

**Social and Emotional Development and Theater Skills in ENACT  
Workshops: Context, Conditions, Process and Outcomes**

By **Dr. Robert Horowitz**, Associate Director of the Center for Arts Education  
Research, Teachers College, Columbia University

**Columbia University Research Associates:**  
Elizabeth Beaubrun, Amy Kleiman, Dan Chiel

Research study sponsored by **The Ford Foundation** • January 2011

## **Executive Summary**

### **Conditions and Partnership**

- ENACT developed strong partnerships in many sites: administrators demonstrated support and inclusion, provided effective liaisons, shared information and resources, and utilized program staff to further the school's objectives.
- The program was unique in its level of outreach in helping students attend school and succeed. The amount of support and communication among guardians, teachers, and administrators was exemplary.
- ENACT developed positive relationships with parents/guardians, and motivated families with positive feedback about students. When appropriate, the program offered supportive interventions.
- Site directors were highly effective in coordinating with artists, teachers and the school administration. They made successful interventions on behalf of the students and kept ENACT staff and artists informed about student issues, thereby contributing to the success of the workshops.
- Many teachers strongly supported the program, actively participating in workshops. They kept artists abreast of issues that should be addressed in the workshops, contributing to the success of the program. They understood the program's role within the school, and how to work with program staff to achieve shared objectives.
- Collaborating teachers who participated in the workshops developed stronger relationships with their students.
- ENACT provided school teachers with a different, and more positive, perspective on their students. Participating in ENACT gave teachers greater insight into their students' potential.
- Some classroom teachers developed new instructional strategies through participating in ENACT.
- Professional development and support for ENACT artists was effective in helping them provide successful ENACT workshops. ENACT made significant progress in developing extensive criteria for successful ENACT teaching, and a comprehensive process for managing artist development. This should help to support quality control for ENACT instruction in years to come.
- School conditions sometimes impeded the potential success of ENACT. For instance, some sites suffered from inadequate support and poor communication from school leaders. Some schools did not provide adequate or appropriate space for ENACT workshops. Some teachers were reluctant to participate in workshop activities because of their discomfort with the social-emotional content or unfamiliarity with theater arts. Teaching in suspension centers presented unique and exceptional challenges. The challenging socio-economic conditions at home, and in the surrounding neighborhoods, impacted students' development, safety, and motivation. ENACT staff and artists were adept at improvising their way through these challenges to provide the best experience possible under difficult circumstances.

### **Implementation: ENACT Workshops**

- The ENACT program was well-structured, with clear methods and goals. It engaged and challenged students to understand their potential for success in school.
- ENACT artists we observed were exceptionally skilled at working with challenging and underserved student populations.
- The ENACT process entailed a structured, yet flexible, form of instruction that included responding to the needs of individual classrooms through ongoing observation of student responses during the workshop. ENACT artists responded to student needs in planning the lessons, and often adjusted the workshop content while teaching, based upon student behavior and responses.
- ENACT workshops provided a sense of inclusion and belonging for all students. A safe environment was created for students to understand, explore and express their feelings and learn about the consequences of their actions.
- ENACT developed and implemented a workshop “toolbox” of five core instructional thematic strategies for artists to include in their teaching repertoire. Artists used the toolbox and found it to be helpful.
- ENACT artists modeled professional artistic practice. This allowed the students to see artists at work, taking chances, improvising, exposing their feelings, and representing complex situations and personal relationships.

### **Student Participation and Development**

- ENACT was highly effective at helping students understand their emotions and develop ways to modify their behavior to effectively deal with challenging emotional situations. Students learned to identify emotions, and learned about the consequences of critical choices when dealing with highly-charged emotional situations. They became better able to make positive choices when confronted with difficult situations at school.
- ENACT helped students develop their ability to articulate feelings, especially difficult or troubling ones. The process encouraged reflection about making constructive choices in everyday behavior.
- Some students particularly valued ENACT because it motivated them to participate in school and helped them avoid some of the negative behaviors of their peers.
- The program provided a support system and safe haven for students within the school, even for students who were not officially participating in the program.
- Students demonstrated gains in social and emotional development. Students developed new understandings of their emotions and behavior and began to make positive choices in difficult situations at home, in school and in their neighborhood.
- Inappropriate classroom behavior improved, according to collaborating teachers.
- Students demonstrated development of self-confidence, positive risk-taking, identifying and managing emotions and challenging relationships.
- ENACT was successful at improving attendance of specific students. Teachers and artists observed improvement in student attitudes toward attendance and punctuality.
- ENACT students learned concrete theater skills, such as the ability to develop and sustain a character, to express a character’s emotions verbally and non-verbally, to develop scenes, and to improvise scenes.
- Students learned the vocabulary, culture and etiquette of acting and the theater. Students created and directed their own scenes, gave and received constructive peer feedback, and edited and revised their work.