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**What are the Educational Impacts for the Participants of  
Community Shakespeare Company?**

Community Shakespeare Company started with two parents' desire to have their children learn in an alternative classroom environment that promotes parental involvement. Their passion for the theatre and the parental "hour" obligation to their children's classroom was the catalyst for Community Shakespeare Company. What has transpired has become an inspiring educational opportunity for the children and community of Lopez Island, Washington.

Lopez Island is a small, rural community similar in size to Manhattan Island, with a population of 2000 full time residents. The island is home to approximately 350 youth. According to the San Juan County Treasurer, Si Stephens, and the 2000 Census report, the socio-economic status of the majority of full time residents with families or children is barely above the poverty level. Most of the island youth are considered "at hope" and live in substandard housing conditions. Full time residents are farmers, fisherman, teachers, artists, retirees or those serving the tourist industry. A major tourist destination, Lopez Island is a weekend getaway for the rich and famous and a summer vacation spot. With all of the island's natural beauty and wildlife it is clearly a place where the "Have and Have Nots" struggle to live in harmony. Though the local school provides after-school opportunities with clubs and athletics, the youth of the island have limited after school educational/creative/artistic opportunities.

The Community Shakespeare Company brings youth and community members together in a safe, nurturing environment where they can rise to the level of others' and their own expectations. The youth learn that they can perform Shakespeare in an age-appropriate adaptation, where the expectations are that they will come to rehearsal, participate, have the ability to adhere to the demanding performance and rehearsal schedule, concentrate, learn their parts, be respectful and supportive of one another and of the adults involved, have fun and contribute a positive attitude. The organization is devoted to youth and education, using theater as the means and Shakespeare as the inspiration. The products of this organization are not only made by and for community, but it literally creates community. CSC creates a community in which art and young artists flourish and grow in character and self-esteem.

As I researched the educational impacts on participants of Community Shakespeare Company, I read and analyzed participant, parent and teacher surveys, I conducted interviews with participants, community members and the co-founders. I was looking for the common ground of what was learned.

I discovered that the educational impacts of Community Shakespeare Company (CSC) are many. The most significant impact is the creation of community followed closely by inter-generational mentorship, role modeled by the directors, Carter and Wilson. Participants learn public speaking skills and improve their memorization and reading skills, while learning and understanding the works of William Shakespeare. The participants expanded their artistic abilities and interest in theatre. They are empowered by their participation in each production,

mainly because of the community building process, which is recognized not only by a closing celebration, but which continues in the development of ongoing relationships with the intergenerational community members.

The statement “Enriching young lives, cultivating community” is the focus of the two co-founders. The CSC model could be a Best Practices Model of an example of Sustainable Community Education.

The CSC co-founders Director Richard Carter and Production Manager Susan Wilson have created a 10-week formula for putting on each production. The same formula is used for all age groups. For the elementary productions, the plays are written in rhyming couplets, which gives the students tools for memorization. This idea came from Canadian author Lois Burdett, who wrote the Shakespeare Can Be Fun series for her 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom. Co-founder Carter and Ms. Burdett have been corresponding for the past five years and share their work with each other. (Ms. Burdett allowed CSC to perform an adaptation of one of her books/plays before it was even produced.) Ms. Burdett’s students perform her books/plays at Stratford, Ontario, Canada. Now, Director Carter writes all of the company’s material, which allows the company the flexibility to write original plays and adapt Shakespeare’s plays to the appropriate age level. A surprisingly positive impact is that the children are capable of performing the original text as early as the sixth grade because of their introduction to Shakespeare’s language in Kindergarten.

In the first week of the 10 – week formula, the directors introduce the play and invite participants to an informational meeting which begins both the community building and audition processes in a non-threatening environment. The process includes sitting in a circle while reading the script aloud. This allows the actors to learn about Shakespeare’s characters, and introduces the directors to the participants, in a safe non-judgmental environment. During this first week both the directors and the participants choose the best roles for each participant/actor. The process is collaborative, with most every participant feeling like an important member of the community.

The second week, rehearsal begins. The Directors and participants make script cuts as necessary (once again the process is collaborative). Subsequent weeks include the actors’ rehearsal and production meetings with the costume designer, stage designer and lighting designer. Crews begin to form, with some of the actors participating as crew members if their roles permit.

A psychological transition from rehearsal to performance takes place during week ten. The members’ excitement and hard work begin to blossom. The

participants feel the support of each other and of their community at large. The culmination of the past ten weeks of hard work bears fruit of sweet ripeness.

The formula created by Director Carter and Production Manager Wilson is an ambitious model that with the proper direction and training *could* be experienced by educators interested in youth, drama and creating community. Art education program replication is complex. Community-building program replication is more complex. The rewards (for all the participants) from learning and implementing the model in its truest form during each week of the process are educational magic.

Creating relationships and showing gratitude are the heart of the magic. CSC is about building community. Each member has equal rights and responsibilities, and a spirit of cooperation and support is developed. Youth in grades K-12 from the home, private, and public school systems have united as part of the company. Approximately one third of the entire Lopez Island resident youth population participates on an annual basis. The company is diverse, people of different backgrounds, needs, cultures, and abilities are welcomed. Local community members volunteer to work on a production. The company's participants know that they are each an integral part of the whole.

All youth who are interested in the company or its productions are able to participate, regardless of performing experience or ability. Participation from every individual in the group is fundamental to the process and ultimately the success of the theatre piece relies on this group effort and mutual need.

CSC creates a space where it is safe for people to be challenged and take risks. A safe space is created when the participants believe that their actions are not being judged and that their opinions are respected. When they feel physically safe and can trust those around them, there is a culture of commitment. Participants take responsibility for their individual roles as they contribute to the larger group. Emphasis is placed on how the group can accomplish its goals as a cooperative and interdependent ensemble. CSC has created an inclusive community which aims to counteract the experiences of isolation and exclusion in our society.

Ken Jenks, Professor of Playwriting, University of Utah recently told Director Carter that he was amazed with the excellent quality of the "All's Well That Ends Well" production for two reasons. First, the majority of the youth involved were between twelve and eighteen, characteristically the hardest age group to work with in educational and theatrical environments. Secondly, this particular play is considered one of the most complex Shakespeare plays. He noted "To undertake this as a youth production was ambitious; to create a high quality production was Art Education at its Best".

In "Beyond Playing or Polishing: A Developmental View of Artistry," Howard Gardner and Denise Wolf suggest that a "judicious blend" of nurturance and discipline, a blend of "playing" and "polishing: are needed and appropriate. Gardener and Wolf describe the "arts as expression" view of artistry and creativity as suggesting that artistic work is

*similar to play – an arena for self-expression and experiment. The creative process is envisioned as free-ranging, unfettered by notions of what is merely appropriate, giving ample space to impressions, intuition and fancy. Within this framework, education for the arts has as its first obligation preservation of the capacities to perceive, experience, and express oneself directly. Those charged with education must seek to protect and even promote experimentation, a zest for the undiscovered, and a corresponding contempt for the cliché. The role of institutions and teachers is to provide materials and opportunities, then to "stand back," inflicting neither methods, images nor labels. At a deeper level, this vision of the creative process implies a notion of development as the unfolding of potential, the leafing-out of innate abilities that are easily stunted by an abrasive or unstimulating environment. (p.49)*

Relationships are developed throughout many age levels in the stimulating environment of CSC, allowing an arena for self-expression, and the unfolding of each participant's potential. This potential is experienced not only on stage but off stage as well. Intergenerational mentorship is a significant part of the interactions of the company. The older youth act as mentors to the younger. They help the younger students with their behavior, homework, costume changes, and stage presence. They take on a teaching role by helping with understanding of Shakespeare's language, reading lines and memorization. The informal setting is safe and nurturing for the youngest, and carries over into their daily lives whether it is in the school building or out in the community. The youngest know that the older youth are looking out for them, and are there to help in any situation.

The company also welcomes community and parental involvement. Parents and community members have joined the company as designers, stagehands, promoters, and technical assistants. Community members have offered their talents as a way to showcase their work. In recent years, the stage has been designed using the talents of local professional artists. The costume designer is a consultant for commercial companies such as Lands End and Eddie Bauer. The choreographer is a NYC trained ballet dancer. The music director is a classically trained music teacher. Her accompanists are also actors in the production.

Shakespeare's plays are full of references to popular music of the time, and were certainly accompanied by musicians. To assist the audience in understanding a

complex play, the music director associated certain songs with certain characters and ideas. For instance, in “All’s Well That Ends Well” the director assigned a piece by William Byrd, the most eminent composer of the English 16th century. When the action changed locale, the director used a romantic Italian song, written (quite a bit later) in the “new style”: a simple, graceful tune accompanied by chords, in contrast to the dense texture of the “old-fashioned” music still in vogue in England. A new generation of students was introduced to this magnificent music.

Music is a universal language. Teaching participants music of 16<sup>th</sup> century England or Italy expands their music “speaking and listening” skills. More significantly, the participants of CSC learn life skills: the ability to stand up in front of a group with confidence, to speak so they can be understood, to sing, dance, recite, read aloud or simply read. Several participants are special education students. One student has a speech impediment and the other is educationally disadvantaged. The student who has a speech impediment spoke into a microphone and acted as a narrator when he was only nine years old. The techniques taught by his speech therapist which he practiced with his parents, in combination with Director Carter’s instructions about using proper diction, pronunciation, and breathing techniques, enabled this student to speak to an audience. In subsequent years he began to perform with minor speaking parts. At the age of twelve, he wrote dialogue based on a fictional character, taught those words to other actors and then acted those words. He chose to put himself on the stage before his community and demonstrate how he was overcoming his obstacles.

The student who is educationally disadvantaged was insecure about auditioning by reading in front of her peers. Directors Carter and Wilson had her audition separately. Months later her reading ability improved by 2 grade levels and her self-consciousness lessened. She asked for a larger speaking role in the next production.

Learning how to overcome educational hardships is not easy for any student. Whether a student is gifted and talented or educationally disadvantaged, both face educational challenges during their learning careers.

Countless numbers of students have faced their own set of educational hardships when first learning the works of Shakespeare. Introducing children and adolescents to great works of literature which are too often thought of as dry, old, intellectual, boring, or at least not user-friendly, has profound implications. As one audience member commented to Director Carter -“You are painlessly teaching Shakespeare”. To date the company has performed All’s Well That Ends Well, As You Like It, MidSummer Night’s Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, The Comedy of Errors, The Tempest, and Twelfth Night,

Teaching Shakespeare in a painless way improves the participants' understanding of his work while enhancing their artistic development and interest in theatre. Participants use their knowledge and apply what they have learned about performing, designing, stage blocking and writing in other venues. Recently, a fifth grader, inspired by Director Carter, wrote the play The Cook's Domain for his classmates to perform. Another wrote an adaptation of Little Red Riding Hood for finger puppets. Participants have a more discerning view of other theatre performances and can analyze the productions in a professional manner. Students can relate to the actors on stage and (when given an opportunity to speak with them), will discuss their own experiences in relationship to what they saw performed.

In a Project Zero research study "Stand and Unfold Yourself" Steve Seidel writes a brief recapitulation of artistic development

*From five to eleven years, the child is becoming a crafts person. He struggles with various media, trying to make them do as he wants. He has standards and expectations he wants to achieve. He is becoming conscious of audience, communication, impact and criticism.*

*Moving into adolescence, the child emerges as a "visionary and technician." She is consciously planning her works, negotiates the possibilities and demands of various media and techniques, is beginning to think in terms of creating a body of work. Her standards are becoming far more calibrated in relation to standards in the field. She is more able to choose teachers in relation to her own sense of her needs and ambition (pg.79).*

Choosing to participate in the company empowers each participant. CSC develops participants' personal, and social skills. Through bringing their minds, bodies, and spirits to the drama they gain insight into themselves. Through working with others within the discipline of theatre, they learn to relate to people and build relationships of trust, support, honesty and understanding. CSC encourages its participants to believe in themselves, and helps them develop self-esteem and self-confidence.

This enables the participants to value their own work and other's contributions. The self-esteem developed during this process can be measured by the participant's passion and eagerness to strive to accomplish his or her best.

The participants' commitment to the high level of expectations of the company is their chosen (guided) path to the feeling of success when they meet their goals. It is the ability of the work of CSC to transform the inner self, the group and the community at large that makes it such a powerful and appropriate medium for work with young people.

Working with young flourishing artists (while creating community) cannot be complete without recognizing them for their achievements. A community that

accomplishes and acknowledges its success teaches celebration. Not just the usual opening night or last night party but the ongoing support and respect that comes from being an integral part of the whole. This is a community that accepts and recognizes the artists for who they are, for what they have accomplished, and for what they have given back to the community.

Recognizing the participants' achievements and identifying the numerous educational impacts that CSC has on its participants makes a wonderful program for comparison with other National Youth/Community Shakespeare Programs .

It was not an easy task to identify other National Youth/Community Shakespeare Programs which were conducting themselves in similar fashion to CSC. I was fortunate to be able to find the outstanding and highly regarded Shakespeare & Company's Education Program in Lenox, Massachusetts. They bring the classical poetry and plays of William Shakespeare alive and into the lives of students and teachers through workshops, performances, residencies and summer programming. Each aspect is designed to be educationally enriching, theatrically compelling and personally inspiring.

One of the most extensive arts-in-education programs in the northeast, it reaches more than 40,000 students and teachers each year with innovative, responsive and challenging programs. Identified by the GE Fund, the MacArthur Foundation, the Arts Education Partnership and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities as a *Champion of Change*, Shakespeare & Company's Education Program is recognized as an innovative leader in the field of integrating the arts into education. Since the program was founded in 1978, nearly a million elementary, secondary and undergraduate students have participated.

In June, 1998 Project Zero of Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, under the direction of the current Director Steve Seidel, completed a two-year study of two aspects of the Shakespeare & Company Education Program. Their report not only confirms the myriad benefits for participants of these programs, but also articulates for all of us the multiple educational values of this kind of arts programming has for the students and teachers in our schools.

Another Northeast art program, The Shakespearean Youth Theatre, is a group of young people dedicated to performing quality productions of Shakespeare and learning about the plays, the playwright, and theater. To this end, the cast is highly involved in every aspect of the production, from selecting and editing the play to publicity, sets, and costumes.

Early in the year, the cast meets with the director to discuss possible plays for the season. The discussion ends with an assignment of several plays for closer rereading and consideration. The cast then chooses the play, taking into consideration issues such as casting, audience appeal, and personal taste.

In past years the plays have been edited for length and content, Macbeth being the group's first unabridged production. Each cast member reads and researches the play, and submits his/her edited version of the script. The director then reads each one and synthesizes the final script. This process has increased the cast's understanding of Shakespeare, character development, and script analysis.

Shakespeare and Company (S&Co.) is an established company on the east coast in Lenox, Massachusetts. Community Shakespeare Company is a fledgling company on the west coast in Lopez Island, Washington. Both companies are dedicated to youth and art education. During this research I became very excited to see the similarities between these two programs, considering the fact that Co-founders Wilson and Carter did not know about S&Co. prior to establishing CSC.

The Project Zero research study identified the following Realms of Learning (pg. 14) during the Shakespeare and Company's Fall Festival:

- Learning about Shakespeare and his language, and ways of reading the text and encountering the dramatic action.
- Learning about acting
- Learning about working in caring and creative communities
- Learning about oneself: linking self-knowledge to personal intellectual development.

As stated earlier, my research identified the following Educational Impacts for participants of CSC:

- The creation of community
- Intergenerational mentorship;
- Improved reading, memorization and public speaking skills;
- Learning the works of Shakespeare;
- Artistic Development/Interest in theatre;
- Empowerment;
- Celebration.

The structure of the Fall Festival is different from CSC, but shares similar qualities with CSC's structure. S & Co. works with a minimum of 10 high schools. They send out a team of two instructors. CSC works with students from elementary and secondary schools and includes home school and private school students. They work within one community.

In both companies, the directors choose which play will be performed. The directors produce an edited draft. The lengths of the plays vary. Both companies use the audition process to ease anxiety about the auditions and to encourage having fun and taking risks. Both companies use creative non-traditional casting techniques, even creating roles for the participants. Both companies develop a disciplined and committed work environment. Both companies establish relationships with parents, student teachers, and administrators. Both companies work on creating a cooperative environment. Both companies utilize input from the students. The S& Co. works within the school during this process and helps teachers develop lesson plans that will engage students with Shakespeare's plays in the classroom. CSC moved out of the school environment (amicably, with the school district's blessing) to create broader participation, away from the constraints of public education, and to embrace students from the private school and home school sectors. S&Co. involves the students more in the marketing and promotion of the play. CSC's founders and parents take on that role.

The culmination of both companies' hard work happens to fall on the same weekend in November. The Fall Festival for S&Co is dedicated to sharing all of the productions from the ten high schools. CSC dedicates the final three performances to its community audiences.

What distinguishes Community Shakespeare Company from Shakespeare and Company is that they are not just trying to teach Shakespeare, or teach more than basic theatrical skills. What they are consciously trying to do is alter the landscape of their community in a positive way, through the play production process.

It is obvious that they will need to ask themselves some of the same initial questions proposed by Shakespeare and Company in the initial stages of the Project Zero research study. The leadership of Shakespeare and Company thought it important to research the feasibility of replication, offering student and teachers participation in the Company's theatre-in-education programs in different settings.

The leadership of Community Shakespeare Company thinks it is important to research the feasibility of replication as a "Best Practice" model of Sustainable Community Education. They will need to determine if they can maintain the integrity of their work and the quality of implementation when they introduce their model to other communities. The educational impacts of the Community Shakespeare Company are too great to get lost in a mediocre replication program.

The 10-week formula could be duplicated without the community-building component, but it is the community development part that makes this model unique. The co-founders have a deep understanding of complex concepts and

have a strong set of beliefs about education, Shakespeare, drama, and community development. They also have a broad set of administrative and interpersonal skills that include passion, integrity, honesty, high energy, compassion, playfulness, and a sense of humor. The youth of Lopez Island are participating in a unique educational experience.

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## Appendix

### **10 Week Formula**

Week 1 Day 1 First hour- Invite all interested participants to hear about the chosen play. The play is introduced and explained. Some participants have already read the play (several times) they also help in this process. (Mentoring). Play/audition/schedule process is discussed. Most importantly, time commitment is discussed.

Week 1 Day 1 Second hour– Students interested in performing the play are invited to the audition process and begin to read lines from the play, or a prepared audition piece. All participants sit in a circle with shared scripts and read as much of the play as possible. The directors assign actors to read roles. Interest in gender/age/role doesn't matter. The directors will be exposed to the actor's reading ability, vocal quality, confidence and experience. This process allows actors to learn about the characters, gives the directors exposure to actors, and starts the community development process. (Reading Skills).

Week 1 Day 2 First hour – Reading lines continues, with each reader taking on different roles. (Reading Skills).

Week 1 Day 2 Second Hour – Students stand up in various combinations of two and threes to see what they look and sound like together. Students give directors their first, second, third and fourth choices for roles they are comfortable playing (Identification of and voicing goals).

Week 1 Day 3 – Directors spend the day working on casting.

Week 1 Day 4- Characters/students names are posted. Inevitably someone (and their parents) is disappointed and needs reassurance about why they were chosen for their specific part/role. (Creating Community – everyone is an important member)

Week 1-Week 2 – Director Carter works on editing the play taking into account:  
Length of play  
Quantity of roles – adding a part

Week 2 Day 1 – Rehearsal begins. All participants are called. Participants get their scripts. Reading of the play begins with everyone sitting in a circle reading their parts. Participants and Directors make cuts as necessary.

Week 2 Day 2 - Blocking begins. Blocking is the choreographed movement of the actors on stage. Every step that actors take on the stage and their placement in relation to the audiences' sight lines is thoroughly thought out. How the actors stand, where they stand, how they move around each other, so that they are not "blocking" each other from being seen is all taken into consideration.

Week 3 thru Week 6 - Rehearsal of different scenes; not all participants are called.

Week 3 - Production meetings are called. Costume Designer, Stage Designer, and Lighting Designer. Crews begin to formulate.

Week 7- The actors are off book and have their lines memorized. (Reading and memorization skills)

Week 7 – Rehearsal and Production work. Finish up blocking-identify weakest parts.

Week 8 - Rehearsal and Production work. Continually the production becomes less of the Directors' show and more of the actor's show.

Week 8 Day 1- Rehearse first half of play in its entirety.

Week 8 Day 2 –Rehearse second half of play in its entirety.

Most actors have not seen or heard the play in its entirety, because they may not be in scenes from the different halves. The reality of what the group as a whole is accomplishing is really starting to come together.

Week 9 Day 1 – Move to Theatre/Community Center. Adjustment to new space takes place.

Week 9 Day 2 - Rehearse in new space. Take everything the actors know and conform it to new space. Primarily they work on Projection and Diction.

Week 9 Day 3 – Rehearse in new space

Week 9 Day 4 – Rehearsal if needed.

Week 10 Day 1 – Load In. The empty space becomes a theatre with actors, parents, and community members' help and support. Risers and chairs are arranged. Acoustical shells are moved in place. The stage is created. Director Carter's vision of the theatre becomes a reality.

Week 10 Day 2 – Costumes – All of the flurry of costume changes, adjustments and fittings are taking place along with the actors running through the entire play. The characters are really taking hold as the costumes reinforce actors taking on a new persona.

Week 10 Day 3- Tech Rehearsal – A full day of rehearsal. Actors spend the entire day at the theatre working with music, costumes, blocking, props and lighting.

Week 10 Day 4- Dress Rehearsal –Actors are completely on their own, in performance, and discover their weakest and strongest moments. Anticipation of the open dress and performances escalates.

Week 10 Day 5- Open Dress Rehearsal – First performance in front of an audience. A psychological transition from rehearsal to performance takes place. The excitement and all the hard work is beginning to blossom.

Week 10 Days 5, 6 and 7 – Performance – The actors sit back stage, finding personal and group ways to entertain themselves. Some will silently read a book, while others will play card games or whisper softly. They will support each other by congratulating each other after completing a scene, handing each other props, or adjusting makeup, hair and costumes during scene changes. Volunteer adults are back stage helping with costume changes, giving support and encouragement. The audience is comprised of community members, parents, grandparents, and friends. They are genuinely amazed at the accomplishment of these young actors under the guidance of Carter and Wilson. The culmination of the past ten weeks of hard work bears fruit of sweet ripeness.