

Neighborhood Bridges Program Evaluation Report II

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By

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Report Highlights

This report is the second in a series of reports from a three-year evaluation study of the Neighborhood Bridges (Bridges) program of the Children's Theatre Company (CTC). CTC contracted with the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement to evaluate Bridges as part of a grant CTC received from the Arts in Education Model Development and Dissemination Program of the U.S. Department of Education.

The purpose of this report is to summarize additional data gathered since the initial report and present recommendations for program improvement based on a synthesis of all the data collected to date. The next report in the series will include data from the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA-II) reading test that students took in spring 2006.

Bridges is a 31-week program of storytelling and creative drama for elementary and middle school students intended to help them:

- develop their abilities to write, speak, and think clearly;
- recognize their capacity to become storytellers of their own lives;
- achieve state and national standards for theatre; and
- improve their achievement in reading and writing.

Each week, Bridges brings a teaching artist into participating classrooms to work collaboratively with the classroom teacher. A typical two-hour Bridges session is composed of four parts: the fantastic binomial, storytelling, skits and theatre games, and writing games. In addition to the weekly Bridges components students also do the following over the course of the program: create and perform one play at their school and a second play on-stage at CTC; write letters to and receive letters from a pen pal at another Bridges school; and attend a professional production at CTC and meet their pen pal.

The evaluation report of July 2006 indicated that, overall, classroom teachers and teaching artists think that Bridges is operating effectively. They also were satisfied with the content of the Bridges curriculum. Classroom teachers' responses to items concerning their role in implementing Bridges and their satisfaction with the program activities were mostly positive, and the same was true for teaching artists. The additional data summarized in the present report are consistent with the initial findings. However, the new data also serve to elaborate upon the findings.

Reflecting on the data as a whole, the following aspects of Bridges are especially strong.

- √ Bridges is flexible and teaching artists and classroom teachers have the freedom to adapt the program to fit the needs of their students, such as adapting Bridges for 3rd grade students or students who are English language learners.

- √ The large proportion of classroom teachers and teaching artists that return to Bridges each year provides stability in implementing the program and the opportunity to build on past experiences in order to take implementation deeper.
- √ The feedback mechanisms in Bridges, such as: classroom observations by program management, monthly teaching artist meetings, and surveys of classroom teachers, teaching artists and students help keep the program on track and responsive to issues that emerge in the schools.
- √ Bridges gives students an opportunity to develop skills in working with their peers that may be unlike anything they experience elsewhere in the curriculum. The group work is sustained, primarily student-directed, and authentic to the task of creating and performing skits.
- √ Classroom teachers value Bridges and can readily articulate how it benefits their students. Some teachers struggle more than others to fit Bridges into their schedule, but all teachers see value for their students. For example, the survey data indicate that teachers noticed student learning in areas such as the following:

Improvement in students' ability to create a story and character using voice, body, and imagination.

Students' ability to clearly identify plot, theme, and character in the oral stories.

Students generating ideas through group discussion, rehearsal, and sharing.

In interviews with a sample of classroom teachers, they most often mentioned the student learning in these areas: creativity and confidence in their writing; speaking up, speaking clearly, and feeling confident speaking up; working in a group and developing respect for each other.

- √ Teaching artists are positive about Bridges and creative in addressing challenges that come up for students and classroom teachers. In their surveys they concurred with the classroom teachers' perspectives on student learning. In their interviews they most often remarked on student learning in the following areas: acting and storytelling; writing; and comprehending and analyzing oral stories.
- √ Comparisons of individual student's surveys from the start of the program to the end of the program showed that they most often recognized growth in their skills related to acting, storytelling and oral communications. Statistical tests showed that the changes from the initial survey to the follow-up survey were statistically significant. This indicates that the differences are unlikely to be due to chance.

The combined data also illuminate several areas where the program may benefit from discussion, clarification and improvement.

- 1) Clarify the purpose of the final writing game and include it more often in Bridges sessions. Does something essential to Bridges become lost when classroom teachers assign it as homework rather than including it in a Bridges session, or, when students don't have a chance to do the final writing game at all? How is the purpose of the final writing game different from the purpose of allowing students time beyond Bridges to refine stories they began during the fantastic binominal?
- 2) Make stronger connections to the school's writing curriculum. Provide students with multiple opportunities to revise and further develop the stories they begin in Bridges by encouraging classroom teachers to do more follow-up writing instruction on these stories. Time constraints in the school curriculum make this difficult. However, there are several Bridges classroom teachers who have successfully used students' Bridges writing as a starting point for further writing instruction that is part of their school curriculum. These classroom teachers might be able to assist others in making meaningful connections.
- 3) Clarify Bridges' role in the writing curriculum. Map Bridges to the writing standards that are part of the Minnesota Academic Standards in Language Arts to clarify which parts are addressed within Bridges and which parts classroom teachers need to address outside of Bridges time. For example, the standards state that in 5th grade students are to "Write in a variety of modes to express meaning, including: descriptive, narrative, informative . . . thank you notes, and reports." Bridges may help students with narrative and descriptive forms, yet not take those forms of writing beyond the first draft. Teachers could use Bridges writing as a starting point and then cover other parts of the standards such as elements of composition and spelling, grammar, and usage as part of their regular writing instruction.
- 4) Proactively address the time constraints in Bridges sessions. A strength of Bridges, according to classroom teachers and teaching artists, is the flexibility of the curriculum and the instructional activities. This flexibility may also be a weakness, however, if components that are critical to the intended student outcomes are squeezed out, perhaps unintentionally. Is there a core of activities that should happen during each session? Are some components more important than others? What gets lost, potentially, if the chair game doesn't occur, or if students don't have sufficient time to get feedback on their skits? Would it benefit students to include more time for re-working skits? What should be omitted to make this feasible?
- 5) Encourage each classroom teacher and teaching artist to have explicit conversations about the classroom cues or prompts the teacher already uses to manage students so that the teaching artist can take advantage of what is already in place. Also encourage discussion about the role each will play in addressing student discipline issues. Having occasional one-on-one planning meetings, rather than always meeting

with other Bridges classroom teachers and teaching artists at the school, may facilitate these conversations and make it easier for either the classroom teacher or the teaching artist to bring up sensitive issues specific to working relationship or their students.

Table of Contents

Description of Neighborhood Bridges.....	1
Design and Methods.....	2
Findings: Implementation of Neighborhood Bridges.....	4
Findings: Student Learning in Neighborhood Bridges.....	9
Summary and Recommendations.....	24

List of Tables

Table 1: Rates of Survey Completion	3
Table 2: Student Survey Results for the Acting, Storytelling, and Oral Communication Components of Bridges	11
Table 3: Student Survey Results for the Writing Component of Bridges.....	12
Table 4: Student Survey Results for the Analyzing Stories Component of Bridges	13
Table 5: Classroom Teachers’ Observations of Student Learning – January.....	15
Table 6: Classroom Teachers’ Observations of Student Learning – May	17
Table 7: Teaching Artists’ Observations of Student Learning – January	20
Table 8: Teaching Artists’ Observations of Student Learning – May.....	22

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Description of Neighborhood Bridges

Bridges is a 31-week program of storytelling and creative drama for elementary and middle school students intended to help them:

- develop their abilities to write, speak, and think clearly;
- recognize their capacity to become storytellers of their own lives;
- achieve state and national standards for theatre; and
- improve their achievement in reading and writing.

Bridges was founded in 1997 by Peter Brosius, Artistic Director of CTC, and Jack Zipes, Professor of German and Comparative Literature at the University of Minnesota. Each week, Bridges brings a teaching artist into participating classrooms to work collaboratively with the classroom teacher. A typical two-hour Bridges session is composed of four parts:

The Fantastic Binominal: The teaching artist and students spontaneously create a story through free association based on two arbitrarily chosen nouns and a preposition. Then students create their own stories and write them in their Bridges notebook. Each week 2-3 students are asked to present their stories to their peers. The teaching artist and classroom teacher coach the students in using gestures and voice to dramatize their story.

Storytelling: The teaching artist and classroom teacher each tell a tale, often two different versions of the same tale, or tales related to each other. The tales are drawn from an anthology provided with the Bridges curriculum. Over the course of the year, tales are presented from several genres, including fairy tales, pourquoi tales, and myths. The stories are followed by discussion designed to help students think critically about the content of the tales and the implications for their lives.

Skits and Theatre Games: Students work in small groups to create and perform brief skits based on the stories they have just heard. The teaching artist leads students in

games designed to develop their skills in areas such as focus, diction, gestures, and collaboration.

Writing Games: Students participate in a reflective writing exercise to solidify the day's learning and incorporate the creative energy of their skits into their own stories.

In addition to the weekly Bridges components students also do the following over the course of the program: create and perform one play at their school and a second play on-stage at CTC; write letters to and receive letters from a pen pal at another Bridges school; and attend a professional production at CTC and meet their pen pal.

Although students do some writing as part of their weekly Bridges' sessions, it is hoped that teachers incorporate some of students' Bridges writing into their regular writing instruction so that students have an opportunity to further develop their stories and their writing skills.

Each week, the teaching artists and classroom teachers at each school meet for one hour to develop the lesson plans for upcoming sessions.

In 2005-2006, 18 classroom teachers from seven schools in Minneapolis and Saint Paul participated in the program. For 11 of the classroom teachers, this was their first year of involvement in Bridges. Across the 18 participating classrooms there were a total of 540 students involved in the program. Twelve teaching artists participated in the program, including the director of Bridges and CTC's Assistant Director of Education-Community Engagement. For three of the teaching artists, this was their first year teaching in Bridges.

Design and Methods

The evaluation was designed to measure the extent to which Bridges accomplished the outcomes specified in the grant proposal and provide information that CTC and Bridges staff can use to strengthen the program. The intended program outcomes are as follows:

- Increase student achievement in reading.
- Increase student achievement in writing.
- Increase student achievement in theatre.
- Broaden classroom teachers' instructional strategies to include elements of storytelling and theatre as arts and as a support to learning in other core content areas.

The report summarizes data collected through surveys and interviews of classroom teachers and teaching artists and student surveys. Each data collection method is described below.

Classroom Teacher and Teaching Artist Surveys

The classroom teacher and teaching artist surveys had been developed and used by CTC staff prior to this study. The survey set included three surveys for classroom teachers and three surveys for teaching artists. The survey items asked respondents to rate their level of agreement on a four point scale – where a rating of 1 equaled strongly disagree and a rating of 4 equaled strongly agree – with statements about the appropriateness of the curriculum and program activities, and the roles of the classroom teacher and teaching artist in conducting the program. For purposes of the present evaluation, the evaluator added two sections to the surveys to collect information about: 1) classroom teachers’ use of elements of storytelling and theatre, both as arts and as a support to learning in other core content areas, outside of Bridges sessions; and 2) classroom teachers’ and teaching artists’ perceptions on the effectiveness of Bridges’ components for student learning.

The surveys were included in the curriculum materials distributed to classroom teachers and teaching artists in September. At three points during the year (January, March, and May) they were asked to complete the appropriate survey and turn it in to the director of Bridges at a program meeting.

As shown in Table 1, a high proportion of teaching artists and classroom teachers completed each of the surveys. This suggests that the results are likely to be a fair representation of how all of the classroom teachers and teaching artists would have answered the items had they completed the surveys. However, due to the small numbers of classroom teachers and teaching artists involved in the study, caution is needed when using percentages to compare ratings of survey items. A shift of one or two people across response options can make a disproportionately large shift in percentages.

Table 1
Rates of Survey Completion

	Teaching Artists N=12	Classroom Teachers N=18
Survey I	12/12 100%	18/18 100%
Survey II	11/12 92%	14/18 78%
Survey III	10/12 83%	16/18 89%

Classroom Teacher and Teaching Artist Interview Guides

Two semi-structured interview guides were developed by the evaluator specifically for use in this study. The primary purpose of the interviews was to collect information on what classroom teachers and teaching artists thought was working well in Bridges and what could be improved. The interviews were conducted in May and June of 2006 and each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were read and coded to identify themes in the responses.

Interviews were completed with 9 of the 12 teaching artists. Two artists did not respond to a request for an interview and the Bridges Captain was excluded from the interview process because in addition to being one of the teaching artists she is part of the Bridges management team.

Nine teachers from 6 of the 7 participating schools were interviewed; both Bridges teachers at the seventh school refused to participate in the interview. The teachers for the interview sample were selected from Bridges teachers at the 6 schools to represent the range of schools, grade levels, and years of teacher experience with Bridges. Nonetheless, the interview results may not adequately represent the range of teacher experiences across the 18 classrooms and 7 schools that participated in Bridges this year. Caution is recommended when generalizing the interview results to all Bridges classroom teachers.

Student Survey

The student survey had been developed and used by CTC staff prior to this study. The survey asked students to rate their level of agreement on a four point scale – where a rating of 1 equaled strongly disagree and a rating of 4 equaled strongly agree – with items that described their skill level in and enjoyment of various aspects of Bridges. The surveys were included in the curriculum materials distributed to classroom teachers and teaching artists in September. They administered the survey during a Bridges session in the fall and again in May. The results were compiled by the evaluator.

The survey findings are reported only for students who completed the survey at both intervals because the purpose of the analysis was to examine how students' responses changed over time. The results in this report are based on responses from the fifty-five percent (298) of the 540 students that participated in Neighborhood Bridges during the 2005-2006 school year. The response rate suggests caution in generalizing the survey results to all students who participated in Bridges. Students who did not complete the survey at all, or did not complete the survey at both intervals may have responded differently than the students whose responses were available. In some cases, students may not have completed both surveys because they were not enrolled in the Bridges school for the full school year. In addition, data from 3 of the 18 classrooms that participated in Bridges had to be excluded because an old version of the survey with a different response scale was used inadvertently in the spring. The results do, however, provide an indication of how over half of the participating students experienced the program.

Findings: Implementation of Neighborhood Bridges

The initial evaluation report indicated that, overall, both classroom teachers and teaching artists thought that Bridges was operating effectively. On written surveys both groups indicated that, for the most part, the Bridges components were effective for helping students develop skills in writing, theatre, or reading. They also were satisfied with the content of the Bridges curriculum. Classroom teachers' responses to items concerning their role in implementing Bridges and their satisfaction with the program activities were mostly positive, and the same was true for teaching artists. Information from interviews with classroom

teachers and teaching artists provided additional information about how Bridges was implemented and the results are summarized in this section

Teaching Artists' Perspectives

The primary purpose of the interviews with teaching artists was to collect information about the effectiveness of each major component in Bridges classroom sessions. During the interview teaching artists were asked how often their classroom sessions included each of the following components and, then, how effective they thought the component was for student learning:

- fantastic binominal,
- oral stories and discussion,
- chair game,
- warm ups and theatre games,
- skits, and
- final writing games.

Bridges encourages teaching artists and classroom teachers to adapt the major components to fit the context of each classroom's students and, thus, there is no right answer to how often sessions include the major components. Instead, the question was asked to get a picture of the variation that may have occurred across the 18 classrooms that implemented Bridges in 2005-2006.

The components most likely to occur in Bridges sessions were: the fantastic binomial, the oral stories and discussion, and the rehearsal and performance of skits based on the oral stories. Most of the teaching artists also said they usually did at least one warm up or theatre game during a session.

In contrast, the teaching artists noted that they often ran out of time at the end of a Bridges session to do the final writing exercise, but they tried to at least introduce the exercise as a homework assignment. Use of the chair game was also low, but teaching artists were more likely to include it as part of a session than the final writing exercise.

Teaching artists' concerns about implementation of Bridges centered on the challenges of fitting all the components into a session and the difficulty of doing some components with larger class sizes, classes that had a large number of students who were English language learners, or classrooms where there seemed to be pre-existing classroom climate or behavior problems. In each case the teaching artists described how they tried to work with the classroom teacher to adapt the program activities to address the needs of the class.

Although time was most often mentioned as a reason for not being able to include all of the components, several teaching artists described additional challenges in carrying out the chair game that the program may want to address. Teaching artists discussed how it was difficult to carry out with ELL students. One teaching artist said,

If you have like 3 or 4 ELL students in one group every time you get to that point somebody has to translate. And then the students have to understand what is going on. And then they add to the story in their own language or in English and go forward so that adds a lot of time. The important thing about the chair game is momentum. It gets really hard to get back the momentum and go forward.

In contrast, another teaching artist remarked that “ELL students had a hard time moving it along, it would take them a long time to make up a story together, but their growth over the year was huge. It was one of the places they grew the most.”

Other teaching artists mentioned that it was more difficult to carry out the chair game with younger students – those in 3rd or 4th grade. Many teaching artists noted that regardless of grade level it is difficult to keep the audience engaged. One teaching artist remarked that in other parts of Bridges students are not asked to memorize, whereas in the chair game they need to memorize what the students before them have said because when they add their piece to the story line they can’t change the story so much that the story loses focus.

The teaching artist also talked, however, about how they’ve succeeding in addressing some of these challenges. For example,

I do a lot of modification. We will often stand in a circle rather than sit. A person in the center will tell part of the story and then they’ll point at a person who should go next, to mix it up and make it more physical. Maybe the sitting in a chair is harder when the rest of Bridges is so all over the classroom. So I used a lot of modifications; it would be helpful to develop more.

The chair game’s still always the trickiest thing in terms of organizing and organizing is principle for the kids. And so we experimented a lot this year. . . . It worked better, there was less hemming and having and feeling sort of insecure, when you gave them a sentence and people just kept adding on. They didn’t go back to the beginning and tell the whole thing each time. So each person just added on and at the end you had a volunteer from that group tell the whole story. And while they were telling the story other people could help them. I found the stories to be clearer and, then, when it came time to act them out the way they were able to act them out was clearer than when there was all the addition of things. And I tried to coach it more this year.

Toward the end of the year when they were getting more and more excited about acting out the FB we tried switching the chair game right after that, just kind of build on that, because they’d have all the excitement and energy and we thought well if we could keep the energy going into the chair game maybe that would work. And that kind of works and I probably would have kept going with that but by then we were going into our final rehearsals for the Bridges Festival.

The teaching artists were very positive about the effectiveness of the Bridges components for student learning. Each of them could readily describe what students seem to learn during the year as they participated in activities such as the Fantastic Binomial, oral storytelling, and the skits; these comments will be summarized later in this report.

Teaching artists were also specifically asked about the weekly planning meetings with their classroom teacher. In general the teaching artists found the meetings useful, but they also offered ideas on how to make the sessions more productive. Several mentioned that they would have liked the opportunity to meet one-on-one with their classroom teacher rather than as a group of teaching artists and classroom teachers within a school. Some noted that in their schools the various teaching artists and classroom teachers had different styles and this made planning as a group difficult. This was also complicated by the reality that individual classrooms were often different in many ways. One idea was to spend the first half hour together as a group and then have one-on-one meetings.

Two teaching artists noted that having the planning right after the Bridges classroom session was helpful because they were just coming off teaching and had lots of thoughts to share. It provided a common starting point for the meeting.

A continual challenge was that teachers got interrupted a lot and were sometimes trying to accomplish other things during the planning period because their out of class time was so limited during the day.

Classroom Teachers' Perspectives

The classroom teacher interviews focused on how often teachers provided follow-up instruction to enable students to refine stories they began writing in Bridges and teachers' use of the elements of storytelling and theatre outside of Bridges sessions, either as arts or as a support to learning in other core content areas. They were also asked for suggestions on how to make Bridges stronger.

Final Writing Games and Other Follow-up Instruction

The bulk of the instruction in Bridges occurs through a weekly 2-hour classroom session with the teaching artist and classroom teacher. Classroom teachers are asked to supplement this instruction, however, by providing time outside of Bridges sessions for students to enhance the stories they began writing during the fantastic binomial. This may occur either by doing some of the final writing games from the Bridges curriculum or incorporating Bridges' writing into the classroom's ongoing writing instruction. It is also hoped that four times during the year teachers will have students create final drafts of stories they began writing during Bridges.

The survey findings that were summarized in the initial report indicated that some teachers thought they could be more successful with the follow-up activities. During their interview, teachers were specifically asked how often students had an opportunity to further develop a story they had initiated in Bridges. Six of the teachers described how they had students do additional writing on a story they had started in Bridges. Some of the teachers said they

assigned Bridges writing games as homework or at other times during the school day. Other teachers had students do further work on their Bridges stories as part of their regular writing curriculum. All of the teachers said it would be valuable for students to spend time outside of Bridges taking some of their stories to a more finished level, but they found it challenging to find time to do this given the curriculum expectations at their school. Several noted that they couldn't devote all of their instructional time allotted for writing to polishing students' Bridges stories because creative writing is just one type of writing students must learn during the year.

Teachers' Use of Elements of Storytelling and Theatre

A specific performance objective for the U.S. Department of Education grant was to increase the use of elements of storytelling and theatre among first time Bridges teachers, both as arts and as a support to learning in other core content areas. The specified performance target for the first year of the grant was that 25% of first year Bridges teachers would include these elements in their instruction. The classroom teacher surveys in January and May listed 10 elements of Bridges and asked teachers how many times they had used each in the past two months outside of their classroom's weekly Bridges session. The initial evaluation report indicated that the performance target was met at both survey points. In fact, over 25% of the first year teachers reported using each strategy at least 1-2 times both in the late fall and in the spring.

In the interviews, which included a selection of all Bridges teachers not just those in their first year, two teachers mentioned using some theatre games, especially voice and articulation games, outside of their Bridges sessions and found them effective. Several teachers mentioned making use of the actor's tool kit when students were making presentations or doing oral reading.

Teachers talked less about using specific Bridges strategies outside Bridges sessions, however, and more about how they tried to make connections for students between what they were doing in Bridges and what they were doing in the rest of the curriculum. Most often teachers described trying to connect Bridges with their writing curriculum. For example, one teacher discussed how it was helpful to tell students to "make it like a Bridges story" when they were getting stuck writing a personal narrative in their writing curriculum. Another said that to help student make connections she intentionally used terms from the district's writing curriculum when students were doing their writing in Bridges. Two other teachers made connections between Bridges and their school's reading curriculum by providing students with additional reading on Bridges genres or issues that seemed to intrigue the students.

The interview data suggest that Bridges teachers as a whole – not just first year Bridges teachers – were more likely to connect Bridges to other areas of their curriculum than they were to either 1) employ specific elements of storytelling and theatre to teach other areas of the curriculum or 2) spend more time teaching storytelling and theatre as art forms in themselves. Several teachers mentioned that they were unlikely to teach more storytelling and theatre than that which is already included in Bridges because they needed the time to cover other mandatory areas of the curriculum.

The findings also suggest that because classroom teachers need a good understanding of Bridges in order to make meaningful curriculum connections for students it was more difficult for first year Bridges teachers to make these linkages than it was for more experienced teachers. Several experienced Bridges teachers were even challenged to make connections to their curriculum this year because their school was using a new reading curriculum, they were teaching a new grade level, or their school was involved in another major curriculum initiative that required a great deal of their time.

In initial discussions of the findings with program staff, it became clear that the aim of Bridges is less about increasing teachers' use of specific Bridges strategies outside of Bridges sessions and more about encouraging teachers to employ Bridges values in their instruction and interactions with students. The values include encouraging students to raise critical questions about what they hear and see, allowing students to make choices, and challenging them to discover solutions to problems – such as how to work with peers to create a skit – rather than handing them the answers.

Areas for Improvement

The classroom teachers were very positive about Bridges and many had to be pressed a bit by the interviewer to generate some suggestions for how the program could be improved. One need that emerged was for classroom teachers and teaching artists to talk more explicitly about classroom management and the roles of the classroom teacher and the teaching artist during Bridges. For example, some classroom teachers said they were uncertain about when it would be appropriate for them to interrupt the flow of a Bridges session to address a student behavior issue. They also thought it would be useful for the teaching artist to understand the cues already in use by the classroom teacher for behavior management, rather than create new cues or establish contradictory rules. The classroom teachers noted that consistency was critical in managing student behavior and therefore it was difficult if students perceived that the rules were different in Bridges than in other parts of the school day.

Findings: Student Learning In Neighborhood Bridges

This section summarizes data on students' perceptions of their learning in Bridges as measured by the survey students completed at the beginning and end of the program. It also includes classroom teachers' and teaching artists' perceptions of student learning in Bridges that was gathered through surveys and interviews.

Student Surveys

The survey asked students to rate their level of agreement on a four point scale – where a rating of 1 equaled strongly disagree and a rating of 4 equaled strongly agree – with 18 items that described their skill level in and enjoyment of various aspects of Bridges. For ease of interpretation, the items were divided into three categories: acting, storytelling, oral communication; writing; and analyzing stories.

Acting, Storytelling, and Oral Communication

The survey contained eight items related to the acting, storytelling, and oral communication aspects of Bridges. For six of these items, there was a statistically significant increase from pre-survey to post-survey in the percentage of students that marked agree or strongly agree (see Table 2, p. 11). On the post-program survey significantly more students indicated that they liked to act out stories in front of the class and significantly more students said they were good at acting out stories in front of the class. Other items showing statistically significant change were as follows:

- I like to put on a play.
- I like to tell a story I create in front of the class.
- I am good at telling a story in front of the class.
- I like to read a story aloud in front of the class.

It should be noted that although the table shows the combined percentage of students choosing either strongly agree/agree or disagree/strongly disagree; the statistical tests were conducted before the response categories were collapsed. In some cases, the statistical significance may reflect a change in the percentage moving from agree to strongly agree or strongly disagree to disagree rather than from agree to disagree. The statement “I like to tell a story in front of the class” may be one of these cases because the change shown in the table is only from 51% to 59%.

Writing

The results indicated that a majority of the students felt confident about their writing prior to the program and a majority enjoyed writing stories or poems (see Table 3, p. 12). Although there were slight changes in the percentage of student agreeing with the survey statements on the post-program survey, none of the changes were statistically significant. This means the likelihood is high that the changes are due to chance. Given students’ confidence in their skills prior to the program, however, there was little room on the response scale to capture change from the initial ratings.

Analyzing Stories

A majority of the students felt confident in their ability to analyze stories prior to the program. A majority also enjoyed analyzing stories (see Table 4, p. 13). When students repeated the survey at the end of the program, there was a statistically significant change in one item: I can explain the main conflict or problem in stories I hear. The level of agreement actually decreased for two items, but the difference was not statistically significant and therefore may be due to chance.

INSERT TABLE 2

INSERT TABLE 3

INSERT TABLE 4

Classroom Teacher and Teaching Artist Surveys

In January and May classroom teachers and teaching artists were asked to rate their level of agreement on a four point scale – where a rating of 1 equaled strongly disagree and a rating of 4 equaled strongly agree – with a set of statements about changes they may have observed in their students. The items included on each survey were based on program staffs’ judgment about what students may have learned at each point in the program. Only two items were included on both surveys. For example, the January survey asked about improvement in the content of students’ writing whereas the May survey asked about improvement in content, sentence, structure, and word choice. By the end of the program it is assumed that students will have improved more aspects of their writing than they had back in January. For ease of interpretation, the items were divided into four categories: writing; acting, storytelling, and oral communication; analyzing stories; and other.

Classroom Teacher Surveys

In January, classroom teachers rated their agreement with 12 statements about specific changes they may have observed in students from the beginning of the year to date. For the most part, the classroom teachers agreed with the statements. This indicates that they had observed student learning in a variety of areas (see Table 5, p. 15). For example, all of the classroom teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements, listed by category:

- *Writing*
 - An improvement in the students’ use of imagination and descriptive details in their writing.
 - Students demonstrating a stronger comprehension of beginning, middle, and end in their writing.
 - Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in their writing.
- *Acting, Storytelling, Oral Communication*
 - Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in the retelling of stories.
- *Other*
 - I am noticing a stronger sense of community and support among the students in my class.

Two statements received noticeably lower ratings and they may warrant further study in order to strengthen the program. Nineteen percent of the classroom teachers disagreed when asked if they had observed students providing deeper insight into the social focus during discussion and 17% disagreed when asked about their students writing for longer periods of time.

Table 5. Classroom Teachers' Observations of Student Learning-January

	Percent Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree	Number of Respondents
<i>Writing</i>			
An improvement in the content of students' writing.	12	88	17
An improvement in the student's use of imagination and descriptive details in their writing.	0	100	15
Students demonstrating a stronger comprehension of beginning, middle, and end in their writing.	0	100	15
Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in their writing.	0	100	15
An improvement in my students' attitude towards writing.	6	94	17
Students writing for longer periods of time.	17	83	17
<i>Acting, Storytelling, Oral Communication</i>			
An improvement in the student's use of imagination and descriptive details in the retelling of stories.	7	93	15
Students demonstrating a stronger comprehension of beginning, middle, and end in the retelling of stories.	7	93	15
Students expressing their opinions in a more articulate manner during discussion.	12	88	16
Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in the retelling of stories.	0	100	15
<i>Other</i>			
Students providing deeper insight into the social focus during discussion.	19	81	16
I am noticing a stronger sense of community and support among the students in my class.	0	100	16

In May, at the end of the program, classroom teachers rated their agreement with another set of statements about what changes they may have observed in students. Once again, classroom teachers' level of agreement with the statements was high overall (see Table 6, p. 17).

All of them chose either strongly agree or agree for the following statements, listed by category:

- *Acting, Storytelling, Oral Communication*
 - Improvement in students' ability to create a story and character using voice, body, and imagination.
 - Enabling students to generate ideas through group discussion, rehearsal, and sharing.
 - Students' ability to create original work to communicate specific ideas.
- *Analyzing Stories*
 - Students' ability to clearly identify plot, theme, character in the oral stories.
 - Students processing and discussing the themes of the social focus on a deeper level.
 - Students displaying deeper questioning and probative skills.

Three items received relatively low ratings of agreement (81%) and this indicates areas where the program could be improved:

- The quality of students' writing has improved in content, sentence structure, and word choice.
- Students writing for longer periods of time.
- In general, students' vocabulary has increased.

Table 6. Classroom Teachers' Observations of Student Learning-May

	Percent Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree	Number of Respondents
<i>Writing</i>			
The quality of students' writing has improved in content, sentence structure, and word choice.	19	81	16
Improved usage of plot, theme and character concepts in students' writing.	12	88	16
An improvement in my students' attitude towards writing.	12	88	16
Students writing for longer periods of time.	19	81	16
<i>Acting, Storytelling, Oral Communication</i>			
Improvement in students' ability to create a story and character using voice, body, and imagination.	0	100	16
Enabling students to generate ideas through group discussion, rehearsal, and sharing.	0	100	16
Utilizing feedback from others to revise creation or performance in theater.	6	94	16
Students' ability to create original work to communicate specific ideas.	0	100	16
<i>Analyzing Stories</i>			
Students' ability to clearly identify plot, theme, character in the oral stories.	0	100	16
Understanding the connection between a story and its historical and cultural contexts.	13	87	16
Students processing and discussing the themes of the social focus on a deeper level.	0	100	16
Students displaying deeper questioning and probative skills.	0	100	16
<i>Other</i>			
In general, students' vocabulary has increased.	19	81	16
ELL students have increased their English vocabulary.	13	87	16

Classroom Teacher Interviews

The interviews conducted in May with a sample of Bridges teachers provide additional information about classroom teachers' perceptions of student learning in Bridges. Classroom teachers most often remarked on benefits to students in the following areas:

- Creativity and confidence in their writing. Classroom teachers made comments such as, "I think it helps a lot with details. I think it helps a lot with making clear what you're trying to say and for clarification of your intention." Another teacher remarked, "I think the audience makes a big difference, too, because it gives kids that sense of audience and writing for someone who's not inside their own head." Others noted that the length of students' stories increased as the year progresses. One classroom teacher said the structure of writing in Bridges helps students because they are forced to write in a certain amount of time and they know they might be asked to share their story with people afterwards.
- Speaking up, speaking clearly, and feeling confident speaking up. Classroom teachers remarked that students seemed less fearful of speaking up and sharing their ideas, not only during Bridges, but in other parts of the curriculum as well. As one teacher described, "I had them do a final essay to Children's Theatre and they talked about how they would never, ever have imagined getting up and doing the things that they did. It's the confidence, the speaking up and those are hard to measure." Another teacher observed that when students are asked to read aloud as part of their reading instruction "they're not so much worried about making mistakes." Another noted, "Even kids who aren't rally literate want to get up there and share . . . That has come through in many areas, like reflecting on samples of your work, and reading other stories, and in geography. They want to come up and share one of their answers. Explaining their thinking in math, too. I just believe that it transfers."
- Working in a group and developing respect for each other. Many classroom teachers said that the small group work in Bridges, particularly the expectation that students figure things out on their own, seemed to help students develop skills of team work and cooperation. As one teacher remarked, "We are not there to tell them 'Okay, you're gonna do this part and you're gonna do this part.' They have to figure that out on their own. And either they succeed or they fall apart miserably, but either way they learn something. These groups, except for rare instances, stay intact for the year, so they have to work it out with one another." Another teacher noted that the girls in her classroom stopped being as cliquey, and as she said, "They realized that everybody had skills, and it wasn't just in their little clique that they would stick."

Although the classroom teachers' comments about student learning in Bridges were positive by far, a few areas may benefit from a closer look. Although classroom teachers noted improvements in students' confidence in writing and their ability to add details and be creative, they expressed concern about the structure and grammar in students' writing. For example, students' writing contained many incomplete, run-on sentences and another teacher noted that her students weren't grasping the concepts of beginning, middle, and end

in their stories. Other teachers noted that Bridges helps with narrative writing, but not other genres that are included in the schools' writing curriculum. A few other teachers noted that sometimes students weren't getting the underlying social message of the oral stories in Bridges sessions.

Teaching Artist Surveys

In January, teaching artists rated their agreement with 12 statements about changes they may have observed in students. Most agreed they had observed learning in students as described by the statements (see Table 7, p. 20). In fact, all of the teaching artists either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements, listed by category:

- *Acting, Storytelling, Oral Communication*
 - Students demonstrating a stronger comprehension of beginning, middle, and end in the retelling of stories.

- *Other*
 - I am noticing a stronger sense of community and support among the students in my class.

The two items the teaching artists were most likely to disagree with are closely related, one in the area of writing and the other in the area of storytelling:

- Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in their writing (31%).

- Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in the retelling of stories (46%).

There may be an opportunity to improve the program by further exploring how students could be better helped to develop these skills.

Table 7. Teaching Artists' Observations of Student Learning-January

	Percent Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree	Number of Respondents
<i>Writing</i>			
An improvement in the content of students' writing.	8	92	12
An improvement in the student's use of imagination and descriptive details in their writing.	8	92	12
Students demonstrating a stronger comprehension of beginning, middle, and end in their writing.	8	92	12
Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in their writing.	31	69	12
An improvement in my students' attitude towards writing.	8	92	12
Students writing for longer periods of time.	8	92	12
<i>Acting, Storytelling, Oral Communication</i>			
An improvement in the student's use of imagination and descriptive details in the retelling of stories.	8	92	12
Students demonstrating a stronger comprehension of beginning, middle, and end in the retelling of stories.	0	100	12
Students expressing their opinions in a more articulate manner during discussion.	8	92	12
Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in the retelling of stories.	46	54	12
<i>Analyzing Stories</i>			
Students providing deeper insight into the social focus during discussion.	8	92	12
<i>Other</i>			
I am noticing a stronger sense of community and support among the students in my class.	0	100	12

In May, at the end of the program, teaching artists rated their agreement with another set of statements about what they may have observed in students. Again, overall the teaching artists were likely to agree with most of the statements (see Table 8, p. 22). All of them agreed with the following:

- *Acting, Storytelling, and Oral Communication*
 - Improvement in students' ability to create a story and character using voice, body, and imagination.
 - Enabling students to generate ideas through group discussion, rehearsal, and sharing.
- *Analyzing Stories*
 - Students' ability to clearly identify plot, theme, character in the oral stories.
- *Other*
 - ELL students have increased their English vocabulary.

A few of the areas that had lower proportions of teaching artists indicating agreement suggest possible areas for strengthening the program:

- Utilizing feedback from others to revise creation or performance in theater (80%).
- Understanding the connection between a story and its historical and cultural contexts (80%).

Table 8. Teaching Artists Observations of Student Learning-May

	Percent Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree	Number of Respondents
<i>Writing</i>			
The quality of students' writing has improved in content, sentence structure, and word choice.	11	89	9
Improved usage of plot, theme and character concepts in students' writing.	10	90	10
An improvement in my students' attitude towards writing.	10	90	10
Students writing for longer periods of time.	10	90	10
<i>Acting, Storytelling, and Oral Communication</i>			
Improvement in students' ability to create a story and character using voice, body, and imagination.	0	100	10
Enabling students to generate ideas through group discussion, rehearsal, and sharing.	0	100	10
Utilizing feedback from others to revise creation or performance in theater.	20	80	10
Students' ability to create original work to communicate specific ideas.	10	90	10
<i>Analyzing Stories</i>			
Understanding the connection between a story and its historical and cultural contexts.	20	80	10
Students processing and discussing the themes of the social focus on a deeper level.	10	90	10
Students' ability to clearly identify plot, theme, character in the oral stories.	0	100	10
Students displaying deeper questioning and probative skills.	11	89	9
<i>Other</i>			
In general, students' vocabulary has increased.	10	90	10
ELL students have increased their English vocabulary.	0	100	9

Teaching Artist Interviews

The interview with teaching artists not only asked how often they employed each Bridges component in their lessons, but also how effective they thought each component was for student learning. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive and echoed many of the comments made by classroom teachers. The teaching artists' remarks most often described benefits to students in the following areas:

- Acting and Storytelling. The teaching artists described how students grew during the year in their capacity to physically animate a story and in grew their confidence with storytelling and acting. One teaching artist noted that students were more capable of helping the audience understand what happens in their play by the end of the year.
- Writing. The teaching artists noted improvements in how long students were writing and in their use of comparisons and vivid images. They also remarked on increases in students' confidence and interest in writing. As one teaching artist said, "It's just great to see them go from 'I don't know what to do. What am I supposed to write?' at the start of the year, to a few weeks later when they can't put their pencils down and they really tap into it."
- Comprehending and Analyzing Oral Stories. Several teaching artists described growth in students' ability to comprehend and analyze the stories they were hearing. As one teaching artist noted, "I think they learn to ask questions. I think they learn to stand back from information they're given and critique it, which is very important." Others remarked on their surprise and pleasure at the end of the year when students could recall so many details of stories they had heard earlier in the year. One teaching artist said, "They took it in. They understood a lot of the messages behind the stories. They remembered characters. They really had a high level of comprehension."

Summary of Findings Related to Student Learning

The data on student learning from multiple sources were overwhelmingly positive. Students most often noted growth in their skills related to acting, storytelling, and oral communication and there were statistically significant differences in their ratings from pre- to post-program survey.

The results of the classroom teacher and teaching artist surveys indicated that Bridges is successful in building students' skills and confidence in areas such writing; acting, speaking and oral communication, and analyzing stories. Although the results are positive as a whole

staff may want to focus on the areas where agreement was relatively less in order improve student learning in Bridges. These areas include:

- *Writing*
 - Students writing for longer periods of time.
 - The quality of students' writing has improved in content, sentence structure, and word choice.
 - Students utilizing a clearer central idea and rich complete sentences in their writing.
- *Acting, Storytelling, and Oral Communication*
 - Students utilizing a clearer central ideas and rich complete sentences in the retelling of stories.
 - Using feedback from others to revise creation or performance in theatre.
- *Analyzing Stories*
 - Students providing deeper insight into the social focus during discussion.
 - Understanding the connection between a story and its historical and cultural contexts.
- *Other*
 - In general, students' vocabulary has increased.

Data from interviews with classroom teachers and teaching artists supported the survey findings and provided additional information about growth they observed in their students. The classroom teacher interviews indicated that although students' writing improved in some areas, such as creativity and confidence, more work was needed in areas such as grammar and structure.

Summary and Recommendations

The evaluation report of July 2006 indicated that, overall, classroom teachers and teaching artists think that Bridges is operating effectively. They also were satisfied with the content of the Bridges curriculum. Classroom teachers' responses to items concerning their role in implementing Bridges and their satisfaction with the program activities were mostly positive, and the same was true for teaching artists. The additional data summarized in the present report are consistent with the initial findings. However, the new data also serve to elaborate upon the findings.

Reflecting on the data as a whole, the following aspects of Bridges are especially strong.

- √ Bridges is flexible and teaching artists and classroom teachers have the freedom to adapt the program to fit the needs of their students, such as adapting Bridges for 3rd grade students or students who are English language learners.
- √ The large proportion of classroom teachers and teaching artists that return to Bridges each year provides stability in implementing the program and the opportunity to build on past experiences in order to take implementation deeper.
- √ The feedback mechanisms in Bridges, such as: classroom observations by program management, monthly teaching artist meetings, and surveys of classroom teachers, teaching artists and students help keep the program on track and responsive to issues that emerge in the schools.
- √ Bridges gives students an opportunity to develop skills in working with their peers that may be unlike anything they experience elsewhere in the curriculum. The group work is sustained, primarily student-directed, and authentic to the task of creating and performing skits.
- √ Classroom teachers value Bridges and can readily articulate how it benefits their students. Some teachers struggle more than others to fit Bridges into their schedule, but all teachers see value for their students. For example, the survey data indicate that teachers noticed student learning in areas such as the following:

Improvement in students' ability to create a story and character using voice, body, and imagination.

Students' ability to clearly identify plot, theme, and character in the oral stories.

Students generating ideas through group discussion, rehearsal, and sharing.

In interviews with a sample of classroom teachers, they most often mentioned the student learning in these areas: creativity and confidence in their writing; speaking up, speaking clearly, and feeling confident speaking up; working in a group and developing respect for each other.

- √ Teaching artists are positive about Bridges and creative in addressing challenges that come up for students and classroom teachers. In their surveys they concurred with the classroom teachers' perspectives on student learning. In their interviews they most often remarked on student learning in the following areas: acting and storytelling; writing; and comprehending and analyzing oral stories.

- √ Comparisons of individual student's surveys from the start of the program to the end of the program showed that they most often recognized growth in their skills related to acting, storytelling and oral communications. Statistical tests showed that the changes from the initial survey to the follow-up survey were statistically significant. This indicates that the differences are unlikely to be due to chance.

The combined data also illuminate several areas where the program may benefit from discussion, clarification and improvement.

- 1) Clarify the purpose of the final writing game and include it more often in Bridges sessions. Does something essential to Bridges become lost when classroom teachers assign it as homework rather than including it in a Bridges session, or, when students don't have a chance to do the final writing game at all? How is the purpose of the final writing game different from the purpose of allowing students time beyond Bridges to refine stories they began during the fantastic binominal?
- 2) Make stronger connections to the school's writing curriculum. Provide students with multiple opportunities to revise and further develop the stories they begin in Bridges by encouraging classroom teachers to do more follow-up writing instruction on these stories. Time constraints in the school curriculum make this difficult. However, there are several Bridges classroom teachers who have successfully used students' Bridges writing as a starting point for further writing instruction that is part of their school curriculum. These classroom teachers might be able to assist others in making meaningful connections.
- 3) Clarify Bridges' role in the writing curriculum. Map Bridges to the writing standards that are part of the Minnesota Academic Standards in Language Arts to clarify which parts are addressed within Bridges and which parts classroom teachers need to address outside of Bridges time. For example, the standards state that in 5th grade students are to "Write in a variety of modes to express meaning, including: descriptive, narrative, informative . . . thank you notes, and reports." Bridges may help students with narrative and descriptive forms, yet not take those forms of writing beyond the first draft. Teachers could use Bridges writing as a starting point and then cover other parts of the standards such as elements of composition and spelling, grammar, and usage as part of their regular writing instruction.
- 4) Proactively address the time constraints in Bridges sessions. A strength of Bridges, according to classroom teachers and teaching artists, is the flexibility of the curriculum and the instructional activities. This flexibility may also be a weakness, however, if components that are critical to the intended student outcomes are squeezed out, perhaps unintentionally. Is there a core of activities that should happen during each session? Are some components more important than others? What gets lost, potentially, if the chair game doesn't occur, or if students don't have sufficient time to get feedback on their skits? Would it benefit students to include more time for re-working skits? What should be omitted to make this feasible?

- 5) Encourage each classroom teacher and teaching artist to have explicit conversations about the classroom cues or prompts the teacher already uses to manage students so that the teaching artist can take advantage of what is already in place. Also encourage discussion about the role each will play in addressing student discipline issues. Having occasional one-on-one planning meetings, rather than always meeting with other Bridges classroom teachers and teaching artists at the school, may facilitate these conversations and make it easier for either the classroom teacher or the teaching artist to bring up sensitive issues specific to working relationship or their students.