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## Where are They Now? Graduates of an Arts Integration Elementary School Reflect on Art, School, Self and Others

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### Abstract

How do high school students experience art, school, self and others after graduating from an arts integrated elementary school? This exploratory case study employs elements of narrative inquiry to detail the experiences of six students who graduated from one arts integrated elementary school. Participants expand and revise their perceptions of non-cognitive factors featured in an earlier study that took place when they were in junior high (Simpson Steele, 2017). Four years later, these students explored what they remembered about their arts integrated learning experiences and how they connected those experiences with their present interests, choices, and dispositions. Patterns converged around the participants' ongoing interest in the arts, including engagement in arts ensembles and development of artistic sensibilities. They expressed a value for school and for teachers who provided them with variety of methods and materials. Finally, participants attributed social skills (such as confidence, community, and communication) to their early experiences in an arts

integrated school. The study concludes with three big questions: What is the effect of early learning through arts integration on adult engagements with the arts? How does arts integration influence students' mindsets or attitudes about school? How does the interaction between confidence, community and communication in the context of schoolwide arts integration influence learning?

### **Introduction**

Schoolwide arts integration models are becoming more common throughout the United States. Arts integration is an approach to teaching that involves students in their own learning as they simultaneously pursue objectives in the arts and other content (Silverstein & Layne, 2010). In some cases, struggling schools embrace arts integration as a pathway for change. For example, Turnaround Arts is a public-private partnership focused on improving academic outcomes in low-performing schools that struggle with poor leadership, frequent teacher turnover, low student attendance, and high disciplinary referrals. This initiative embraces "arts engagement as a lever for school transformation" (Stoelinga, Silk, Reddy, & Rahman, 2015, p. 2). Elsewhere, arts integration charter schools—such as the Doral Academy with its multiple campuses in Colorado, Nevada, and Florida—seek to offer families alternatives to traditional curriculum to prepare students for the future. Yet another model in states such as North Carolina and Oklahoma engages a large "A+" network of public, private, and charter schools that claim to nurture student creativity through arts integration (Robelen, 2012). Schools increasingly embrace empirical evidence that arts integration supports student achievement (Ludwig, Boyle & Lindsay, 2017; Miller & Bogatova, 2018). However, these studies fall short when it comes to examining student experiences over time and after they have graduated. Additionally, they fail to explore young learners' lived experiences with arts integration.

The purpose of this exploratory case study is to share the narrative perspectives of six teenagers who attended the same arts integrated elementary school. How do they experience art, school, self and others after graduating from an arts integrated elementary school? This study continues research that began in 2013, when I interviewed these same participants as they were entering middle school (Simpson Steele, 2017). I returned to several of the students as they entered high school to ask them to look back on those early learning experiences, and explored how they connected those experiences with their present relationships, interests, choices, and dispositions.

### **Background**

Within the first installment of this study (Simpson Steele, 2017) I framed student learning through the arts in terms of noncognitive factors (Farrington et al., 2012). Cognitive domains

of human experience, measured by IQ and standardized tests, explain what a person knows and can do with content. For example, researchers often study cognitive effects of arts integration by establishing positive correlations between the introduction of the arts and a school's overall assessment scores in English and Math (Scripp & Paradis, 2014; Snyder, Klos, & Grey-Hawkings, 2014; Stoelinga et al., 2015). However, there is danger in this approach. Winner and Cooper (2000) note, "As soon as we justify arts by their power to affect learning in an academic area, we make the arts vulnerable" (p. 67). Correlational claims that the arts improve cognitive outcomes fall short when it comes to proof of cause and effect (Catterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thomas, 2012). Eisner (1999) warned arts education researchers, "too often, we promise more than we can deliver, a practice that by definition lends itself to disappointment" (p.143). The arts hold significance beyond instrumental outcomes, and pursuing claims within the narrow confines of academic achievement may only increase scholarly skepticism.

Alternatively, noncognitive lenses frame the value of art in schools much in the same way many perceive the value art in life—as a mirror or challenge to human behaviors. Noncognitive factors detail feelings, attitudes, personality traits, beliefs, behaviors, habits, motivations, relationships, engagements, and strategies that contribute to a human's capacity to learn. These factors, as defined and supported by a range of research, are critical to students' "performance and persistence" in their post-secondary lives (Nagaoka et al., 2013, p. 46). Content knowledge, academic skills, and non-cognitive factors interact to support success in college, career, and community. The personal, relational, and contextual nature of this study aligns with noncognitive factors that address mindsets and personal competencies, in particular participant relationships with the arts, school, self and other. Related literature reveals: a) early experience leads to later engagement in arts; b) whole-school arts integration influences teacher effectiveness and school culture; and c) participation in the arts impacts students' understanding of themselves in relation with others.

### ***Early Experience Leads to Later Engagement in the Arts***

The arts are vehicles of communication for culture, society and humanity. Through exchange, the arts act upon our imaginations to allow us to expand and even reform the conscience—to recognize and transform ourselves and our world (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 2002; Greene, 1997). While a healthy cycle of communication between artists and audiences contributes to a vibrant culture sustaining high quality aesthetic experiences that encourage public discourse and action, there has been a steady decline in arts participation in the United States (Zakaras & Lowell, 2008, p. xiii). The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has published Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) since 1982, presenting significant declines in attendance at performing arts events and at art museums/galleries over time, particularly between 2002 and 2012 (National Endowment for the Arts [NEA], 2015). These reports also

provide additional details regarding the lack of diversity in ethnicity, age, and socio-economic status of those who are likely to visit a museum or buy tickets to a performance. Other variables, such as language, gender, and parent education, could also play a role in this puzzle (Mansour, Martin, & Liem, 2016). However, research suggests a comprehensive arts education through which students learn to create, understand, and appreciate the arts leads to adult involvement in the arts (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011; Zacaras & Lowell; 2008). Elpus (2017) contends,

Rather than disengage from art-making and arts attendance upon graduation, students of school-based music and arts education were significantly more likely to create art in their own lives and to patronize arts events than were adults who lacked school-based music or arts education. (p.172)

Young people who receive an education including the arts become adults who fulfill an essential role in an arts communication cycle with the potential to uplift their communities.

### ***Teacher Effectiveness and School Culture***

Literature on whole-school arts integration frequently discusses teacher effectiveness and school culture. In studies where teachers' skill sets expanded and confidence grew in arts integration, so did student learning (Doyle, Hofstetter, Kendig, & Strick, 2014; Werner, 2002). Teacher change was not limited to arts integration methodology: those who partnered with Kennedy Center through Changing Education through the Arts (CETA) reported a strengthened appreciation of arts integration, but also a growing repertoire of instructional strategies and the feeling of empowerment as educators (Duma & Silverstein, 2014). Cawthon and Dawson (2009) researched teachers who increased authentic instruction, engagement of learners, hands-on instructional strategies and collaborations with others teachers. In one arts integration school, teachers began to adopt the mindset of "artfulness" defined as "cognitive and emotional response to stimuli that individuals experience as situated within artistic or arts-based environments" (Chemi, 2014, p. 376). Artful teachers could successfully navigate both breadth and depth of content. They learned to optimize instructional time while ensuring sufficient time to support the incubation of ideas. As teachers moved away from transmission and acquisition models of instruction toward the pedagogies that supported emergent learning, they learned to improvise the balance between creativity and constraint (Sawyer, 2015).

Schools that adopted an arts integration model reported increased attendance rates, decline in discipline referrals, and overall positive change on school climate (Duma & Silverstein, 2014; Scripp & Paradis, 2014; Snyder et al., 2014; Stoelinga et al., 2015). These indicators suggest students wanted to come to school and felt that they belonged there. Charland (2011) explained how one school was a "cultural ecosystem" (p. 5) that changed when a school

adopted Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). In this case, the pedagogy itself influenced school change, but in other instances, collaborations among teachers in arts integration learning communities helped shape a positive, child-centered school environment (Duma & Silverstein, 2014). Robinson (2013) concluded that schoolwide arts integration, "appears to facilitate school environments that are collaborative, caring, and inclusive" (p. 200). Communities that embrace arts integration strategies embrace coinciding philosophies that support a healthy, thriving learning environment.

### ***Understanding Self in Relation to Others***

Scholarship indicates arts engagement supports students' understanding of themselves in relationships with others. Although many of these studies are small in scope, participants experienced growth in identity related domains such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, feeling of belonging, and sense of purpose (Caldwell & Witt, 2011; Rose-Krasnor, Busseri, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006; Shanahan & Flaherty, 2001). Self-expression through performances provided young artists the opportunity to be "who you really are to yourself" (Stinson, 1997, p. 59). Experience in the arts may also encourage greater self-determination and personal initiative (Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). Studies that specifically focused on schoolwide arts integration made similar claims regarding the development of students' personal competencies (Biscoe & Wilson, 2015).

Students participating in the arts also gained a stronger sense of connection with others, seeing themselves as part of a larger local community to which they had contributed (Caldwell & Witt, 2011). In a review of literature on the arts and early childhood, findings suggest music activities increased pro-social behaviors in young children (such as helping, sharing, caring and empathizing with others) and visual arts activities helped children better regulate their emotions (Menzer, 2015). Brouillette (2010) provided evidence that participants "developed an enhanced understanding of the responses, emotional expressions, and actions of other people" (p. 16) through drama activities. In correlational studies, arts participation aligned with relationships of trust, feelings of belonging, and empathy (Hunter, 2005), and were an indicator of greater civic engagement (Catterall, Dumais & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). Studies focusing specifically on arts integration also found that learning through the arts benefitted students' social skills, "including the ability to cooperate" and "appreciation for their classmates" (Duma & Silverstein, 2014, p. 10). This was especially visible among learners with disabilities (Mason, Steedly, Thormann, 2008; Robinson, 2013).

### **Methodology**

This exploratory case study asks: How do high school students experience art, school, self and others after having graduated from an arts integrated elementary school? The exploratory

nature of this study is intentionally open ended—directed toward opening up facets for further inquiry rather than converging upon singular outcomes. The case study is bound by the shared experiences of six students who attended a single arts integrated elementary school during its first years of existence. This research strategy "investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within a real world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 16), privileging the participant's voices and experiences. This study adopts characteristics of narrative inquiry based on the principle that "people are seen as composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). Although the qualitative approach for this study is more formal than Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest for narrative inquiry, I emphasize the value of "experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (p. 40). These are institutional stories of school that shape the lives of the participants (Clandinin, 2013). I am also the interpreter of my contributors' experiences, and therefore position myself alongside them as a participant/witness/writer.

### *Context*

Located on the island of Maui in Hawai'i, Pōmaika'i Elementary School has been committed to arts integration as a foundational aspect of its vision since it opened its doors in 2007. Since then, the school has been active in the Kennedy Center's Partners in Education program along with their partner, Maui Arts & Cultural Center (MACC). Pōmaika'i operates with a vision of whole-child arts integrated learning for all children. Their model is characterized by key four activities: a) all teachers are trained and supported in drama integration throughout the year; b) arts specialists provide instruction in music, Hawaiian arts and visual arts; c) all students receive integrated residencies from local and national teaching artists; and d) a full time arts integration coordinator provides scope, sequence, structure, and support for ongoing arts integration activities<sup>1</sup>. Stakeholders from Pōmaika'i school, the MACC, and the Maui community initiated this research in order to learn more about what students are taking with them when they graduate from Pōmaika'i Elementary School.

### *Participants*

I purposefully selected multiple participants in order to reveal a variety of perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016) but also to make meaning out of patterns among shared experiences (Stake, 1995). I invited all eight original key student participants who had been involved in the first research project and of these, six accepted. Three were just completing ninth grade

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed description of Pōmaika'i's approach to arts integration, see Simpson Steele (2017). For a specific example of a STEAM arts integration unit developed by a Pōmaika'i teacher, see Simpson Steele, Fulton & Fanning (2016).

(freshman), and three were just completing the tenth grade (sophomores). The original selection criteria identified students who: a) experienced arts integration in Pōmaika‘i Elementary classrooms where teachers implemented arts integration strategies and pedagogies consistently and with quality; b) had attended Pōmaika‘i for three or more years; and c) had strong communication abilities. I also interviewed at least one parent for each student to add detail, dimension, insight, and truthfulness to the adolescents' explanations. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study, and the participants agreed to the terms according to informed consent.

*Marco*

Marco is a combination of Filipino-Korean-Indonesian-Dutch-Chinese ancestry with a mother who is a middle school teacher, and a father who is an environmental consultant. He is heavily involved in his high school's media club, and usually takes roles in front of the camera—acting dancing, anchoring, or doing voice overs. Marco's room is full of musical instruments, from drums to ukuleles, and he is dedicated to his high school marching band. He enjoys competitive success, including accolades for his skills in the performing arts.

*Corrine*

The daughter of two accountants, Corrine is a local Japanese girl and a K-5 Pōmaika‘i graduate. She is a committed member of a taiko drumming ensemble and plays in the high school band. She is college bound, enjoys high school, and sees it as a place to gain experience to become well-rounded (not just perform academically in highly valued subject areas.) Corrine suggested the social transition to junior high was sticky because all the students coming from a variety of schools were unsure of who they were in relation to each other: "In middle school, you just want to be cool; but then in high school, you just [get to] be yourself" (personal communication, May, 12, 2017).

*Charlie*

Charlie describes himself as "shy." The oldest of three children in a Filipino-Japanese family, Charlie is also the son of two accountants. In the town of Kahului, where Pōmaika‘i is located, students attend one of two high schools; one is known for their superior band, the other is known for their competitive sports. Most Pōmaika‘i graduates attend the former, but Charlie chose the latter so that he would have more opportunities to play ball. He was a freshman varsity athlete on both his high school basketball team and baseball team (which won the Little League Intermediate World Series).

*Bridgett*

A Japanese-Filipino-Spanish-Chinese mix, Bridgett is the daughter of parents who were born and raised on Maui. Her father is a police sergeant, her mother works for a transportation

business, and she has a little sister who is a recent Pōmaika‘i graduate. Now in high school, she speaks enthusiastically about her commitment to digital media and robotics which are a part of her Arts and Communication career pathway. She has received local awards and recognition for her editorial work on film projects.

#### *Joshua*

Joshua is from a Filipino-Japanese family that is engaged with the arts. His father, an elementary school counselor, plays guitar and ukulele and his mother, a teacher, enrolled Joshua and his older sister in music, dance and art classes when they were young. In the seventh grade, Joshua came out to his family, telling them he is gay. Starting in middle school, he experimented with wearing makeup and dying his hair; he has had pink hair, bleached white hair, and currently wears shoulder length black hair. He describes himself as sensitive and compassionate, which has led to his involvement in the Key Club and a range of community service projects outside of school.

#### *Taylor*

Taylor is a soft spoken, sensitive sophomore with a strong sense of responsibility. The middle child in a local Japanese family, her mother is a dental hygienist, and her father is an electrical lineman who works off island, but comes home on the weekends. She is heavily involved in a taiko drumming ensemble, works a job every day after school, and is intent on doing the academic work she needs to do in order to make it to college. Pōmaika‘i was not Taylor's designated elementary school; she applied for a geographic exception and began attending in the third grade.

#### *Participant/Witness/Writer*

In this study, I am neither a researcher (in the traditional positivist sense of one who seeks and reveals truth) nor author (as defined by authority over a subject.) I am a *participant* in the local arts integration community as a drama educator who provides preservice and in-service teachers with methods for arts integration. I am a *witness* to the words and experiences of others, adopting an interpretivist paradigm to understand the phenomenon of schoolwide arts integration through the perceptions and experiences of others (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). I am a *writer* who aspires to share power through heuristics, rather than propaganda or declaration; "one suspect among many who now participate in the interplay" (Barone, 2001, p. 163). I have presented professional development at three local schools designated as Arts Turnaround schools, a new arts integration charter school, and also at Pōmaika‘i. As an insider/outsider, I recognize advantages; I have the trust and support of the gate keepers of the school, understand references to curriculum and instruction, and I am privy to the culture of this community. The position also comes with disadvantages, including potential for biases and hidden agendas. I have endeavored to exercise reflexivity and problematize simple



explanations. Like my community, I aspire to better understand (not glorify) the viability of arts integration as a response to our education woes. Since the first study in 2013, I have witnessed how arts-integration schools thrive, but also how they flounder when facing shifts in leadership, funding, or when the approach faces competition with other school initiatives. My own analytical lens has shifted as I turn over questions of sustainability, leading me to seek more specificity defining the language of themes and strengthening the details of my participants' experiences.

### *Data*

This study included one focus group with all of the student participants, one interview with each individual student (six total), and one interview with each student's parent (six total). The purpose of the focus groups was to establish rapport, facilitate dialogue, and establish a relationship with the students based on a mutual understanding of the goals for the research project. Following the focus group, I interviewed each student individually (45-60 minutes), and later a corresponding parent of that individual (45-60 minutes) in order to extend explanations, descriptions, and reflections. In one situation, both parents were present for the interview. I followed the same protocol for each interview, with some flexibility for additional probing. I designed prompts aligned with the research questions such as: a) How do you think/feel about school?; b) How would you describe your social skills, especially working with groups of students to solve a problem or get something done?; c) What role do the arts play in your life?; d) How do you think having arts integration influenced how you are in high school now? Additionally, during student interviews, I showed each participant his or her own case description I developed during the prior study, and asked for further comment, correction, and elaboration. One participant had moved out of the state, so I conducted those interviews on the telephone, all of the others were in person.

I recorded and transcribed each interaction, and upon completion of the data collection, I began with a holistic profile of each student incorporating quotes and stories that seemed most significant to who they are. I conferred with the parents by sending them the profile to ensure my interpretations rang true, but also to honor their rights and stories (Barone, 2001). In an iterative, interpretive process, I returned to the transcripts, and created units of meaning. Using Dedoose software as an organizing tool, I sorted these units under the domains that correlate with the research question: Art, School, Self & Others. I further stratified the units into categories within each domain to further interpret both meaning and significance. These categories evolved from the meanings within the transcripts and findings from the literature. I rearranged, collapsed, and re-named categories with flexibility, as is typical in descriptive, interpretive analysis (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). To visualize the strength of the evidence and seek patterns across participants, I created a table indicating if evidence was strong (3), moderate (2), or low (1) for each individual in each category. An empty cell indicates the

participant did not speak on the matter at all. These assignments did not necessarily reflect the number of times a participant addressed the category, but rather the quality, clarity and emphasis the participant provided in his or her explanations (see Table 1). I chose to further detail categories with strength across participants within the "Discussion" section of this manuscript.

Table 1. <i>Domains, themes, and strength of evidence across participants.</i>						
	Marco	Corrine	Charlie	Bridgett	Joshua	Taylor
<b>Arts</b>						
Family	1	3		1	2	1
Informal, Individual	2				2	
Organized Ensemble	3	3	1	3	1	3
Audience/Appreciation			1		2	
Creative Mindset	2		1	3	3	2
<b>School</b>						
Belonging	3	2	3	3	3	3
Value	3	1	2	3	3	3
Growth	1	1	1			1
Active Engagement	3	1	1	3	1	2
Positive Teachers	3	1	3	3	3	3
Variety	1	3	3	3	1	2
Critical Thinking	3	1	1	2	2	2
<b>Self &amp; Other</b>						
Leadership	2	2	1	1		
Confidence	3	3	3	3	3	3
Collaboration	3	1	3			
Communication	3	2	2	3		3
Empathy		1		2	3	3
Identity	1	3	1		3	3
Community	3	3	2	1	3	3

### ***Limitations***

This study does not strive to meet typical research criteria of reliability or transferability, but to form "analytic generalizations" (Yin, 2014, p. 40) of participants' experiences within a broader context of school and life. This is a study about personal perspectives, not to be mistaken as truths. In addition, these six voices provide a glimpse into a much larger picture including how others might perceive arts integration at Pomaika'i, and at other arts integration

schools across the state and nation. Importantly, the perspectives of students with learning difficulties are absent. Current research points to possibilities for arts integration to support those who struggle most in traditional learning environments (Robinson, 2013), therefore this line of inquiry demands attention for future inquiry.

### **Discussion**

Each participant felt their time at Pōmaika‘i influenced them in diverse ways. For example, students like Marco and Bridgette felt the school amplified traits they already possessed. Marco and his family believe that the environment and arts learning opportunities brought out his affinity for narrative and ability to take performance risks without self-consciousness; his mother contends, "How far he went into the arts, you know, I think that was from Pōmaika‘i" (personal communication, May 20, 2017). In contrast, students like Corrine and Charlie felt as though the school gave them a chance to develop in ways that did not come instinctively. Corrine said, "Without [the arts] I would be missing that little piece inside of my life. I guess, they just helped me complete myself" (personal communication, May 20, 2017). Each student came to school from different contexts and with diverse assets, and therefore left with unique impressions for how the experience affected their lives.

While the individual characteristics of each participant’s story provide insight, so do the patterns—the recurring echoes among the voices of the teenagers. This study focuses on similarities among perspectives. In each section, I weave together the words of several participants, but focus on expanding one participant’s experiences as an example of how the theme has manifested. Students share a relationship with the arts defined by ensemble activities and an artistic worldview. Their relationship with school emerges as a sense of belonging, value, and respect for teachers who provided them with a variety of ways to learn. Finally, they discuss how their personal skills have grown as a result of experiences that bridge confidence, community, and communication.

#### ***Relationships with Art***

In this study, participants did not generally come from families actively engaged in the arts, nor did they enroll at Pōmaika‘i to intentionally pursue the arts. They found themselves immersed in arts integration either because it was the public school in their district or they were fleeing from negative early elementary experiences elsewhere. Charlie’s father explains, "Before Pōmaika‘i, the role of arts in our family’s life was nonexistent" (personal communication, May 20, 2017). Corrine’s father once thought of band as “uncool” and arts experiences as “foreign.” Bridgett’s mother claims, “Other than crafts, I don’t do anything artsy” (personal communication, May 20, 2017). The school threw a large net to catch any

child on the island, regardless of interest or talent, and the graduates eagerly examined how that may have influenced their engagement with the arts today.

#### *Ensemble*

All of the participants in this study chose to be members of arts ensembles in middle and/or high schools. Four participants are heavily invested; Marco and Bridgett are leaders in clubs and classes where they collaborate with others to create media projects, and Corrine and Taylor are both enrolled in band at school, and members of separate taiko drumming ensembles after school. They consider their taiko ensembles "like family," and in Corrine's case they literally are her family—her sister, mother and father are all taiko drummers as well. Her parents are surprised by this involvement, getting “yanked in” and finding, ten years later, how it has become important to them. Corrine holds Pōmaika‘i, not her family, responsible for her musical interests:

I guess because we had ukulele classes that kind of got me into music and we also had the class where they just give us like the different instruments and we just play around with them. I guess that kind of sparked the love for music, and I tried band just because I thought it was fun to play instruments and I just said, “Why not do band?” (personal communication, May 12, 2017).

Charlie, who has the least amount of arts engagement of all participants, expressed a similar sentiment: "Without this school [Pōmaika‘i], I probably wouldn't ever join band" (personal communication, May 12, 2017). Although there is no real way to test these hypotheses, these two students have made their own correlations between early exposure and later engagement, a proposition that the literature supports in reference to adult engagement in the arts (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011; Zacaras & Lowell, 2008). There is also no glass ball to predict if Corrine will transfer her appreciation of music into action later as an adult. Corrine does not expect to pursue music as a career (she is looking forward to working in health care) or even continue in their music "hobbies" past high school, but she does feel that the time she has invested in ensemble music activities have made significant contributions to her cultural identity, family ties and friendships.

#### *Artistic Sensibilities*

Students in this study believe Pōmaika‘i influenced how they appreciate difference, understand creativity, and express empathy. They view creativity as something that began for them at a young age and developed over time as opposed to a fixed ability (Karwowski, 2014). They believe they see the world through artists' eyes. This idea of an artistic sensibility is akin to habits of mind (Costa & Kallic, 2008) or studio thinking (Hetland & Winner, 2001) suggesting an intangible, psychological attitude.

Joshua holds the strongest perspective on this, believing that his formative experiences at Pōmaika‘i support his ability to appreciate difference, embrace ambiguity, and interpret multiple truths. Joshua's family recently moved away from Hawai‘i for many reasons, such as the cost of living. One motivation was so that Joshua could start his freshman year at a new high school, in a new place. Transitioning to middle school was difficult for Joshua because of its size and structure, and his mother felt he struggled with the tension between fitting in and being himself. His mother explains, "For us as parents we wanted to be in a place that was very diverse and where he could feel really—to be himself and be happy and accepted" (personal communication, May 21, 2017). To her, Joshua is not like others, and would rather stand out than fit in: "He never wanted to look always like everybody else" (personal communication, May 21, 2017). Joshua expands his differences to include the way he sees and thinks, telling the story of a debate students were having in an English class about the meaning of the word "indigo." Some saw it as purple, others as blue. Joshua explained that indigo meant both purple and blue, but neither purple nor blue—a definition saturated with contradiction and ambiguity. He ascribed this trait to his elementary school environment: "To me, it's not about things like tableau. To me, Pōmaika‘i is just the way it teaches you to see things differently and see life differently as a whole. Life doesn't have to be boring" (personal communication, May 21, 2017). Joshua also defines himself by his traits of empathy and compassion: "I feel like lots of people judge quickly but I make sure to look at it from someone else's point of view or see what may have them act a certain way" (personal communication, May 21, 2017). Today, other teens seek out Joshua because he listens and understands them. He reaches out to peers when they are hurting, tuning in to the way others think and feel.

For Joshua, and others in this study, artistic sensibilities do not manifest through the technical execution of artwork, school achievement, or the number of visits to a gallery. To these students, artistic sensibilities support an appreciation for that which is "out of the box," an idiom participants echoed multiple times. To them, school was not about identifying "right" answers that converged upon a single outcome, but rather a place for exploring possibilities through divergent thinking. They learned to ask and respond to the question, "What more can you find?" through Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) (Charland, 2011) and now in high school, they continue to ask it.

### ***Relationships with School***

The students who contributed to this study are all college bound. They experience typical teenage struggles such as stress, competing priorities, and organization but they also take on leadership roles in school activities and maintain high grade point averages. In examining how Pōmaika‘i has influenced their current relationships with school, participants articulate how it set them up to love school, appreciate their teachers, and enjoy learning through variety.

### *Loving School*

“Fun” is often maligned by those who consider school a serious business, and the act of attending school a serious job. However, joyful learning can transform a student’s experience with learning inside and outside of school (Goodlad, 2004; Olson, 2009). Some contend “joy and learning—including school content—[should not be] mutually exclusive” (Wolk, 2008, p. 10.) Learning should involve a degree of struggle, but a positive mindset born from pleasure can sustain learners as they persist through monotonous or demanding challenges.

Participants in this study adamantly express how much they “loved” going to school at Pomaika‘i. In the focus group, they agreed when Marco said, “It’s fun. School didn’t feel like a chore” (personal communication, May 12, 2017). They believe these feelings created momentum to value schools beyond Pomaika‘i. Marco exemplifies this enthusiasm; he does particularly well in school, with a 4.0 grade point average. He chose to attend Pōmaika‘i when he was in second grade because he and his family were dissatisfied with their assigned neighborhood school. Taylor and Bridgett also transferred during their elementary years, and they all compare their positive experiences at Pōmaika‘i with their negative experiences in other elementary schools. Although they were very young, they remember feeling stressed in those prior situations, as if they did not belong.

Marco suggests curriculum at Pōmaika‘i looks and feels different from other public schools in the area, so much so that it feels like a “private school.” Yet he sometimes wonders if it is possible Pōmaika‘i did not give him the same content knowledge as his counterparts, and tells a story about feeling lost in a middle school Math class when his peers from other schools were better prepared than he. However, he ultimately feels that loving school is more important than content knowledge:

... at Pomaika'i, there's definitely an emphasis on the students and how they're doing, but I guess, in middle school a lot of the teachers are like, “Okay, I want you guys to understand these standards and then my job's done”... and just don't care about whether you like their class or not. (Marco, personal communication, May 20, 2017).

According to Marco, the student-centered approach at Pōmaika‘i kept him engaged in academic content and when he got to middle school he noticed that that it was much more difficult to learn his less-favorite subjects when taught through more traditional methods. However, he remains successful in school because of the mindset he developed while at Pōmaika‘i: “They gave me like a positive outlook... Pōmaika‘i kind of engraved that will-to-learn into my being” (personal communication, May 20, 2017). The participants connect their value for school and their sense of belonging in school to the strong sense of enjoyment they had as young learners coming to school at Pōmaika‘i.

*Appreciating Teachers*

Students in this study suggested their Pōmaika‘i teachers were different from others in their middle school and high school experiences. Again, their exposure to other elementary teachers was limited, but they felt that Pōmaika‘i teachers actively fostered an environment open to productive failures. They observed how teachers set high expectations, but also accepted the students where they were and supported them from there. They suggested teachers engaged students in authentic relationships, focusing on each individual and getting to know them as people, not just students.

In our conversations together, I was incredulous to learn that Bridgett describes herself as "shy." To me, she seems garrulous and confident, ready to take on any challenge, but she remembers having few friends as a kindergartener. According to her, the teachers at Pōmaika‘i gave her confidence to be herself, to come "out of her shell" (personal communication, May 20, 2017). During these elementary years, she spent a great deal of time with her teachers; in 4th grade she spent her afterschool hours in her teacher's classroom, helping prepare for the next day's studies. She felt calm and cared for there.

Bridgett's mother also perceives teachers working together in a cohesive and intentional way to cultivate a sense of "family." She explained:

The environment that we experienced—[Pōmaika‘i] was one school that we always felt like was our school, like I mean, just from the first day they opened and how welcoming they were... It's like the whole school is so gelled; you have one body, not everybody pulling and going on different ways. (personal communication, May 20, 2017)

This sentiment includes several important ideas: the families felt ownership within the school, the environment was open and welcoming, the faculty were connected to each other, and there was a sense of interconnection between all parts of the whole. This is consistent with the literature that suggests teachers at an arts integration schools change as a result of the professional developments, collaborations, and the cultivation of mindsets that define their work (Cawthon & Dawson, 2009; Duma & Silverstein, 2014)

*Learning Through Variety*

Over the years, arts integration has often relied on right brain/left brain theory (Sperry, 1975) and multiple intelligences theory (Gardner, 1983) to help explain how infusing curriculum with variety supports learning. However, these theories are now dated, and as neuroscientists continue to map how the human brain works, our understandings continue to shift; "we use most of our brains, most of the time" (Geake, 2008, p. 123.) In this study, students and their

parents used the language of these two theories to support their ideas, however the value of what they were saying extends beyond the theories. Their ideas converge in the belief that typical classroom communities contain learners who learn differently from each other. In addition, each learner is strong in some ways and needs support in others. For these reasons, it is important to design a classroom with a variety of instructional methods and assessments. According to the participants of this study, this is the legacy of Pōmaika‘i; by creating different pathways for learners to understand content and express what they know, teachers support student confidence and learning.

Charlie acknowledges a value for instructional variety. Upon our first meeting back in middle school, he told me candidly that the arts were at the bottom of his life’s priorities: “I don’t care for arts, I’d rather do active things, like playing or running” (personal communication, May 15, 2013). He enjoys listening to music and has grown to appreciate public speaking, but otherwise he is neither drawn to the arts, nor has the time to engage with them between ball games. Yet he expresses sincere appreciation for his Pōmaika‘i learning, commenting, “there was so much color and experiences” (personal communication, May 20, 2017). Charlie and his family suggest he benefitted from this unique approach to teaching and learning because it exposed him to a world beyond math and sports. The variety gave him balance, but also kept him engaged. He says, “I see all of my friends, they don’t like school. They think it’s like the same thing every time and the same boring stuff, like a pattern. Over [at Pōmaika‘i], there’s like nice surprises in different ways” (personal communication, May 20, 2017). The variety of instructional strategies helped him remain “wide awake” (Greene, 1977, p. 121) in a classroom that defied monotony. The brain science behind Universal Design for Learning (UDL) submits that intentional curriculum design provides pathways and options for learners (as arts integration does) and supports the variability of learners in any class (Glass, Meyer & Rose, 2013). Without identifying it as such, this study’s participants expressed a strong value for this approach at Pōmaika‘i.

### ***Relationship with Self and Others***

Interactions between self-confidence, communication, and community seem to define the way Pōmaika‘i graduates perceive the influence of an art integrated education on their personal competencies. They feel the stronger the communication, the tighter the community, the deeper the confidence. Without hierarchy or chronological order, participants experience these three dynamics interacting to bolster their sense of self in a social world.

One of the most pervasive claims I heard throughout the course of interviews was that Pōmaika‘i’s approach to education “brought me out of my shell”—another idiom students used consistently, but independently of each other. To some degree, each participant admitted to feeling shy, socially apart, and perhaps nervous about what others might think of them. As



they came "out of their shells" at Pōmaika‘i, they began to practice risk taking in large ways (like a public performance) and in small ways (like a classroom tableau). They felt the only way this could occur was through a community of learners and artists who were taking similar risks. Taylor explains:

One thing I've noticed, people from Pōmaika‘i, I feel like we're less like judgmental because we get to try new things here. When we do things that are out of our comfort zone, we don't judge people when they're different, you know. So, we kind of embrace that sense of diversity. (personal communication, May 12, 2017)

Taylor's comment connects with artistic sensibility, but also suggests a process through which students gain confidence through trial and error. She is still soft spoken, but she believes Pōmaika‘i helped her find her voice and raise it:

In taiko after class, I contribute a lot more to the group and I express my feelings a little bit better. Sometimes, we have to critique others, but I used to be afraid of sharing my opinion. I think learning by working in [Pōmaika‘i's] kind of environment, I learned it's okay to critique and to like share your thoughts. (personal communication, May 12, 2017)

Taylor's quote indicates that in her tight knit taiko community, she practices communicating her ideas, and in doing so gains a level of comfort in her social world. Pōmaika‘i students unanimously believe this powerful outcome has influenced who they are now; their confidence and ability to communicate helps them make new friends, transition into new environments, and present their ideas publicly.

### **Significance**

This study builds upon the first phase of research with the same participants, testing the propositions that emerged from that work (Simpson Steele, 2017). The young people who are telling their stories continue to mature, discover what is important to them, and revise their previous perceptions based on their experiences in high school. Having witnessed these stories, I suggest Pōmaika‘i participants developed value for school and teachers which serves them in their academic pursuits today. As communicated in the original study (Simpson Steele, 2017), they still believe having a variety of ways to learn and express themselves helps them engage with content while balancing their strengths and weaknesses. Their teachers created an environment where they could build confidence over time, developing community and communication skills—all findings present in the original study. Of note, some of the themes from the first study did not appear in this one. For example, "drive" did not appear in

this study; students did not emphasize gaining a growth mindset, or learning how to be persistent or have grit specifically as a result of their arts integration experiences. In addition, I have revised some of my own thinking by redefining the research question, overarching domains, and subsequent categories.

Engagement in the arts is a new domain in this study because students are beginning to make independent choices about how they spend their time. These students show a strong tendency to join performing arts clubs and bands—ensemble types of experiences where they make their contributions within a community of artists. This is not arts integration, but the participants believe arts integration experiences sparked their desire to continue in the arts. Notably, students do not seem to independently engage in artistic expression or engage in arts appreciation by going to concerts, plays, or galleries as a result of their exposure to the arts at Pōmaika‘i. As this unwinds, there may be long term consequences for a society that wants to encourage young people to be involved in the arts and a culture that values broad participation in the arts among its citizens (Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011).

As an exploratory case study, my purpose was to conclude with questions. These questions revise and extend the findings here: What is the effect of early learning in arts integration on adult engagements with the arts? How does arts integration influence students' mindsets or attitudes about school? How does the interaction between confidence, community and communication in the context of schoolwide arts integration influence learning? In addition, longitudinal inquiry has the potential to provide insight into the lives of those who have experienced the phenomenon as they continue to mature. As studies accumulate, evidence may inform policy makers and administrations as they weigh the costs and benefits schoolwide arts integration.

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