but when backed with confidence, community-involvement, and a strong central mission, can be used as a blueprint for a successful art-based program anywhere.

## **Scholarly Research Studies on CBAE Programs in Low-SES Communities**

### ***Early Childhood Longitudinal Study***

In an early childhood longitudinal study (Aikens, & Barbarin, 2008), the authors use kindergarten through third-grade students to examine the extent to which family, school, and neighborhood factors account for the impact of SES on children's early reading. Utilizing modeling techniques, growth curve models were estimated to depict children's reading trajectories over those four years. The largest contribution in predicting initial kindergarten disparities came from the category of "family characteristics." This included home literacy environment, parental involvement in school, and parental role strain. However, school and neighborhood conditions contributed more than family characteristics to SES differences in *learning rates* in reading. The connection between school characteristics and reading outcomes indicates that the makeup of the student population, as indexed by poverty

concentration and number of children with reading deficits in the school, is related to reading outcomes.

### ***Champions of Change***

A joint research study (Burton et al., 1999) from educators at Teachers College, Columbia University, was conducted on 2000+ students in grades four through eight. The study successfully attempted to correlate the success of students who attended “high-arts” schools and programs compared to those who attended “low-arts.” This research study discusses the four main disciplines of art (i.e., visual, musical, theatrical, dance), who is teaching each discipline (i.e., specialist teachers, classroom teachers, artists-in-residence, etc.), and provides very meaningful, essential feedback on students through the formative assessment of questionnaires and other standardized measures. This information is critical because it shows some of the complexity that is experienced in just one subject area, in different settings, at varied ages and grade levels. It also illustrates the comparison of students who have minimal artistic involvement versus those who have profound, high-art experiences. The implications of this study are profound, with results recommending in-school arts being provided for maximum potential success to low-SES students.

Researchers James Catterall and Lynn Waldorf (1999) also published research findings from a variety of studies conducted by a collaboration between Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education (CAPE) and North Central Regional Laboratory (NCREL) in which they evaluated the research and findings from NCREL’s summary from 1998-1999. NCREL, which had been partnering with CAPE from the early years, conducted an extensive data collection from 1992 to 1998, with its more extensive research

extending one more year, 1998-1999. The whole study was to reveal how curricula from Chicago public schools, when partnered with CAPE and integrated into their curriculum, could show improvement in, or at least affect student achievement.

Also in *Champions of Change*, a research study (Catterall et al., 1999) was conducted on CBAE programs which centralized some of its studies specifically on youth in low-SES communities. The focus areas of this study are on music and theatre. With more than 25,000 students having been tracked for 10 years, the findings of the research concluded that academic achievement is higher for students involved in the arts versus those who are not. It also suggested a variety of developments ranging from gains in reading proficiency, gains in self-concept and motivation, and higher levels of empathy and tolerance for others.

Each of these studies contribute and relate to this thesis research because many of the youth subjects live within low-SES communities, and standardized measures show they have poor performance rates in their academic performance. Many research studies related to this thesis topic do not centralize their findings on the specific disciplines of music and theatre. More commonly, research is presented on the broader spectrum of art disciplines. It should only be viewed as beneficial, if not necessary, to also include the specific disciplines of music and theatre within lower-SES communities considering many of these programs typically exist more prevalently and successfully in more affluent communities (Catterall et al., 1999).

## **Career Assessments**

Ali et al. (2005) conducted a study that relates to situations many youth experience on a recurring basis. In this study, researchers included 114 students from lower-SES backgrounds. The purpose of the study was to understand the relationship between youth career success and the role that siblings and peer support can contribute to self-efficacy beliefs. The results are discussed in relation to the *social cognitive career theory*, which holds that portions of an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences (Bandura, 1986). The study also explores theories such as the *school to prison pipeline* and *colorism*, both of which occur most frequently in poorer communities that are also minority dominant (Ali et al., 2005). Colorism refers to discrimination based on skin color. It disadvantages people with darker skin while privileging those with lighter skin. Research has linked colorism to lower incomes, lower marriage rates, longer prison terms, and fewer job prospects for darker-skinned people (Nittle, 2021). According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the school to prison pipeline is a:

disturbing national trend wherein children are funneled out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Many of these children have learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse, or neglect, and would benefit from additional educational and counseling services. Instead, they are isolated, punished, and pushed out. (American Civil Liberties Union, 2021, para. 1)

The sound notion that quality versus quantity is a leading consideration given, and primary factor, in this research study that involves three mid-western states, eight

after-school programs, and 4900+ students (Ali et al., 2005). The relationship of greater engagement and positive emotions due to structured programs versus lower engagement and less positive emotions from less structured programs is an indicator that the quality of a program is directly related to more beneficial outcomes to the participants involved in such programs. These researchers, amongst others, have linked out-of-school environments and engagement in free time activities with enhanced personal confidence and social competencies, including learning to work well with others.

### **Skills, Impact, and Advocacy**

The enjoyment of art education is only one beneficial aspect for youth. The skills developed in art education often transfer to other areas of life and schoolwork (Frost, 2017). These benefits have a broad range and impact multiple areas (i.e., educational, psychological, social, and lifelong skills). Outcomes of participating in CBAE programs are often based on developing critical life skills, social/emotional development, civic engagement and social change, and college and career readiness in the arts and creative industries, amongst other indicators (Americans for the Arts, 2014).

The following are examples of critical life, and essential, skills that may be acquired through CBAE participation, and a description of each one's importance. These skills can unquestionably impact youth in any area regardless of SES, however current research supports these skills having greater implications for People of Color from lower-SES communities.

## Critical Life Skills

- *Creativity*: Understanding and harnessing one's own creativity allows one to think "outside of the box" and encourages original methods of problem solving. Students who think creatively can take unique approaches to problems and develop alternate solutions. Creativity is a great leadership skill to have because creators are ready to explore, tackle unforeseeable hurdles and embrace discovery (Seabrook, 2017).
- *Self-expression*: With every art piece students create, they are using their creativity, their vision, dreams, wonder and sense of the world. Art education gives students a safe and supportive environment to harness that self-expression, practice, and master it.
- *Open-mindedness*: Understanding art may foster new ways of thinking. Initially, an art observer may be reluctant to articulate what s/he "thinks" the artist is portraying, but upon exploration, begin to think in terms previously foreign to him or her (Seabrook, 2017).
- *Confidence*: Art education allows students to explore and practice with new media and techniques, thereby finding their own "voice." They gain confidence in the path to discovery, without fear of the outcome. It is understood that having confidence is beneficial for personal and professional relationships, helps students tackle challenging subjects, and nurtures exploration in their own lives (Strauss, 2013).
- *Risk-taking*: For students to grow personally and academically, they must take risks. Learning through art education gives them the confidence to try new things,

experiment with the unknown and formulate their own conclusions. Art education can be especially beneficial for students who are not as responsive to “traditional” ways of learning. This is a great trait found in most entrepreneurs or those in leadership positions (Seabrook, 2017).

- *Problem solving*: Artistic creations are born through the solving of problems. How do I turn this clay into a sculpture? How do I portray a particular emotion through dance? How will my character react in this situation? Without even realizing it kids that participate in the arts are consistently being challenged to solve problems. All this practice problem solving develops children’s skills in reasoning and understanding. This will help develop important problem-solving skills necessary for success in any career (Strauss, 2013).

## **Essential Skills**

- *Social/Emotional Development*: Not only do children who participate in arts programming over an extended period show more sophisticated social skills such as sharing and cooperation, but also show reduced shyness and anxiety (internalized display of emotions) and reduced aggressive behavior (externalized display of emotions). Children who do arts regularly are better able to control their emotions and express them in productive ways (Menzar, 2015).
- *Civic Engagement and Social Change*: In arts-based civic engagement, the creative process and resulting artwork/experience can provide a key focus, catalyst, or space for civic participation, whether it is becoming better informed or actively contributing to the improvement of one’s neighborhood, community, and nation. Social change is both the process and effect of efforts to positively alter



societal conditions. It encompasses a range of outcomes—healing, increased awareness, attitudinal change, more diverse and increased civic participation, movement building, and policy change to name just a few (Americans for the Arts, 2015).

- *College and Career Readiness*: Community-based art programs can give students the chance to work hard, practice, take on leadership roles (e.g., through acting, musical ensembles, etc.) and form habits of mind, such as social and motivational skills that link to achievement, thereby deepening their understanding and ability to apply knowledge to multiple problems and contexts through an engaging, memorable experience (National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research, 2011).

### **Impact of CBAE Programs on Youth**

The benefits acquired from CBAE participation will create a meaningful and long-lasting effect on youth who live in low-SES regions versus youth from high-SES regions. A multitude of benefits acquired from CBAE programs are helpful to any participant, regardless of SES. However, studies conducted over the last 20 years have shown a drastic connection between SES, academic progress, and achievement. Successful programs in areas of extreme poverty provide benefits that impact education, social-emotional growth, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills. These benefits have proven to create career opportunities, enhance interpersonal skills, and increase morale.

Research indicates that children from low-SES households and communities develop academic skills slower than children from higher-SES groups (Morgan,

Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). For example, low-SES in childhood is related to poor cognitive development, language, memory, socioemotional processing, and consequently poor income and health in adulthood (American Psychological Association, 2019). The school systems in low-SES communities have less access to essential resources, negatively affecting students' academic progress and outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Inadequate education and increased dropout rates, amongst other factors, affect children's academic achievement, preserving the low-SES status of the community. Participation in CBAE programs may provide benefits and instill values that could help to reduce some of these risk factors.

In addition to the negative effects living in a low-SES community has on education and academic readiness on youth, it also affects the path of their career goals. SES is closely related with social class, and that has been shown to be a significant factor in influencing career aspirations, trajectory, and achievement (APA, 2019). Diemer and Blustein (2007) found that racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic barriers hinder an individual's vocational development. Career barriers are significantly higher for those from poor backgrounds, People of Color, women, those who are disabled, and LGBTIQ-identified individuals (Blustein, 2013). A study showed that individuals from a lower social class had less career-related self-efficacy when it came to vocational aspirations (Ali et al., 2005). Those from higher social class backgrounds tend to be more successful in developing career aspirations and are better prepared for the world of work because of access to resources such as high school career offices, and guidance counselors (Diemer & Ali, 2009).

An example of a local CBAE program that strongly challenges the status quo regarding the lack of career readiness and preparedness for minority youth in areas of higher poverty is *The Arts Empowerment Project (TAEP)*. This Charlotte-based operation has a strong representation of students and families from differentiated racial demographics and SES from various parts of the city. *South* Charlotte is mainly white, and very affluent with small representations of individuals from lower and middle-class SES; *north* and *east* regions of Charlotte represent a mix of Black, Asian, and Latinx ethnicities, with an abundance of government-supported, lower-income families to upper middle-class; *west* Charlotte is mainly Black and Latinx, sustaining the greatest amount of high-poverty demographics, also making it an attractive region for gentrification.

This non-profit organization operates using a court referral system where a judge suggests a community service organization specifically for youth who have experienced violence and abuse. Once they become associated with TAEP, the participants have access to diverse art education and vocational skill building programs, where students may stay with a single program or attempt participation with multiple programs within a specific duration. Due to a lack of accessible public transportation in some areas, many of the youth participants automatically qualify for TAEP's shuttle bus service at no extra cost. However, to satisfy the needs of multiple communities throughout the city, TAEP's programs are intentionally spread throughout the city, offering an abundant variety in each region. TAEP strives to provide equal opportunities for all participants.

## **Advocacy for the Arts**

Advocacy for arts education is a growing support system that can be seen in cities across the country with new legislation, museum exhibitions and public organizational arts programs, and increased budgets and grants for many schools across the greater Charlotte region. Tara Makinen (Arrowhead Regional Arts Council, 2019) believes advocating for the arts is the right and the responsibility we have as civilians in arts activities, organizations, and by public and private funding to make a difference. Unfortunately, many of the battles for arts advocacy are being won in high-SES neighborhoods in Charlotte, further disadvantaging the youth in low-SES communities where there is already a historically high-minority population, restricted lower-income housing, increased crime rates, and a myriad of underperforming schools. Therefore, it is imperative to encourage the youth within these low-SES communities to participate in local CBAE programs.

Over the last two years, Charlotte has received over \$300,000 in grants to support art programs at numerous galleries, museums, university programs, and businesses, each in support of arts education (Americans for the Arts, 2019). The programs include artist-in-residencies, contemporary art exhibits, programs for incarcerated youth, and Charlotte Ballet dance performances. Each program offers a wonderful, creative, and artistically educational experience; however, many of the places that received the grants are in areas where those without transportation, financial support, or awareness of the programs can take advantage of what is offered. One solution to this challenge is to offer other artistic opportunities that may yield equitable value and benefits in low-SES communities, bringing the experience

closer to home. Another solution is to acquire grants and funding that support a means of transportation from low-SES communities to the programs, activities, and organizations that provide arts education opportunities. Although there are many factors to consider when devising such a complex, expensive plan, such solutions are possible to achieve.

One example of a program that includes both solutions is the aforementioned *East Bay Center for the Performing Arts*. Located in Richmond, California, just outside of San Francisco, this arts education program began in 1968 with minimal funding and has developed into what is now a \$15.4 million capital campaign (Engdahl, 2012). Although Richmond has commanding views of San Francisco Bay and Marin County, it does not share in the affluence associated with the Bay Area. It is an industrial city with a large oil refinery and railroad yard. The population is poor, with well over 60% of the children in its school system eligible for free and reduced lunch. The population is changing as well. Formerly dominated by African Americans, the city is now home to an increasing population of new immigrants. The cost of living in Richmond is low in comparison to surrounding cities. Over 60 different languages are present in its schools. In addition, Richmond is regularly listed as one of the top ten cities for murder and crime, nationwide (Engdahl, 2012). Students who participate in the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts program are seventh through tenth graders, and it serves some of them as a pre-conservatory. While it provides performances through its resident companies, it is not primarily a producing company. Rather, it exists to provide underserved children and youth with deep arts experiences in a community where they

otherwise would not find them. Over its 40-year history the Center has reached some 50,000 students (East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, 2009).

The East Bay Center has its own small fleet of shuttles that will transport program participants to locally offered arts programs, which includes bi-weekly field trips to various events. Even more remarkably, the Center also boasts a free, four-year Diploma Program, which is divided into a two-year Advanced Placement and two-year Leadership Program. The studies consist of year-round individual lessons and group classes, community engagement, student mentoring projects, recitals, and public performances. At the end of four years a student will have had as much as 2,000 hours (about two and a half months) of class and lesson time. Many of the Diploma Program graduates will continue to work at the Center during their last two years of high school as teacher assistants or ensemble members. As members of the ensembles, they are paid for performances. During that time, the Center supports them with college admissions advice (East Bay Center, 2009).

The East Bay Center is just one of many successful CBAE organizations whose mission is to engage youth and young adults in imagining and creating new worlds for themselves and new visions for their communities through the inspiration and discipline of rigorous training (East Bay Center, 2009). It has a focus on the arts, it has practicing professional artists as teachers, students are engaged in the practice of art on average three days a week, and students practice a range of arts disciplines both individually and in groups. Beyond the obvious, it also possesses a broader vision of what arts education can do for these students. It is an artistic community that possesses, in Catterall's (2009) words, "a shared ethos, community of caring, shared ways of

knowing, value for creativity in all its forms and outreach and integration with parents” (p. 116).

Youth involvement in a community-based art education program will promote arts advocacy. This is recognized and supported, for example, by the many achievements of the youth who are involved in the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts (Richmond, CA) and The Arts Empowerment Project (Charlotte, NC).

Their engagement in these programs is more likely to promote art education because their involvement helps to cultivate a greater appreciation for the arts, provide the means for the initiation of effective change in a community, and create profound, rich, and rigorous educational experiences for youth otherwise not experienced in traditional school art programs. As policies, political powers, and societal demands change, so will the outlook, role, and importance of CBAE programs in communities. To sustain art education as more than a superficially therapeutic or stress relieving activity, communities need to support and encourage our youth to participate in arts programs in any way possible as it is the youth of today who will have the greatest effect on the status of arts education in the future.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### **Description of Population**

This research study was approved by the UMCIRB at East Carolina University (see *Appendix A*). Research data was conducted using the results of 40 students of color, between 12 and 14 years of age, who attend a private school, reside in a low-SES community in west Charlotte, North Carolina, and participate with TAEP's programs. Although it includes youth participants and volunteers from south Charlotte (a high-SES community), only the experiences of the youth from the low-SES community had their responses recorded.

The 40 participants' private school has a population of 193 and racial demographic that is 70% Black, 18% Latinx, 11% Asian, and 1% White. For the purpose of this study *Latinx* has been used to denote students who identified as Hispanic or Latin. Over 90% of the students receive free lunch, qualifying students for Title I, Part A according to the guidelines of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's education law which has shown a longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students since 1965. The achievement gap is also evident, showcasing great disparities amongst the White, Black, Asian and Latinx students. Although the White student population is 1%, the faculty/staff are 68% White, 17% Black, 13% Latinx, and 2% other.

### **Research Design**

The research design for this project was based on a quantitative research method that utilized the instruments of surveys, questionnaires, personal reflections, and documented verbal feedback. The surveys, questionnaires, and personal



reflections were provided in-person, and collected from multiple students who participate in various CBAE programs throughout the greater Charlotte area.

The surveys utilized a Likert scale approach because it is one of the most commonly used evaluation styles (Losby, 2012). The surveys used an ordered scale that ranged from one to ten, with one representing “*strongly disagree*”, five “*neutral*”, and ten “*strongly agree*.” Due to the nature of the information being acquired, it was necessary to use this exploratory approach because it provided the opportunity to ascertain the needs and goals of the participants, while also collecting ample information that could support larger future studies.

## **Instruments**

Prior to participating, and in compliance with the East Carolina University UMCIRB protocols, each participant and their parent/guardian completed a permission letter (see *Appendix B*) and assent form (see *Appendix C*), respectively. Participants were provided four different surveys that aided in the determination of specific information related to the personal values, benefits, and impact of CBAE participation: Survey 1 (Quantitative): This survey provided various statements regarding a range of benefits students may have acquired from CBAE participation. A Likert scale of one to ten was used for answering each statement (see *Appendix D*).

Survey 2 (Qualitative): This survey asked three open-ended questions about CBAE participation (see *Appendix E*).

Survey 3 (Qualitative): This survey asked participants to explain what they have valued the most from CBAE participation (see *Appendix F*).

Survey 4 (Quantitative): This survey provided various statements to ascertain if CBAE participation contributed to arts advocacy using a Likert scale of one to ten (see *Appendix G*).

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### **Explanation of Quantitative Study**

Through the use of two surveys (Survey 1 and Survey 4), the 40 students who participated in this research study were asked to examine and evaluate their personal experiences with CBAE programs in the Charlotte area. Once all surveys were collected, the results were analyzed and categorized by race. Since the research was conducted on the premise that CBAE programs have a greater impact on People of Color, it was necessary to categorize the results by race and independently analyze each survey by that standard. In this quantitative analysis, only the results of Survey 1 will be examined. The results of Survey 4 will not be examined or considered in this research because the information does not provide any useful insight for answering the three research questions.

### **Analysis of Quantitative Data**

#### ***Survey 1***

Figure 1 (below) yields the results of the top three traits most developed by the participants from their CBAE experience: (1) peer-relationships (blue); (2) confidence (orange), and (3) academic preparedness (grey). It is important to note that 54% of Black, 73% of Asian, and 58% of Latinx student participants selected the aforementioned traits, whereas the remaining participants chose other traits.

The results revealed that 33% of Asian participants considered *confidence* as the most valued trait compared to *peer-relationships* (22%) for Latinx, and *academic preparedness* (20%) for Black youth. According to Harold Stevenson (1995) Asian-

American youth, particularly from Chinese, Japanese, and Taiwanese cultures are more likely to be raised in a household that emphasizes high academic achievement, producing a different set of beliefs, values, and attitudes toward education when compared to other races in America. Based on the sample in this study, it could be speculated that the large gap in value placed on *confidence* between Black and Asian youth may indicate an increase in greater classroom participation for Asian students within this specific research setting. Conversely, the gap in *peer-relationships* between Latinx (22%) and Asian (13%) youth could indicate a decreased emphasis, for Asian youth, towards developing meaningful friendships within this research setting. What is also important to acknowledge is the nearly identical value placed upon *peer-relationships* (19%) and *academic preparedness* (20%) for Black students. This may signify the importance that Black youth respondents place on friendships in this particular CBAE program, and also on the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and abilities that could prepare them academically for college. Due to less than overwhelming majorities of respondents selecting these three traits, further research is warranted to determine if these results are consistent across TAEP programming.

**Figure 1**

*Most Valued Traits*

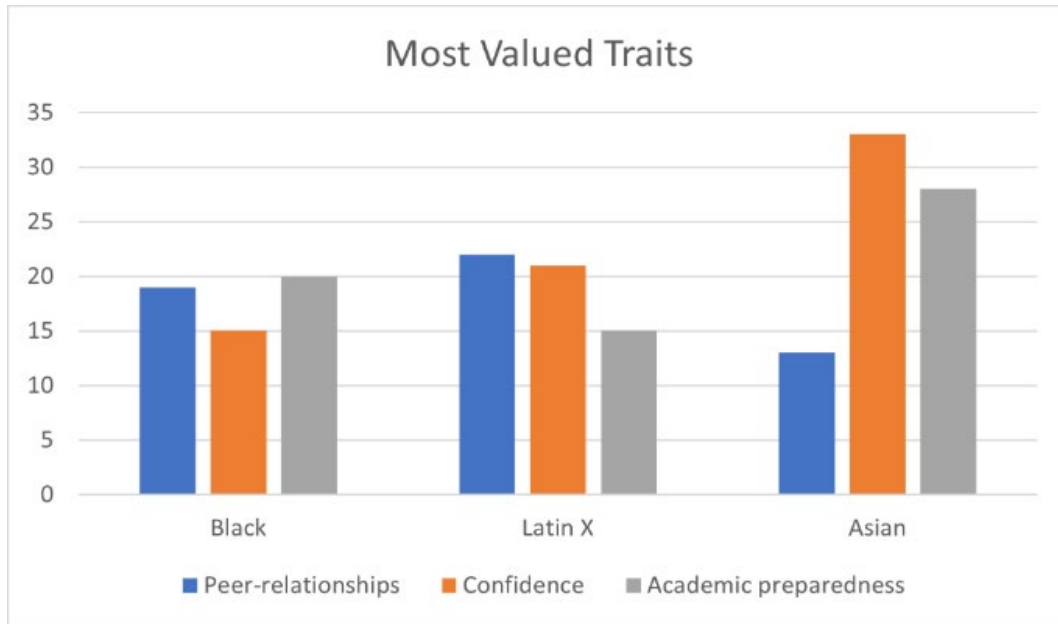
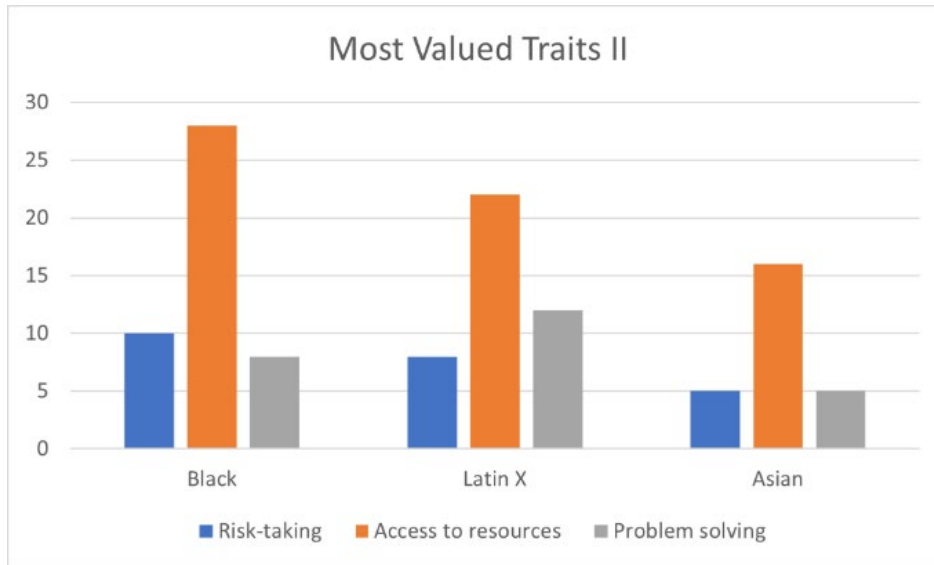


Figure 2 (below) yields the results of the second most valued set of three traits that these students found to be the most beneficial within this CBAE program: risk-taking (blue); access to resources (orange); and problem-solving (grey). It is important to note that 46% of Black, 26% of Asian, and 43% of Latinx student participants selected the aforementioned traits, whereas the remaining participants chose other traits. The results showed that 28% of Black, 23.5% of Latinx, and 16.5% of Asian students all considered *access to resources* as the most valued trait. *Risk-taking* was selected by 5% of Asian, 8% of Latinx, and 10% of Black students. What is also worthy of noting is the importance Latinx students placed upon *problem solving* (13%) compared to Asian (5%) and Black students (8%).

**Figure 2**

*Additional Most Valued Traits*



The results of Survey 1 support the hypothesis that minority youth from lower-SES communities will acquire a breadth of essential and critical life skills that can support areas such as career and educational readiness. These traits were a result of the one-on-one interactions that volunteers and staff encountered with students over the course of six months during community projects and in class activities. What is also worthy of noting is the importance that *access to resources* has for all participants, irrespective of race. In this capacity, the term *resources* is a general term broadly referring to art supplies, reliable transportation, laptops, books, organizational support, and even a social/emotional support system. Current research supports that access to a range of resources is essential for success (Little, 2021). This supports the hypothesis that access to resources would be considered one of the important benefits of CBAE participation.

## **Limitations**

Considering the surveys were conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic, limiting the number of participants and recorded information, the results of this study should not be used to make generalizations about all Black, Asian, and Latinx youth who participate in CBAE programs across the Charlotte area. Additionally, the survey results should not be applied to all CBAE programs across the state because more than 40 participants would be needed to make this study's results more generalizable. Regardless of the limitations, the findings of these surveys provide invaluable insight into the benefits, and the impact of the benefits, for minority youth who participated in TAEP programs during the time of this study.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### **Summary of Research**

Significant benefits are to be gained from participation within a CBAE program. However, the benefits and impact are greater if you are a minority youth living in a low-SES community. A snapshot of the benefits gained include critical life skills such as problem-solving, confidence, and open-mindedness regarding different cultures. CBAE programs also provide incredible opportunities to truly educate students through the arts by giving them experiences and developmental support not received in the school environment.

Youth with low-SES will gain a range of benefits and values as participants within a CBAE program different than those with high-SES. For instance, low-SES in childhood is related to poor cognitive development, language, memory, socioemotional processing, and consequently poor income and health in adulthood (American Psychological Association, 2019). The school systems in low-SES communities have less access to essential resources, negatively affecting students' academic progress and outcomes (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Studies reveal that individuals from a lower social class have less career-related self-efficacy when it comes to vocational aspirations (Ali et al., 2005) and those from higher social class backgrounds tend to be more successful in developing career aspirations and are better prepared for the world of work because of greater access to resources.



## Discussion

In hopes of increasing awareness, continuing active engagement, and expanding support concerning the benefits of CBAE programs in low-SES communities and their effects on youth, strong consideration must be given to the following statements:

- I. The implementation of community-based art education programs in low-SES communities increases educational opportunities for all participants, but particularly minority youth, through the acquisition of important critical and life skills that can only be gained from CBAE participation.
- II. Without the existence of community-based art education programs in low-SES communities across the Charlotte region, there would be a lower rate of youth minority success in academic achievement, and career readiness.
- III. The need for community-based art education program participation is more profound and more impactful for youth who have less access to resources and who lack the support systems necessary to foster and cultivate positive change through arts education.
- IV. People of Color will greatly benefit from participating in community-based art education programs. Their involvement in such art education programs from early childhood through high school will provide a foundational set of skills that may increase their likelihood of success in multiple settings such as test taking (problem-solving skills), job interviews (confidence skills), international exploration (risk-taking and peer-relationships skills), and college preparation (academic preparedness skills).

## **Implications**

This research should be perceived as a glimpse into the complexity and intricate design that goes into the intention, purpose, framework, and mission of community-based art education programs, particularly those located in low-SES communities. The opportunities these youth experience within a CBAE program go beyond the creation and exploration of art; their experiences can also be life-altering.

An intention for this research is to support ongoing studies, but also to spark new interest in the ongoing discussions about the effects of art education on youth in areas of higher poverty. It is imperative for the continuity of research in this area, as it contains meaningful and impactful information essential to improving the overall livelihood of youth within the Charlotte region and beyond. Pamela Lawton (2010), previous director of the art education program for the former Corcoran College, believes art educators should be focused on teaching their students to make essential connections between the classroom and the outside world, as these connections and associated skills may lead to lowered career barriers, improved career paths, higher academic achievement, and an overall improvement in quality of life.

Another intention is to spark more involvement and increase advocacy towards the arts and arts education. The quantitative data from this study provide examples not only of the benefits youth may gain from their experiences, but also a glimpse of the influence CBAE programs are capable of having. Without continuing efforts that explore new directions, and expand upon existing successful program designs, there is an increased risk of youth in low-SES communities who may not get the chance, or be

provided the experiences, to have an equal opportunity for future success compared to those from higher-SES communities.

## **Future Research**

In relation to this study, the research supports how vital CBAE programs are for youth, including the benefits gained from their participation. As it pertains to this study, the research also gives insight to the influence these benefits can have on minority youth living in low-SES communities. Research has shown students actively involved in the arts are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement; 25% of students who are most socioeconomically challenged are five times more likely to graduate from high school and twice as likely to graduate from college if they are significantly active in the arts compared to their peers with little or no arts participation (Ali et al., 2005).

Research has also supported that educational values and benefits differ for youth in low-SES communities versus those in high-SES communities; however, the research of benefits and values gained from participating in a CBAE program demand that such programs must be expanded to more cities, conducted on a more frequent basis, and be responsive to other relevant factors (e.g., ethnicity, citizenship status, and English as a Second Language youth) from both high- and low-SES communities.

The hope is that future research will continue to be conducted in cities and communities across the country that reflects the benefits and values of CBAE programs in low-SES communities. Future research must consider SES, ethnic background, and community aesthetic choices. Another hope is that art educators will be inspired to help

our youth foster and sustain a love for art and art education through careful planning, engaging activities, effective social interactions, individual growth opportunities, and a welcoming attitude on the part of teachers and administrators. Future research may provide critical insight toward the improvement of CBAE programs including their operation, maintenance, and expansion. Because many of the youth in low-SES neighborhoods and communities already have enough on their plates, their participation in CBAE programs is not only essential, but potentially lifesaving.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY  
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board  
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284  
· [rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/](http://rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/)

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: Dwayne Wilson  
CC: Borim Song

Date: 4/9/2020  
Re: UMCIRB 19-002783  
Benefits of Community-Based Art Education Programs

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 4/8/2020. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a Final Report application to the UMCIRB prior to the Expected End Date provided in the IRB application. If the study is not completed by this date, an Amendment will need to be submitted to extend the Expected End Date. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

| Name               | Description                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Parent consent     | Consent Forms                       |
| Recruitment script | Recruitment Documents/Scripts       |
| Student assent     | Consent Forms                       |
| Study Protocol     | Study Protocol or Grant Application |
| Survey 1.docx      | Surveys and Questionnaires          |
| Survey 2.docx      | Surveys and Questionnaires          |
| Survey 3.docx      | Surveys and Questionnaires          |
| Survey 4.docx      | Surveys and Questionnaires          |

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION LETTER



Parental Permission to Allow Your Child to Take Part in Research

Information to consider before allowing your child to take part in research that has no more than minimal risk

Title of Research Study:
Principal Investigator:
Institution, Department or Division:
Address:
Telephone #:
Study Coordinator:
Telephone #:
Participant Full Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Please PRINT clearly: \_\_\_\_\_

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why is my child being invited to take part in this research?
Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
What will my child be asked to do?
What might I experience if I take part in the research?
Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?

What if my child decides he/she doesn't want to continue in this research?
Who should I contact if I have questions?

I have decided my child can take part in this research. What should I do now? The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
I know that my child can stop taking part in this study at any time.
By signing this informed consent form, my child is not giving up any of his/her rights.
I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Parent's Name (PRINT) Signature Date

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) Signature Date

APPENDIX C: ASSENT FORM



*Assent Form  
Things You Should Know Before You Agree to  
Take Part in this Research*

IRB Study # \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Study:

Person in charge of study:

Where they work:

Study contact phone number:

Study contact E-mail Address:

People at ECU study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research is trying to find out *what, if any, benefit there is participating in an educational/community-based art program.*

Why are you doing this research study?

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

How many people will take part in this study?

What will happen during this study?

Who will be told the things we learn about you in this study?

Who should you ask if you have any questions?

If you have questions about the research, you should ask the people listed on the first page of this form. If you have other questions about your rights while you are in this research study you may call the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914.

If you decide to take part in this research, you should sign your name below. It means that you agree to take part in this research study.

Sign your name here if you want to be in the study: \_\_\_\_\_

Print your name here if you want to be in the study: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name of Person Obtaining

Assent: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D: SURVEY I

Age: (ex// 12)\_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: (ex// White, Hispanic, Asian, African-American, etc. ) \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Language: (ex// English)\_\_\_\_\_ Secondary Language (if any): (ex// Spanish)\_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the number that corresponds with your level of agreement.

Strongly Disagree = 1    Unsure = 5    Strongly Agree = 10

I have enjoyed participating in a Community-Based Arts Education (CBAE) Program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I would recommend this CBAE Program to others from my community

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have made meaningful peer relationships during my involvement

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have acquired a range of life-long skills that extend beyond the classroom environment

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My confidence has increased because of my participation

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My level of creativity has increased due to my participation

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am able to communicate my feelings and thoughts through verbal means easier than before

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have developed or sustained a sense of open-mindedness to other cultures

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have increased my problem-solving and critical thinking skills and abilities

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am less inclined to exercise my risk-taking ability

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I feel safe expressing myself through art without fear of judgment

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

There is a connection between my educational success and my participation in this program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Being a part of this program keeps me safe

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I completely trust the students and faculty in this program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have experienced a significant improvement in my ability to create new friendships

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

This program has helped me understand and establish my cultural identity

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

APPENDIX E: SURVEY II

Age: (ex// 12) \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: (ex// White, Hispanic, Asian, African-American, etc. ) \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Language: (ex// English) \_\_\_\_\_ Secondary Language (if any): (ex// Spanish) \_\_\_\_\_

Please use complete sentences for the following questions.

Has your participation in this community-based arts education program connected you to your culture or identity? If so, please explain. If not, then what do you recommend could be done so that it can?

How has your participation in this educational/ community-based arts education program impacted your school education in general?

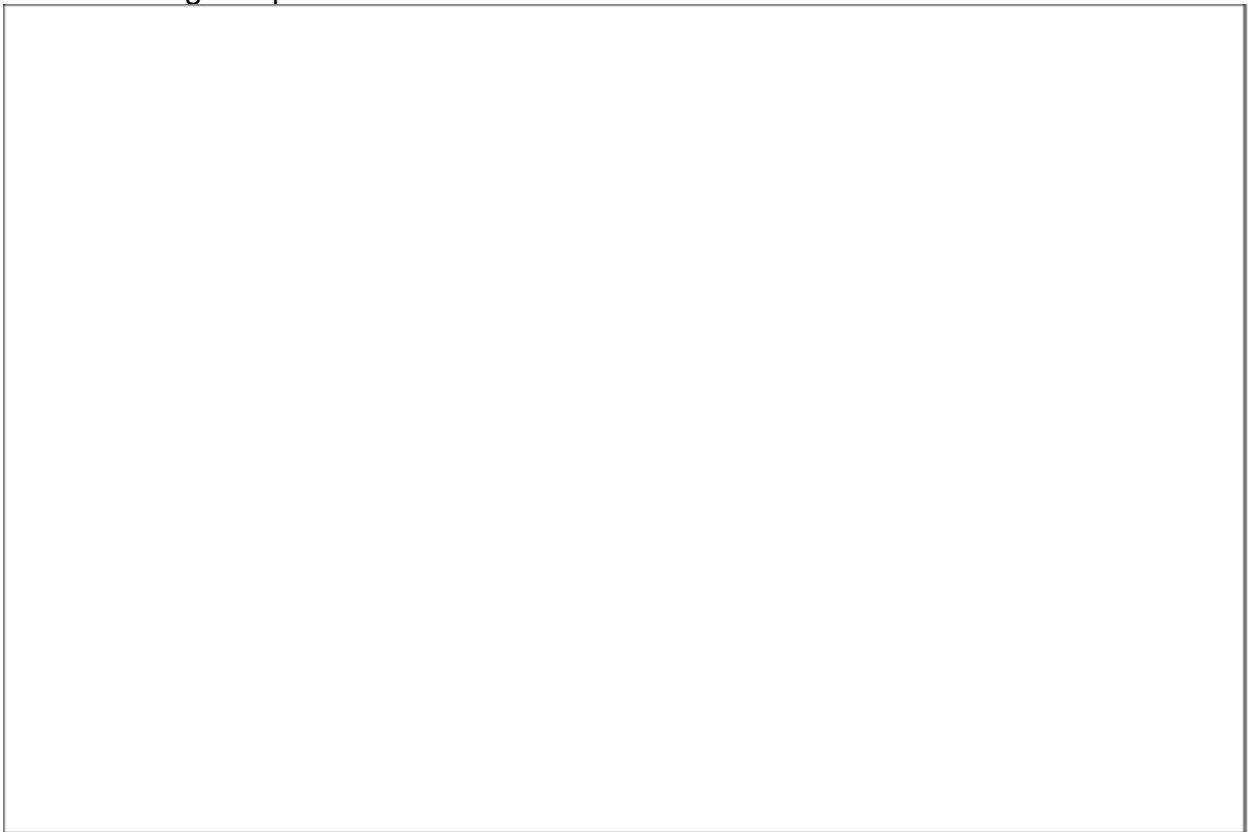
In what ways do you feel your participation in this art program has benefitted you?

APPENDIX F: SURVEY III

Age: (ex// 12)\_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: (ex// White, Hispanic, Asian, African-American, etc. ) \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Language: (ex// English)\_\_\_\_\_ Secondary Language (if any): (ex// Spanish)\_\_\_\_\_

Please answer using complete sentences.



What have you valued from participating in art in middle school? Please explain.



APPENDIX G: SURVEY IV

Age: (ex// 12)\_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: (ex// White, Hispanic, Asian, African-American, etc. ) \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Language: (ex// English)\_\_\_\_\_ Secondary Language (if any): (ex// Spanish)\_\_\_\_\_

(Research question: Does involvement in a community-based art program promote art advocacy in low-SES communities?)

Please circle the number that corresponds with your level of agreement.

Strongly Disagree = 1 Unsure = 5 Strongly Agree = 10

I have enjoyed art more since participating in the program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I look at my community and the walls within it as a blank canvas for artistic creation

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I get excited when working together to create art

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I constantly discuss art outside of the program to friends or family

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am interested in being a youth leader in my community

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I am interested in connecting to other programs in the surrounding areas

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have participated in at least one art contest in the last 12 months

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have created at least one finished artwork in the last 6 months

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My parents/guardian have been more interested in my art since my participation in art

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

My parents/guardian have been supportive of my artistic endeavors/pursuits

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10