

***Making Books Come Alive:
Evaluation of the
Flynn Center/Flynn School
Collaborative Arts Education Program***

**Cynthia A. Char
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August 2004

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This program evaluation examined the third and final year of the arts-based educational partnership between the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts and the John J. Flynn Elementary School in Burlington, Vermont. The primary goals of the FC/FS Collaboration focused on improving reading comprehension for students, collaborative professional development for teachers, and a collective awareness of the performing arts in everyday life in the school community. The collaboration is comprised of three primary components: classroom collaborations between the Flynn's education staff and classroom teachers and students; teacher workshops; and school-wide attendance at live performances at the Flynn Center. During Year 3, a project toolkit, *Words Come Alive!* was also made available to Flynn teachers.

Major Findings

Based on teacher surveys and teacher interviews, the evaluation found that the FC/FS Collaboration was very positively received by both teachers and students, and indicated a number of learning benefits afforded to students and teachers in the area of reading, literacy, drama and movement. Specific outcomes that teachers reported included:

- **Teachers' acquisition of valuable teaching strategies and techniques.** Teachers reported learning from Flynn artists a valuable repertoire of new teaching techniques that utilized movement and drama to support students' reading and literacy. For example, teachers described learning how to focus on a small part of a story in depth to help students learn about settings, characters, or story events, and using role playing activities to heighten students' awareness of character emotions, story conflict and social conflict. Teachers appreciated how Flynn artists modeled useful teaching strategies that addressed teachers' core curriculum, rather than simply providing discrete, "stand-alone" enrichment activities.
- **Students' increased comprehension, recall and writing of story texts.** Teachers indicated that as a result of the FC/FS Collaboration, students displayed greater understanding of story settings, characters and characters' point of view, major story events, and the sequence of events. As a result of enhanced comprehension, teachers reported that students were better able to recall stories at later times, which allowed them to make greater connections between different story texts and between stories and real life situations. Teachers also described how FC/FS role playing and writing activities

enabled students to become more aware of what's explicitly written, implicit, or missing from a text, and the ways readers infer and interpret written texts.

• **Students' and teachers' greater appreciation and understanding of drama and movement.** Teachers were highly enthusiastic about the ways in which the FC/FS afforded their students important exposure to live theater. The Flynn matinee performances were considered a critical component of the FC/FS Collaboration. These performances were seen of value in and of themselves, as well as made possible worthwhile, productive exchanges in closely-related classroom-based activities which preceded, or followed, specific Flynn performances. Teachers described lively class discussions concerning what's most important to capture from a book in a stage production, how a single work could be interpreted or portrayed in different ways, the symbolism of props, and some increased appreciation and working knowledge about props, staging and lighting.

• **Identification of key components of program success.** Teachers identified a number of key FC/FS program components and characteristics that they felt were essential to the project's success. These features included the customized and highly flexible ways Flynn artists worked with teachers and students; the expertise and experience of the Flynn teaching artists in both drama and in classroom management and work with schools; and the important offering of Flynn matinee performances. Teachers also positively regarded the "Words Come Alive" toolkit, and felt it would be helpful in sustaining their use of the drama-related teaching techniques in their classrooms, given the conclusion of this three-year project.

This third year, final evaluation suggests that the Flynn Center/Flynn School Collaboration offers a valuable model of arts-based teacher professional development and curriculum that can promote children's literacy, drama, and learning for many students. It is a model that holds great educational promise, and provides a valuable educational alternative that could be of great interest to other schools in Vermont, as well as regions nationwide.

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Introduction

This past year marked the third and final year of the arts-based educational partnership between the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts and John J. Flynn Elementary School. The primary goals of the FC/FS Collaboration focused on improving reading comprehension for students, collaborative professional development for teachers, and a collective awareness of the performing arts in everyday life in the school community. The collaboration is comprised of three primary components: classroom collaborations between the Flynn's education staff and classroom teachers and students; teacher workshops; and school-wide attendance at live performances at the Flynn Center. During Year 3, a project toolkit, *Words Come Alive!* was also published and distributed to all Flynn teachers.

The School

Located in Burlington's North End, John J. Flynn Elementary is a K-5 school that served 351 students during the 2002-03 school year. (No figures for the 2003-04 were available on the Burlington School District web site, as of August 2004.) During the 2002-03 year, 17% of the student body received English as a Second Language (ESL) services, 8% received special education services, and 44% were eligible for free or reduced lunch through the federal lunch program, an indicator of low socioeconomic status.

Year 3 Program Implementation

Twenty teachers participated in Year 3, 16 out of 17 classroom teachers (one opted out due to scheduling problems), and four specialists (art, music, P.E. library.) During the year, teachers generally had four hours of classroom time and one hour of planning time. Unlike previous years, no professional workshops were held, due to a change in district policy regarding in-service and faculty meeting time. Regarding attendance at Flynn performances, four classes attended three different performances (grades K and 2); seven classes attended two performances (grades 2-5), and six classes attended one Flynn performance (grades 1, 2, 4 and 5). As in past years, the Flynn School teachers voted on which performance they would see as an entire school, and all classes attended a Hansel and Gretel opera. In addition, Dayton Contemporary Dance Company presented a show titled "Two Geniuses Passing" at the school for all of the students in grades 2-5.

In addition to the Flynn center artist collaborations and the Flynn performances, the project staff developed a project tool kit, called *Words Come Alive!*, which was published and distributed to all Flynn teachers in January 2004. The 47-page ringed booklet (5.5" x 8.5" hard card stock pages), comprised of an introductory section (Overview; How does it work (including the Vermont standards), Definition of terms; Getting started), eight warm up activities, and ten classroom activities, through written prose and photographs

of children. Each activity featured both a set of artistic goals and reading goals, along with directions for conducting the activity. Additional helpful hints, such as questions to ask when choosing activities, reflecting on critiquing student work, and additional print resources are also provided. Three levels of activity difficulty (easy, intermediate, or advanced) are provided for warm ups, activities, and activity extensions.

Evaluation Goals and Methods

The major objectives of the Year 3 program evaluation were to: 1) determine how the FC/FS Collaboration influenced classroom practice and students' literacy experiences and learning; 2) obtain feedback on the project's professional development efforts and tool kit materials, and 3) describe overall program outcomes on the Flynn students and teachers.

Two primary research methods were utilized. The first was the use of in-depth individual teacher interviews conducted with a core set of Flynn teachers who had participated in the Flynn/Flynn collaborative for more than one year. The second was a written survey administered to all Flynn School teachers. Standardized test scores for the Flynn School were also obtained for the 2002-03 school year, off the Burlington School district web site, and are also presented and discussed.

The *individual teacher interviews* were conducted with five Flynn teachers who had participated in the FC/FS for at least two of the three years of the program. Teacher names were suggested by the Flynn director of school programs. The five teachers were classroom teachers who represented K-1, 2-3 and 4-5 grade levels. Teachers ranged in the level of teaching experience, and included four veteran teachers with 17 to 31 years of teaching experience, and one teacher with five years of teaching experience. Three of the teachers had been at the Flynn school for 17 or more years, while two teachers had been at the Flynn only two or three years. Individual interviews were conducted by phone in June 2004, with each interview lasting about 45 minutes. The interview protocol (Appendix A) consisted of questions pertaining to five major areas:

- teachers' assessment of the quality and value of the collaboration with the teaching artists;
- the impact of the FC/FS collaboration on students' learning and literacy;
- the influence of the Flynn Center performances upon their classrooms and curricula;
- the likelihood and feasibility of teachers' future implementation of FC/FS classroom activities; and
- suggested recommendations for making the FC/FS collaboration more effective and sustainable, and for improving tool kit materials.

Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis. Transcriptions were analyzed for emergent and convergent themes.

The *written survey* (Appendix B) was administered to all Flynn School teachers in June 2004. As an incentive to return completed questionnaires, each teacher respondent was eligible for a raffle, in which the winning prize was a choice of either a pair of free tickets to a Flynn main stage show next year, or free seats for their class to attend a student

matinee. Surveys were administered to 17 teachers at the Flynn School. Completed questionnaires were submitted by all 17 teachers, for a 100% return rate.

The survey consisted of 23 items (20 Likert scale items, and 3 open-ended questions) assessing teachers' views of the educational impact and value of the FC/FS Collaboration and tool kit materials. Ten of the 20 rating scale items were drawn from the survey utilized in the Year 2 evaluation. The ten newly added survey items were designed to tap teachers' overall assessments and reflections, appropriate to this third and final year of the program, and to obtain reactions to the newly developed project toolkit, "*Words Come Alive!*" Survey items were tallied and percentages computed based on total valid responses (excluding "no response" and uncodable responses.). Open-ended questions were analyzed for emergent themes.

Findings

Highly customized ways Flynn artists worked with teachers and students. Teacher interviews clearly indicated the flexible, highly customized ways in which Flynn Center artists worked with each teacher and classroom. Each of the five teachers was very positive about the ways in which Flynn Center artists collaborated with them in their classrooms, and provided expertise, teaching strategies and valuable educational activities to promote their students' learning.

I appreciate the collaboration, and feel lucky to be part of it. It really enriched my curriculum. Particularly this year, it was phenomenal what we did together. That whole collaboration piece... Two really competent invested individuals who are working together to this one goal. It's been a great experience – everyone I've worked with has been wonderful. So flexible – and so willing to meet whatever you want them to do.

Across the different classrooms, Flynn artists supported a wide variety of curricular themes and units such as West African folktales and dance, colonial Vermont history, slavery and the civil rights movement, and fairy tales. Within each classroom, Flynn artists responded to teachers' requests to emphasize drama or movement, and worked closely with teachers by focusing on key literature being read in social studies or language arts currently underway or on experiences that would prepare students for an upcoming Flynn Center matinee performance they would be attending.

Valuable teaching strategies and techniques. Teachers were highly positive about the ways in which the FC/FS Collaboration had influenced their classroom teaching. Of the teachers surveyed, 88% (n = 14) reported that participating in the FC/FS Collaboration had influenced their teaching in a positive way "often" or "always."

In their interviews, the teachers typically characterized Flynn artists' contributions in terms of offering innovative teaching techniques and strategies, rather than simply providing discrete "stand-alone" activities. Teachers described teaching strategies that were first modeled by the Flynn artists and later utilized by teachers on their own with students, and could provide various examples of using particular techniques multiple times and in multiple ways.

What I learned from Tracy, that I had never done, is taking a small piece, and doing, and doing it again – “this time slowly,” and “this time now with big facial expressions.” I don’t think I appreciated before how you can take a little part of the story, and really make that one little piece much more meaningful.

Teachers were particularly appreciative about how the project enabled them to focus on their core curriculum, rather than a more extraneous, enrichment activity. One teacher chose to use the FC/FS project to delve deeply into the same book for three years, given the book was a central one in her curriculum dealing with Vermont colonial history. She spoke of how it had helped her learn techniques for deepening students’ involvement in, and understanding of, both a story and a historical period.

Joan did a lot of work with kids helping them to visualize in ways beyond the textbook, what might be going on in the story, or things behind scenes, or how characters might have been feeling. For 3 years in a row – we worked with same book. She amazed me every year how she could bring out different things from the story. But in each way that she did it – it really deepened the level of comprehension that the kids were getting from the book...

[On my own], I’ve had kids act things out, so they can experience what it might have been like...It’s really added a new dimension to my teaching and planning about a book that wouldn’t have been there otherwise. Deepened my understanding about how important it is to get kids personally involved in a story...and deepened their comprehension because they physically act something out.

Whether this was due to the ways in which Flynn artists worked and talked with teachers, the development and presence of the toolkit materials, or the three-year nature of the project which promoted a longer, and more sustained professional development process, it was evident that teachers had acquired a number of teaching strategies that incorporated movement and drama in their classrooms that they regarded as highly generalizable and applicable throughout their classroom curricula and classroom year.

Enhancement of students’ reading and literacy skills. Of the teachers surveyed, almost all (93%) indicated that their students’ general comprehension of all reading materials had improved during the FC/FS Collaboration, and that their students’ abilities to understand and remember specific readings improved when addressed by the Flynn Center teaching artist. Roughly two out of three teachers surveyed (64%; n = 9) reported that their students’ reading comprehension improved as a result of the Flynn-Flynn collaboration.

All of the teachers interviewed strongly felt that the FC/FS drama and movement activities significantly enhanced their students’ appreciation and comprehension of written texts and books. Teachers identified a variety of areas of literacy growth, including increased understanding of story elements, story sequences, details, and story language.

Regarding story elements, teachers spoke of students’ greater understanding of settings, characters, and events. Several teachers described emotionally powerful, key story

events that students dramatized, such as fourth graders acting out the role of a Vermont boy trying to free his father pinned under a fallen tree, fifth graders being groups of slave owners and slaves confronting each other, and kindergarteners, as the Three Billy Goats Gruff and the troll, successfully reconciling their differences about the crossing of the bridge. Another technique teachers used was having children interview a classmate who adopted the persona of a particular story character. By role playing and “being” these central characters, teachers believed their students acquired a greater understanding of characters and characters’ points of view, story conflict and resolution, historical context and social conflict.

Other teachers described how drama helped students develop a better sense of setting, whether it be a West African market place, an ocean, or a colonial cabin. This enhanced sense of setting extended not only to literature, but science and social studies as well.

We took social studies texts –and acted out how it might be in a colonial kitchen, in that family, and what happens in that room in the house. They then understood how understood how those people were living, understanding what life was like back then. Without doing (acting)– you can walk away with lots of assumption based on present life. The drama refines your ability to be put in a different space and time in history.

Several teachers described drama activities in which students acted out key events from a story, and how it fostered students’ understanding of the main events and sequencing of those events within a story, and empathy with story characters. For example, one teacher had her first graders act out the main story events from a folktale, and later applied it to their study of Martin Luther King and civil rights.

What I really wanted to do [in my first year in the project] is see if children taking a story and putting it into their bodies, if it would really enhance their comprehension. We had worked on a story with Jean, in which a bird comes to an island and there’s nothing there. We took each part – each main part of that story– and created different movements for it. So at the end, we created a whole dance, of this bird, and set it to music, and performed it for each other.

Then, it was around Martin Luther King time, so what I did was take the same kind of work I had been doing with Jean. I read Martin’s Big Word, and other some other stories for Martin Luther King’s life. We took the main events of his life, from childhood to his death, and created movement for each of those time frames. And we created this dance of Martin Luther King’s life, and performed it for each other, and put it to some music. And the children were writing responses to that. And I felt like their understanding of the civil rights movement – I mean, this is 1st grade – they really got the injustices that were happening at that time. They had felt the anger – of the hoses being turned on them, or sitting at the counter, or being removed from the bus because we had put all those things into our bodies. They had experienced them. I found that taking her techniques and applying them to books, I could really see a difference in the depth that the children could understand the text.

Teachers stated how this learning was not only “in the moment” and deepened students’ comprehension during a story activity, but how such dramatization significantly heightened children’s later recall of story events. This enabled teachers to call upon children’s memory of these past events when they wished students to foster connections between story texts, and between texts and real life situations.

(The project enhanced) their ability to talk about a book, and remember it... Movement helped them make connections between the text of the books and their lives, that helped you understand the book; you can relate to the characters, their feelings, or how the story flows... They just plum remembered it better – it got in their muscles, because they didn’t just talk about it... That really helped their comprehension of the story, and their memories, so they can talk about it at another time.

One teacher described how drama not only deepened students’ comprehension of text, but offered an excellent assessment tool.

For some of my students who were struggling with reading and reading comprehension, to stop now and then, and -- I still do this now -- have them act out a portion, it really helped them understand what they’re reading. They are able to visualize what’s going on – it may be watching others acting out, to see the action. Or working with others, sparking the interest – it’s not just words on the page ... What also comes out is what they don’t understand. Sometimes in the reading it seems that they understand, but when they act it out, it’s pretty obvious what they missed. Then I can help them.

Unlike 2002, the 2003 standardized test results for Flynn School fourth graders did not indicate a further increase in New Standards Reference Exam (NSRE) reading scores. 77% of the Flynn fourth graders met or exceeded the standards in basic understanding in reading (compared with 83% of Flynn 4th graders in 2002), and 69% of Flynn fourth graders met or exceeded the standards in reading analysis and interpretation (compared with 75% in 2002). The Flynn second graders did produce a slight increase in their Developmental Reading Assessment scores, with 77% of the students meeting or exceeding the standards (compared with 72% in 2002.)

Greater appreciation for the written word and creative writing opportunities. Several teachers described how FC/FS activities fostered their students’ greater appreciation and understanding of the written word. One teacher who had done an extensive unit on West African folktales and trickster tales described how her students’ writing of their own stories reflected an increased awareness of story details and language.

The class wrote a class trickster tale, and then each child wrote a trickster tale or a how-to legend set in West Africa. The quality of what these children wrote was amazing. I think it was due in part to what we were doing in every aspect of the curriculum – the dance with Lois, the folktales, acting out with her, reading trickster tales at reader’s workshop, working on writing at writer’s workshop.... [What was different was] the amount of detail they put in their story. They are really able to transport you to the setting of the story. They had acted out and been the fruit women selling in the market, the grain mashers, the carvers, the

hunters, the trees in the jungle. They were really able to put themselves in the setting of the story much better. The stories were very rich – it was really in the details in setting up the story, and feeling comfortable with what might have been seen in the market, or heard in the jungle. Really able to incorporate the words that created that sense.

Another teacher described how she had students create dialogue for conversations between characters that were only briefly alluded to in a given story book, and how that allowed students to draw inferences, and to deepen their understanding of characters and a story's problems and solutions.

[The project's] given me suggestions of other ways to help kids to expand their own comprehension of a story. Of many of the ideas that she introduced me to, one that I've done on my own is creating conversations between characters that aren't in the story. A book might say that "So and so decided to do such and such," but not really go into the behind the scenes on that. What would that conversation have been like? Takes the kids to a level of comprehension that they wouldn't have thought otherwise.

A third teacher spoke about his students acting out the text written by their classmates, which fostered a deeper understanding of what's explicitly written, implicit, or missing from a text, and encouraged students to revise their writing.

For their narrative story for portfolio, the kids had to write something imaginative. One girl, watching her own story being performed said, "That's not really the relationship between those two people. That's not how that's supposed to be." And we all looked at her, and looked down at her work. "This is what it says here." "But it's supposed to be this." But the kids acting it out said, "Yes, but it doesn't say that." So the girl realized, "Oh, I've got to fix that."

Which is what we want – to go back and revise what they've done, see what's missing. And that's what happened. Students would act out other students' narratives, act out what had actually been written. That was great, because when you write something in your mind, you know what you mean and what you're saying. But when you see other people all of sudden take your work, read it, and start acting it out, what they see and what you've (actually) written may be quite different from what you thought you did. It was really helpful.

The Flynn students' 2003 standardized test results for writing did indicate a further increase in New Standards Reference Exam (NSRE) on one of the writing assessments, with 82% of the Flynn fourth graders meeting or exceeding the standards in writing effectiveness (compared with 74% of Flynn 4th graders in 2002, and 56% of Flynn 4th graders in 2001). Decreases, however, were observed concerning the NSRE writing conventions portion of the test, with only 62% of the Flynn fourth graders performing at or above the standard (compared with 71% in 2002, and 56% in 2001).

Students' greater understanding of drama and movement, and the value of the Flynn matinee performances. Flynn teachers were very positive about their students' increased knowledge and appreciation of drama and movement. All of the teachers surveyed (n =

17) indicated that their students' knowledge of theater and dance increased as a result of the Flynn-Flynn partnership "often" or "always."

The Flynn matinee performances were seen as a critical component of the FC/FS Collaboration. The vast majority of teachers ((87%; n = 14) felt that the student matinee performances were valuable to their students' learning, while roughly two out of three teachers indicated that the student matinee performances had influenced their classroom curriculum (69%; n = 11), and had influenced their students' reading comprehension in a positive way (67%; n = 10).

They look forward to going, are interested in what they're going to see, and how it's going to be shown. I think their level of understanding – of what plays are like, and how you don't always show everything from a book on theater, and what's important to show – that kind of conversation is pretty mature for kids. And they've been able to talk about things like that, and I don't think they would have otherwise. So the Flynn has been a great experience.

All five teachers interviewed stressed how valuable the Flynn matinee performances were to the success of the project, and to their students' learning. A number mentioned how if it weren't for the Flynn performances, many of their students would never experience the impact and joy that results from attending such live performances.

Those [performances] were fantastic. There are lots of our students who would never get to a performance (if it weren't for the program.) So, it's giving them an experience to see a live dramatic performance there... That, in and of itself, has a lot of value.

One teacher described how well an African performance they attended served as a great "launching place" and kick-off to her unit on West Africa. Teachers were emphatic that the value of the live performances was significantly heightened by the related drama work the students did themselves in the classroom, both prior to, and following the Flynn matinee performances.

Each time, I tried to do quite a bit of work ahead of time before we went to a performance. It gave them a real focused way of appreciating what they saw on stage. Not just think, "we did that", but "look at how they did that." ...Kids would say, "I remember when I did that, when I felt that, when I was being that character. I know how hard it is to look really angry." The exercises – like learning to freeze – really gave us a lot of disciplined training. It gave them an elevated level of understanding of what was involved in a story.

Once we did our own performance, exercises with different texts, [it affected] the next time we watched a performance, read, or watched a video presenting some form of literature, or social studies being presented. By doing drama, you become a different observer, and are able to take in more detail, at makes you better at visualizing what's in front of you.

Several teachers described the value of students seeing how a single work could be interpreted or portrayed in different ways.

Because the students are using some drama in their own work – they are able to see what drama can do, and how they can do it...It let's them see how you can do something like that – other ways you can communicate a story. That it's ok to interpret something a little differently from they way you are used to seeing it.

One teacher used her students' seeing of *Corduroy* performed as an opportunity for her students to compare and contrast the live performance with the book version that they had previously read.

We went to the Corduroy performance, and we had studied different versions of the book. We then drew a big Venn diagram, and talked about what it was like in the story versus what it was like on stage, and what they had in common. It was all very spontaneous and they showed themselves to be incredible observers, which helped them to build comprehension.

Another teacher described how the live performances taught students about symbolism and how effective minimal props can be, and mitigated against students' tendencies to assume you need an elaborate set of props for dramatization.

[Students learned about the] symbolism of things, stage props. When students get up to act, they think “– I need this, I need this, I needs this” [Lots of props.] And yet they were able to see in the performances that you really didn't need many props and things to create a whole scene. Like Hansel and Gretel...Did you have a whole cabin out there in the woods? You just need a table and a couple chairs to stand for a whole area. You can use something to represent larger things. I think that had a lot of merit to it.

Teachers also described how the classroom work heightened not only students' comprehension, but also their appreciation of theater.

[Compared with my classrooms before the project], they appreciate a lot more now, and have a deeper understanding of what we're seeing, having experienced some things before. Like before, some kids might have missed things completely - just sat there, and watched it, and said “Yeah, ok.” But now, having done some preliminary work, they had a much deeper level of appreciation than they would have ever been able to have otherwise. Like one group last year presented animals with their bodies – and 10 different people might be working together to make a caterpillar, or a snake. And we had experimented with some of that in the classroom. So the kids knew exactly what was going on, and they were able to look at that and say, “look at where his legs are – and how hard that must be!”.

Teachers were particularly appreciative of the “behind the scenes” demonstrations and discussions that took place as part of the Flynn Center performances themselves, and how it complemented the related work they were doing in the classrooms.

It was great that the Busy Spider performers took the staging apart, and showed how the props worked, and the black light. Before the Eric Carle performance, Joan had already come in and done some fabulous web making with her black

light and glowing thread. She made that book come alive! It strengthened the connection with real people on stage, by familiarizing ourselves with the story before. How real people could do magical things.

The teachers interviewed were somewhat mixed about the choice of this year's whole-school performance, the Hansel and Gretel opera. Teachers of the younger children said that the opera was difficult for children to follow and understand, although their understanding was significantly enhanced by the Flynn Center artists coming in beforehand and working directly with the children so that they could become familiar with some of the music and subtle and sophisticated humor (e.g., that the witch was called "Dainty Mouth" because she in fact had a large mouth and ate children) before the performance. Several teachers, while acknowledging the value of a "whole school choice" to promote school community, voiced a preference to choose a performance that more closely tied with an important topic, story, or dramatic quality that was of high priority to their classroom teaching.

One teacher did say how much her kindergarteners with excited about the learning they could demonstrate to themselves and to their older second grade partners. Having read some of the Eric Carle stories beforehand, many of the younger children could anticipate the sequence of animals that appeared in one of the performed stories, and were proud that their knowledge surpassed that of their older peers.

Benefits to students' overall learning process and to all students. All teachers surveyed (n = 17) indicated that participating in the Flynn-Flynn collaboration influenced their students' overall learning in a positive way, and that drama and movement techniques had influenced their students' engagement in learning "often" or "always." All but one of the teachers (94%; n = 16) also felt that the collaboration had influenced the culture of the Flynn School in a positive way "often" or "always."

Teachers also spoke about the project giving students a greater comfort with moving their bodies, increased self confidence and pride, and strengthened the sense of their group and community building.

One teacher spoke passionately about the increased sense of joy that her class felt by being part of the Collaborative.

It definitely incorporated a new sense of movement, and there's a certain kind of joy. I think sometimes as a classroom teacher, you forget that – the standards are there staring at you – "Let's go, let's get them reading." And when Tracy would come in, all that would melt away, even though we were still working toward comprehension. She just automatically, with the music, with her own moving and exaggerations, brought joy in. That was very powerful and will stick with me. And that, to me, is a gift to kids.

Regarding whether the Collaborative was more beneficial to some students more than others, all but one of the teachers surveyed (n = 15) reported that the classroom activities led by Flynn Center teaching artists were appropriate for all students in their class, "often" or "always."

Everyone has their own learning style, and responds to challenges in different ways. It's not cut and dry, you can't predict which kids will benefit more. It gives everyone the opportunity to grow, and do something that maybe they haven't done before, to test themselves. Some kids surprise themselves at how good they are. Someone might be a windowsill as part of a setting (some non threatening parts), while some kids who likes to fly with an idea, and is more encompassing, might take an upfront part.

Interviewing someone, who is a [story] character, also can let you take on another persona, that's less threatening and let's kids be free to express some things. It's not so predictable (which kids would most benefit.) Depending on which kinds of text we used, brought others to the front. It's not that certain kids were super stars all the time.

At the same time, teachers did feel that children who were more kinesthetic seemed to particularly benefit from the FC/FS program, as expressed by these three different teachers:

It's especially good for those kids who learn by moving, the kinesthetic learners. For some kids who don't listen to stories with a lot of excitement, they got really into the stories that we were moving around for... There was one little boy who tends to have a blank look when I read. However, you can't have a blank look when it's your turn to take a mask and show how a character was... the more we did it, the better he took to it. He can't sit still long for a book, but [here] he could get silly, he could laugh, he could roll around on the floor to act out the story. And that's what he needed to do.

I have children who are not academic stars – who are very bodily kinesthetic – who could really shine in these experiences. I had one boy – who really had some anxiety issues – does not like to be in the limelight, does not like to be in front of people. And he was one of the lead roles in the legend – and he could really rise to that occasion and could offer himself up to that.

For those, who tend to have arts as a strength – it allowed them to shine a bit more, where they might not have stood out in a subject area before, stand out a little more. “Hey, I can understand this by using this method.” Also, some struggling readers, by being able to act out a scene from some book, I watched children who didn't really understand what was going on academically, to not do well in reading, start to improve. Part of that I attribute to their being able to understand what we were doing, by acting it out. They weren't just getting it from the printed word.

Significant professional growth in utilizing movement and drama in the classroom, and sustainability. All of the teachers surveyed (n = 17) indicated that their own knowledge of theater and dance increased as a result of the Flynn-Flynn partnership, while all but one (93%; n = 15) reported that on their own, they were planning to use drama and/or movement in their classroom next year.

Prior to working in the FC/FS collaborative, all five teachers who were interviewed had personal interest in the arts, but none had actively nor regularly used drama and movement in their classrooms. One teacher described previously doing an occasional production such as the Three Bears in her classroom, while another said she had a visiting artist come to her class to conduct interesting, but discrete and isolated activities in her classroom. Only one of the teachers had participated in more formalized, drama-related teacher workshops, having taken a class at the Shelburne Museum that “brought history and literature to life.”

As a result of participating in the FC/FS collaborative the past two or three years, all five teachers spoke glowingly about the multiple teaching techniques and activities they had acquired and their confidence and optimism that they would regularly continue to use these drama-related techniques in their classroom teaching in the future.

It's another tool in my tool kit. Not only can we give stories, but give little reminders of the story. Not only can we ask kids to tell the story back to one another, partner kids for story memory, but get kids to use their bodies and act it out. And breaking it down into little parts, and get them to really experience the book, by adding some drama to it.

I absolutely see doing more different movement activities with books, to really enhance the comprehension piece. I loved the work where I've take the main points of the story – synthesizing is one of our reading comprehension strategies that we work on with children – taking that and trying to understand it at a deeper level. There are definitely a lot of pieces that I would feel comfortable, and that I have felt comfortable doing with the children. I can see myself continuing with a lot of the strategies that I've learned the past few years.

Positive teacher response to the “Words Come Alive” Toolkit: Distributed midway during Year 3 to all Flynn teachers, the Words Come Alive Toolkit materials were well-regarded by teachers. A number of teachers mentioned that they had not yet used the toolkit materials with their students, but expressed their intention to do so. According to teacher surveys, all the teachers liked the “cards with ring” format of the toolkit. Teachers indicated that the sections devoted to the warm-ups and activities as the most useful. 86% (n = 12) indicated that they found there was enough description in the toolkit of the warm-ups and activities to implement the ideas in their classroom, and agreed that the toolkits jogged their imagination to create variations of their own of the warm-ups and activities.

In the open-ended item in the survey, teachers also commented on the teacher-friendly format, and expressed that they thought the toolkit would be an excellent resource to help them continue to utilize drama-related techniques with their students.

*The tool kit is user-friendly; the activities easily adapt to a variety of lessons.
Great for those of us with little/no drama ability.
Very clear and helps directly with teaching.
Helpful to remember what we've done.
Another tool for my strategy tool belt.*

Importance of highly skilled Flynn artists. Each of the five teachers interviewed worked with several different Flynn artists over the course of the project. Teachers' assessments of these artists were uniformly, highly positive.

As noted earlier, one of the things that made the FC/FS Collaboration so successful was the Flynn artists' ability to focus the project on the teachers' central curriculum work and concerns – core books, core curriculum, important literacy and reading comprehension objectives, learning that addressed each and every student. Activities were well-integrated into the core activities of the classroom, and were neither tangential nor simply “enrichment.”

Teachers were particularly complimentary about not only the Flynn artists' expertise in the arts, but their flexibility, respectfulness of teachers and students, and excellent classroom management skills. As one teacher expressed about her Flynn artist:

She was very accepting, and so skilled at being with the children. Accepting where they were at, including everyone, setting limits, and modeling off what I did...She was very skillful at blending in with my classroom, you would have thought we had worked together for 15 years! She had a real respect for me as the teacher. And yet her skill was greater than mine, and she shared it with all of us. It was a lovely thing....

I attribute the success to [our Flynn artist's] skill. So skilled, not only in her art of using drama, but connecting with me and managing a group of children. And she had to go from the 3rd grade all the way down to kindergarten, and class to class – she was amazing. In her ability to relate to the kids and move right into the classroom – each classroom has its own culture – she would just move right in our classroom culture, and bring comprehension and joy.

Appropriateness of the FC/FS Collaboration's three-year time frame. When asked whether three years was an adequate length for a collaboration with the Flynn Center, ten out of the 16 teacher survey respondents (62%) indicated that they felt it was an adequate period of time, while three teachers (19%) indicated that it was not enough time, and another three teachers (19%) answering “neither yes or no.” Follow-up comments suggest that teachers were generally quite positive about the Collaboration, but wished that the collaboration could be longer.

All five teachers interviewed seemed reasonably confident that they had learned enough that they could sustain some of these teaching techniques in the coming years. A number also described how much they enjoyed working with more than one Flynn artist over the years, and how each year they had acquired new skills and built on old ones.

[Over the 3 years] I've gotten more comfortable to use these techniques. First year – I wouldn't have even attempted to do it on my own. Joan can really command an audience – I wasn't as comfortable doing those things. But started doing it more, participated more – made me much more comfortable. So having it spread over multiple years has been good...I hope to be able to keep doing these things, forever, as long as I teach. And try to use it in other ways, in other subject areas. I plan on continuing to use these strategies.

Suggestions for improving the FC/FS Collaboration. Teachers were asked if they had any recommendations for improving the FC/FS Collaboration. The main suggestions had to do with scheduling, and frequency of contact. Three teachers in their surveys commented that they wished that they could have met on a more regular basis, while one requested that the meetings could have been spaced more evenly throughout the year.

One specialist commented that since she sees all classes, but only for a short amount of time, it was most helpful to work with Flynn teaching artist directly, “working one-on-one with her to brainstorm activities and ideas to make story times more interactive, engaging, with greater theater and movement.” She highly recommended this strategy for “specials” (e.g., art, music, library) who see many classes, rather than have the Flynn artist work with only a class or two.

One of the teachers interviewed commented that the hardest thing about the Collaboration was scheduling, and the difficulty of finding common time for scheduling Flynn artists’ classroom visits. Between being hard to get to the school office to make the phone calls, or see the sign-up list, this teacher requested that someone from the Flynn Center could at times, physically be present at the school and work with teachers directly to line up those common times. The teacher felt that having a lot of phone tag and e-mail tag burned up a lot of time, and deterred some people from becoming more involved in the project.

Another scheduling-related suggestion was whether the school could rent an acting tent in the school courtyard for a day in the spring, to accommodate the different classrooms’ work with the various Flynn artists. Since the school is “strapped for space,” such a tent would bypass the scheduling constraints posed by reliance on the school gym or music room for students’ dramatic and movement work, and allow different classes and teachers to come and work together.

One teacher also recommended that there be made available a list of possible artists that could work with schools and their areas of expertise. She considered herself fortunate in linking up with an artist with expertise in African dance to enhance the teacher’s unit on West Africa, but felt it was somewhat serendipitous that such a connection was made. (She happened to mention the unit to one of the Flynn artists, who knew of such a person.)

To optimize the utility of the tool kit materials and increase its use and dissemination, one teacher strongly recommended that the Flynn project should get in touch with the person in the district responsible for writing in the schools, and that it should be part of her presentations to different school faculties.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on teacher surveys and teacher interviews, the evaluation found that the FC/FS Collaboration was well-received by both teachers and students, and indicated a number of learning benefits afforded to students in the area of reading, literacy, drama and movement. Specific outcomes that teachers reported included:

- **Teachers’ acquisition of valuable teaching strategies and techniques.** Teachers reported learning from Flynn artists a valuable repertoire of new teaching techniques that utilized movement and drama to support students’ reading and literacy. Teachers appreciated how Flynn artists modeled useful teaching strategies that addressed teachers’ core curriculum, rather than simply providing discrete, “stand-alone” enrichment activities.

- **Students’ increased comprehension, recall and writing of story texts.** Teachers felt that through the FC/FS Collaboration, students displayed greater understanding of story settings, characters, and the sequence of story events. As a result of enhanced comprehension, students were better able to recall stories, allowing them to make greater connections between different story texts and between stories and real life situations. Teachers also described FC/FS role playing and writing activities supporting students’ greater awareness of what’s written, implicit, or missing from a text, and the ways readers infer and interpret written texts.

- **Students’ and teachers’ greater appreciation and understanding of drama and movement.** Teachers were highly enthusiastic about the FC/FS affording their students important exposure to live theater. The Flynn matinee performances were seen as a critical component of the FC/FS Collaboration. In addition to being of value in and of themselves, they made possible lively exchanges in related classroom-based activities which occurred before or after the performances, about such topics as multiple interpretations of a single work, and decisions about what to feature in a staged production.

- **Identification of key components of program success.** The three major components of the FC/FS Collaborations – the classroom collaborations between Flynn’s education staff and classroom teachers and students; the teacher workshops, and class attendance at live performances at the Flynn Center – were regarded by teachers as highly beneficial to both students’ learning and teachers’ professional development.

Teachers identified a number of program components and characteristics they felt were essential to the project’s success. These features included the customized and highly flexible ways Flynn artists worked with teachers and students; the expertise and experience of the Flynn teaching artists in both drama and in classroom management and work with schools; and the important offering of Flynn matinee performances. Teachers also positively regarded the “Words Come Alive” toolkit, and felt it would be helpful in sustaining their use of the drama-related teaching techniques in their classrooms, given the conclusion of this three-year project. The three-year time period for the collaboration, and the *Word Come Alive!* Tool kit materials, both appeared to be positive

factors in the teachers' confidence that they would be able and willing to sustain these teaching techniques in the future.

This third year, final evaluation suggests that the Flynn Center/Flynn School Collaboration offers a valuable model of arts-based teacher professional development and curriculum that can promote children's literacy, drama, and learning for many students. It is a model that holds great educational promise, and provides a valuable educational alternative that could be of great interest to other schools in Vermont, as well as regions nationwide.

Appendices

Appendix A: Teacher Interview Protocol

Appendix B: Teacher Survey