

# **California Prison Arts: A Quantitative Evaluation**

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## **Executive Summary**

California has been a leader in prison fine arts programs in the United States. Arts-in-Corrections, the granddaddy of them all, enjoyed a highly successful 30 year run until the state budget crisis led to its closure in 2010. The need for prison arts education is greater than ever, in part because of AIC's demonstrated transformational impact on imprisoned men and women.

The William James Association Prison Arts Project, California Lawyers for the Arts, The Actor's Gang, Marin Shakespeare, and Jail Guitar Doors are California non-profit organizations with experience and a demonstrated commitment, not only to provide art instruction in prisons, but to engage in ongoing evaluation of the impact of these programs on human development. This report presents results from the most recent quantitative evaluation of prison arts education, in collaboration with these organizations, and with the support of the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Andy Warhol, Gerbode and San Francisco Foundations.

There is evidence that prison fine arts programs provide authentic learning experiences that engage the minds and hearts of the incarcerated. Prison art program evaluations in the United States and elsewhere in the world have found strong correlations between arts education and improved work ethic, self-esteem, creativity, intellectual agility, motivation, self-confidence, emotional control, and an ability to work with others. Further, interdisciplinary research shows cognitive, social and personal competencies are cultivated through arts instruction and practice. The findings of this research is further evidence of the transformative power of the arts.

A brief description of this study and main findings are provided below:

- This quantitative evaluation of California prison arts programs using a pretest-posttest survey research design was conducted in four California prisons and included classes in theater(California Rehabilitation Center, Norco, San Quentin), poetry (San Quentin), writing (New Folsom), and visual arts (Soledad).
- A sample of 110 inmates participated in the study, including former Arts-in-Corrections inmates (N=49), and those new to prison arts education (N=61). Approximately half of the 61 inmates had studied or practiced art prior to their incarceration (N=30), while 31 of the participants had never studied or practiced art.
- Three surveys were administered: one to former Arts-in-Corrections inmates (33 variables); the other two were pretest (28 variables) and posttest (29 variables) questionnaires given to those who had not been involved in AIC.

- Each questionnaire included attitudinal scales adapted from the statistically validated "Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ) that measures: Time Management, Social Competence, Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility, Emotional Control, Active Initiative, and Self-Confidence.
- Those with previous arts education and practice, including former AIC participants (N=79), were statistically more likely to be intellectually flexible, self-confident, motivated, in control of their emotions, socially competent, and better managers of their time than inmates who had never studied or practiced art (N=31).
- Participants who had previously studied or practiced art were statistically more likely to pursue other educational and/or vocational programs than were those without arts education.
- A significant majority of former AIC inmates attribute to the arts program their greater confidence and self-discipline to pursue other academic and vocational opportunities. This was particularly true for those who had participated in Arts-in-Corrections for two or more years.
- Many participants self-reported a reduction in disciplinary reports while involved in the art classes, and 61% of those who were in the Arts-in-Corrections program for 5 or more years reported improved behavior.
- Most AIC inmates, regardless of years in the program, reported that they got along better with other inmates and prison staff.
- These findings are supported by a 1983 cost-benefit study of Arts-in-Corrections that showed a significant reduction in disciplinary reports for inmates active in the Arts-in-Corrections program.
- A significant majority of participants reported that the art programs helped them to relieve stress, feel happier, and gain valuable insights. Over half (58%) said their art brought them closer to family; enriching their conversations and nurturing a new identity as artist, rather than convict.
- A comparison of the pretest-posttest survey results for the 31 inmates who had no previous arts education or practice showed a positive and statistically significant correlation between their participation in the theater, writing and visual arts classes and improved time management, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, active initiative, and self-confidence.
- There was a positive, although not statistically significant, change in their feelings of social competence and emotional control. The fact that former AIC inmates who had participated two or more years in the arts program showed statistically significant

improvement in these areas of social behavior suggests the importance of long-term exposure to arts education and practice.

## **California Prison Arts: A Quantitative Evaluation**

Incarceration carries with it the responsibility of offender rehabilitation. It is morally and fiscally the right thing to do--especially with historically high rates of incarceration, longer sentences, and the revolving door of recidivism . Policy makers and practitioners are searching for evidence-based programs shown to be effective in helping incarcerated men and women develop positive attitudes and life-effectiveness skills to prepare them for reentry into their communities.

This study in-progress is intended to add to our understanding of how one type of prison-based programming, instruction in the arts, affects inmates' attitudes, behavior, and identity. The William James Association and California Lawyers for the Arts secured grant funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the California Arts Council, and the Andy Warhol, Gerbode and San Francisco Foundations, to sponsor 12-week arts classes at three northern California state prisons. The Actors' Gang theater program consisting of 8-week theater workshops in a southern California prison, and the Marin Shakespeare San Quentin prison theater program also participated in the study.

A review of the literature reveals how arts education can influence human development. Interdisciplinary studies published in neurobiology, education, and criminal justice journals argue that the arts can be a powerful and highly valuable activity for

people at any age, including prisoners. For example, researchers have found that arts education can lead to improved writing skills and enhanced performance in other academic disciplines, as well as better social skills such as working with others or increased self-worth. This partial research review focuses primarily on evaluations of prison art programs here in the United States and elsewhere in the world.

### **What Other Studies Tell Us About Prison Arts Education**

Studies have shown that inmates can benefit in a number of ways when exposed to the arts. For example, arts education can help those struggling with issues of self-worth, confidence and empowerment (Matarasso and Chell, 1998; Jermyn, 2001). Marian Liebmann argues in favor of arts education in prison as an effective means of communication for those who have problems expressing themselves. He found the arts to be a useful means of self-expression and self-exploration. Prison arts programs in Norway, for example, were found to contribute to self-development through improving motivation, social and life skills (Langelid, Maki, Raundrup, Svensson, 2009).

Why is the creative process and arts education so essential to human development? One theory is that there is a strong linkage between arts education and development of the right-brain, which in turn, lead to higher-order thinking skills and greater emotional self-regulation. Further, there is compelling evidence that a well-developed right brain correlates with focused attention, creativity, intellectual flexibility, patience, self-discipline and the ability to work with others--essential elements for life-long learning

and success in a highly competitive job market (Stevens, 2000; Sautter, 1994; Feder & Feder, 1981).

Beyond encouraging and facilitating creativity, communication, and reflection, art teaches inmates how to work with focus and discipline. Finding the right word for a poem, practicing a musical instrument, or memorizing lines in a play is hard work. And yet this is how we learn the value and satisfaction of completing projects once started. After all, art in its many forms is visible evidence of focused, hard work--one of the noblest expressions of the human spirit (see, "Prison Education and Training in Europe-A Review and Commentary of Existing Literature, Analysis and Evaluation," 2011).

Arts education also has been associated with other life effectiveness skills, such as the willingness to experiment and learn from mistakes, self-criticism, reflection, and persistence in completing projects (Winner and Hetland, 2007). Olivia Gude, in her 2009 Lowenfeld Lecture, affirmed the importance of art training and engagement in empowering inmates with a sense of purpose, raised consciousness, and the belief that they can realize positive change in their lives (Gude, 2009) . The development of one's identity through art education and practice is critical as well. Moran and Steiner (2003) asserted that creativity transforms the creator "through the personal experience of the process, and others, through the impact of new knowledge."

The pioneering Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, wrote that the "development of a creative individual, one who strives for the future, is enabled by creative imagination embodied in the present" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 88). He also understood that "a creature that

is perfectly adapted to its environment would not want anything, would not have anything to strive for, and, of course, would not be able to create anything. Thus, creation is always based on lack of adaptation, which gives rise to needs, motives, and desires" (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 29). It is in this context that our individual creative ability transforms our identities, sometimes in dramatic ways, and more often in subtle ways. For example, an inmate who attempts to come to grips with a broken heart by writing a poem, is transformed in the process; his or her identity has been changed. It is through connecting our inner self with the world that enables us to become fulfilled as a person. This is particularly important for the disempowered and disconnected who live behind concrete walls and barbed wire.

Another principle benefit of prison arts programs is that they can act as a gateway to further learning through building confidence and self-esteem (Brewster 2012; Cohen, 2009; Silber, 2005). Studies have shown that the arts can encourage a state of readiness to learn by increasing self-esteem and developing basic communication and other essential skills (Hughes, 2005; Anderson and Overy, 2010; Langeild, 2009). This is particularly true, as we said, for those alienated from the formal education system. It helps that arts education offers non-traditional subject matter and teaching methods. A study of young offenders in England for instance revealed that they valued arts lessons even though they had little enthusiasm for other formal education (Jiang and Winfree, 2006; Brazier and Wilson, 2005). Another example involves inmates in a theater program where a majority

of its graduates re-engaged with school, including in some cases, college courses (Miles, 2007).

Researchers found that inmates think of art instruction differently than they do authoritative systems of one-way learning experienced in a traditional classroom--the teacher teaches and the student passively learns (McMillan, 2003, 4; Durland, 2002). Artist-instructors, on the other hand, are regarded as being there to help, assist, guide and mentor inmates in learning how to create. In other words, art programs offer the opportunity for inmate-artists to form positive relationships that are based on mutual respect as artists rather than on authority (Dean & Field, 2003, 7). As a result, art programs tend to be more accessible, absorbing and rewarding, and therefore, more likely to be taken seriously by inmates (Gussak, 2007, 450; Clements, 2004, 173).

Further, art and the creative process can provide a safe and acceptable way to express, release, and deal with potentially destructive feelings such as anger and aggression (Blacker, Watson and Beech 2008). In this context, prison arts programs have been found to positively impact behavior while incarcerated. For example, a study of inmates who participated in an arts center in England showed that participants improved their discipline records while involved in arts programs. Discipline reports were reduced by 29% compared with reports prior to participation in the program. Further, prison officials stated that behavior in the arts was better than in industrial workshops and in other areas of the prison. Staff also reported improvements in "prisoners' attitudes to work, including an increased ability to occupy themselves in their cells" (Hughes, 2005).

A 1983 cost-benefit evaluation of California Arts-in-Corrections found similar reductions in disciplinary reports and positive feedback from prison officials (Brewster, 1983).

Prison arts programs often offer the opportunity for inmate-artists to reconnect with society through art auctions in support of local nonprofit organizations, or art shows (Brewster, 1983, 2012; Schrift, 2006, 260-2; Lyer, 2008). Displaying or selling artwork, performing music, and theater, or having public readings of inmate prose and poetry, provides inmates the opportunity to engage in "productive exchanges with the community before and after release" (Johnson, 2008, 107), which is an essential element of any authentic effort to rehabilitate and reintegrate incarcerated men and women. While it may be easier and popular to demonize those locked away, society will be better served if we acknowledge their "humanness" and provide ways to heal and improve it (Austin, 2007, 2).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

This study measures attitudinal and behavioral changes in inmates who participated in theater, visual arts, poetry and writing courses offered in four California state prisons. The following prisons and classes are included in the study: the Actors' Gang Prison Project at the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC), Norco; the Marin Shakespeare theater program at San Quentin State Prison; a visual arts class at the

Correctional Training Facility (CTF), Soledad; a poetry class at San Quentin; and a writing course at the California State Prison (CSP), Sacramento (also known as New Folsom state prison). Table 1 shows the percentage of participants by prison facility.

**Table 1**  
**The Percentage of Participants by Prison**

Prisons	Percent
CRC	32.80%
Folsom	27.90%
Soledad	26.20%
San Quentin	13.10%
	<b>100.00%</b>

Two male inmate populations participated in the study. One group consisted of men who had taken classes through the California Arts-in-Corrections (AIC) program ( $N = 49$ ). AIC was a highly successful fine arts program from its inception in 1980 until its closure in 2010 due to state budget reductions. At one time, classes in music, writing, visual arts, theater, and numerous other fine arts programs were offered in every state prison. The former AIC participants were given a survey at the end of their 12-week program.

These men were involved in AIC from a period of 1 to 33 years, with an average of 6.4 years. Eighteen percent (18%) of the respondents participated in AIC for less than a year; whereas, 26% participated from 2 - 4 years and over half (56%) were involved in the program for 5 or more years. Approximately half studied music (49%), three-quarters (78%) took writing and/or poetry classes, one-fifth (20%) participated in theater, and 43%

were involved in visual arts. Many of the men studied more than one form of art which explains why the percentages exceed 100% (Table 2).

**Table 2**  
**What AIC Participants Studied**

Area of study	Percent
Writing/Poetry	77.60%
Music	49.00%
Painting/Drawi ng	42.90%
Theater	20.40%
Other	6.10%

When asked why they had participated in Arts-in-Corrections, a significant majority regardless of years in the program said they "wanted to learn new skills," and they liked "to be creative." Also, many were motivated by a desire to "change their lives" and they wanted to have something to share with their families (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Why Inmates Chose to Take Classes in Arts-in-Corrections**

	5+ years(N=12)	2-4 years(N=7)	1 or less years(N=8)
Wanted to learn new skills	91.70%	85.70%	75.00%
A good way to pass time	25.00%	71.40%	25.00%
Always enjoyed art	33.30%	71.40%	50.00%
Like to be creative	83.30%	85.70%	100.00%
Was curious	58.30%	28.60%	75.00%
Something to share with my family	41.70%	57.10%	25.00%
Wanted to change my life	41.70%	57.10%	62.50%
Other	25.00%		25.00%

Regardless of years in the program, nearly everyone said that art helps them to express themselves, relieve stress, feel happier, be creative, and make better choices. Most also reported that art helps them to better understand themselves and to work with others (Table 4). A majority (64%) of AIC participants reported that they got along better with other inmates while in pursuing their art (Table 5). However, a greater percentage liked themselves better the longer they were in the program, and half of those with two or more years in the program got along better with prison staff, compared with only 25% who were in the program for a year or less (Table 5).

The second group in the study had not been involved in arts-in-corrections, although approximately half had studied or practiced art at sometime in the past (N - 61; Table 6). Nearly half of this group (46%) enrolled in the theater programs offered at CRC (33%) and San Quentin (13%). Twenty-six percent (26%) took the visual arts class offered at Soledad state prison, and 28% studied writing at New Folsom. A pre- and posttest research design was used with this group to measure attitudinal and behavioral changes when controlling for previous arts education and practice. Surveys were administered during the first and last class sessions.

**Table 4**  
**How Arts Education and Practice Helps Inmates**

Column1	5+ years(N=12)	2-4 years(N=7)	1 or less years(N=8)
Express yourself	91.70%	100.00%	100.00%
Relieve stress	83.30%	85.70%	75.00%
Feel happier	83.30%	85.70%	75.00%

Be more creative	91.70%	100.00%	87.50%
Make better choices	75.00%	85.70%	37.50%
Connect with family	58.30%	71.40%	37.50%
Work with others	83.30%	100.00%	75.00%
Better understand yourself	83.30%	85.70%	87.50%
Other	41.70%	14.30%	12.50%

**Table 5**  
**Changes in Behavior While Taking Classes**  
**In Arts-in-Corrections**

Column1	5+ years(N=8)	2-4 years(N=11)	1 or less years(N=23)
Got along with other inmates	65.20%	63.60%	62.50%
Liked myself more	60.90%	63.60%	50.00%
Fewer disciplinary records	60.90%	36.40%	12.50%
Got along with staff	52.20%	54.50%	25.00%
Got along with my family	30.40%	27.30%	37.50%
Didn't change that much	8.70%	18.20%	37.50%
Other	13.00%	9.10%	25.00%

**Table 6**  
**Non-AIC Participants Who Had Studied or Practiced Art in the Past**

Responses	Percent
Studied	4.90%
Practiced	26.20%
Both studied and practiced	19.70%
No	49.20%

Inmates were asked in the pre-survey what they hoped to learn through the art classes. Three-quarters (74%) of those who had previously studied or practiced art

wanted to be open to new ideas, compared with 52% who had not studied art prior to their participation in the study. We also found 68% of those with previous art experience wanted to discover things about themselves they didn't know compared with only 41% without previous art education or practice (Table 7).

A significant majority of both those with previous arts education and those without think that being an artist requires self-discipline, hard work, self-confidence, and training. Those with art experience also believe artists must be determined and persistent in perfecting their craft (Table 8). Nearly everyone enjoyed their art classes (96%; Table 9), and want the opportunity to take additional ones (Table 10). When asked if their behavior changed while taking the classes, 63% said that they got along better with other inmates, and 44% got along better with the prison staff. Nearly half liked themselves better (46%) and a third (33%) self-reported that they received fewer disciplinary reports (Table 11). With the assistance of prison officials, we are attempting to confirm a reduction in disciplinary actions.

Participation in the study was strictly voluntary. Inmates learned about the art courses from correctional staff, flyers, and other inmates. Approximately 5% of the men were unable to complete their program because of scheduling conflicts. The Actors' Gang offered 8-week theater classes; whereas, the classes in the other prison programs were 12-weeks. The courses were taught by professionally recognized artists who are experienced and gifted teachers.

**Table 7**

## What Non-AIC Inmates Hope To Learn In The Arts Program

Column1	Done art before. (N=31)	Not done art before(N=29)
Be open to new ideas	74.20%	51.70%
Discover change about self	67.70%	41.40%
Express inner feelings	54.80%	31.00%
Change how interact with others	38.70%	31.00%
Not sure	6.50%	37.90%
Other	19.40%	10.30%

People who have done art before have greater hopes from the program than people who have no art experience. (The blue line lies above the orange line for all the important categories).

**Table 8**  
**What Non-AIC Inmates Believe Is  
Required To Be An Artist**

Responses	Percent of Cases
Self Discipline	71.70%
Talent	68.30%
Self confidence	66.70%
Training	66.70%
Hard work	66.70%
Determination	55.00%
Persistence	48.30%
Other	11.70%

**Table 9**  
**Did The Non-AIC Inmates Enjoy The Classes?**

Frequency	Percent Frequency
Very much	52      96.30%
Somewhat	2      3.70%
Total	54      100.00%
Missing	4
	58

**Table 10**  
**Would the Non-AIC Inmates Like To Take  
Other Art Classes**

Categories	Frequency	Percent Frequency
Yes, definitely	52	94.55%
Yes, Most		
Likely	2	3.64%
Not sure	1	1.82%
Total	55	100.00%

**Table 11**  
**How Non-AIC Inmate Behavior Changed  
While Taking Art Classes**

	Percent Frequency
Got along better with inmates	62.96%
Liked myself more	46.30%
Got along better with staff	44.44%
Studied more	44.44%
Fewer disciplinary reports	33.33%
No change	18.52%
Got along better with family	16.67%
Other	11.11%

## Questionnaires

The AIC participant survey, and the pre- and posttest surveys included attitudinal scales adapted from the statistically validated "Life Effectiveness Questionnaire" (LEQ) that measures: Time Management, Social Competence, Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility, Emotional Control, Active Initiative, and Self-Confidence (Neill, et al., 2003). Life effectiveness is essentially "the psychological and behavioral aspects of

human functioning which determine a person's effectiveness or proficiency in any given situation" (Neill, et al., 1997, 5). The assumption is that the higher a person scores on each of the LEQ scales, the greater his or her personal effectiveness will be, and consequently, is more likely to be successful in life and work.

Each of the seven dimensions measured can contribute to a happier, more fulfilling and successful life. Making the best use of our time (***Time Management***) helps us to complete projects and feel satisfied at the end of a day. It is more likely those who are confident and comfortable interacting socially (***Social Competence***) will form meaningful relationships, and better reintegrate into their community. The drive to accomplish excellence (***Achievement Motivation***) is an admirable trait that is essential for those striving to become self-actualized. The ability to adapt to changing circumstances or to adjust one's thinking based on new or changing information (***Intellectual Flexibility***) is particularly important in the fast paced and ever changing world in which we live. Maintaining control of our emotions in stressful situations (***Emotional Control***) is critical for each of us, and even more so for incarcerated men and women. People tend to be rewarded for taking the initiative or assuming a leadership role when placed in a new or challenging situation (***Active Initiative***). Belief in self, knowing you can take on most any challenge or task (***Self-Confidence***) is perhaps the most important ingredient for a life lived fully and happily.

The AIC past participant survey consisted of 33 questions, including the attitudinal scales; whereas, the pre- and posttest had 28 and 30 questions respectively. The data was

cleaned and analyzed using SPSS statistics software . Descriptive and comparative statistics were used in this study. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) or t-tests (or their non-parametric equivalent) were used in analyzing the attitudinal scales. Chi-square tests were used for all other comparative analyses given the variables are categorical. Several of the non-attitudinal questions allowed for more than one response which explains why the total percentage for those questions exceeds 100%.

### **Qualitative Data: Interviews and Observation**

The principle investigator had the opportunity to observe the theater, visual arts and poetry classes, and interview several of the participants. In the past three years, he also conducted 26 in-depth interviews with formerly incarcerated men and women to learn of their experiences in the Art-in-Corrections program, and how it impacted them during and after their incarceration.

### **Findings**

#### **Arts Education and Life Effectiveness Skills**

We were interested in learning if arts education and the creative process correlates positively with the life effectiveness skills measured by the attitudinal scales: Time Management, Social Competence, Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility, Emotional Control, Active Initiative, and Self-Confidence. We compared those who had previous arts education and practice, including AIC participants (N = 79), with those who had never studied or practiced art (N = 31). Active initiative was the only attitudinal

scale where there was not a statistically significant difference between those with and without arts education and practice.

**Intellectual Flexibility:** Research has shown that successful problem-solving requires creative, flexible, and innovative thinking which depends on a well developed and active right brain. The "intellectual flexibility" scale measured how easily participants changed their thinking or opinions when presented with a better idea. In other words, how open are they to new ideas, or adaptable and flexible in their thinking. Perhaps it should not be surprising, therefore, that inmates with arts education and experience are far more likely to feel themselves intellectually flexible than those without exposure to the arts. In fact, intellectual flexibility was found statistically to have the highest correlation with arts education than any of the other life effectiveness skills (Table 12).

**Table 12**  
**Life Effectiveness Skills: A Comparison of Inmates with Previous Arts Education & Those Without**

Factors	Equal Variances assumed	Equal Variances not assumed
***Intellectual Flexibility	2.848	2.712
***Self Confidence	2.739	2.483
**Achievement motivation	1.934	1.731
**Time management	1.772	1.739
**Emotional Control	1.623	1.615
**Social Competence	1.515	1.42
Active Initiative	1.166	1.009

**Self-Confidence:** The data also shows that inmates with arts training and practice are much more likely to believe in their ability to do almost anything they set out to

accomplish, as compared with those who have not been exposed to art education. We found a very strong statistically significant correlation between self-confidence and the arts (Table 12). Studies have shown that engagement in the creative process, and training in the arts, correlates with self-confidence and a positive self-image--especially as we become more experienced and accomplished in our art.

**Achievement Motivation:** Researchers have found that arts education and the creative process can serve to motivate people to do their best when undertaking a project or activity. The men who participated in this study, including those interviewed, support these earlier findings. Table 12 shows a statistically significant and positive difference between those with and without arts education. Many of the men who had been involved in Arts-in-Corrections, for example, talked about the fact that the program taught them the importance of hard work, self-discipline, and giving attention to details in an effort to complete projects to the best of their ability. Leon expressed it best when he said,

Arts-in-Corrections taught me above all else the importance of completing projects. I think one of the problems with young people today is that they don't finish what they start. They may get interested in something but often don't follow through. I was like that for most of my life. But not anymore. I've learned with the help of others, especially the art instructors, how satisfying it is to complete tasks and get better at my art in the process (Brewster & Merts, 2012, 57).

**Time Management:** Studies have shown that arts education and practice correlate with self-management and self-discipline, prerequisites to effective time management. Many of the inmates interviewed described how the arts program helped them to become more disciplined and focused as they worked at their art. It therefore was not surprising to

find a statistically significant correlation between arts education and better time management (Table 12). Although prison life constrains a person's ability to control his or her time, it was encouraging to learn through interviews with many of the inmate-artists that the arts program motivated them to manage their time more efficiently. They felt their time better spent when engaged in their art, whether practicing a musical instrument, drawing or painting, writing, or rehearsing for a play. Those interviewed also stressed their improvement in setting priorities, planning and completing projects.

**Emotional Control:** Social and emotional development are strongly linked. A major part of emotional development is how we recognize, label, and control the expression of our emotions in ways that generally are consistent with cultural expectations. An important measure of emotional control is how we react when things go wrong, or when we find ourselves in stressful situations. It is difficult, for example, to imagine a living space more stressful than prison. We, therefore, wanted to learn if the arts program helped inmates to self-regulate their behavior even while living inside the walls.

Research shows that people of any age can feel a sense of emotional satisfaction when involved in creative process. This satisfaction comes from having control over art materials, or a musical instrument we are playing, the use of words in our writing, or lines memorized and acted upon in a play. Inmate-artists who, for example, are involved in visual arts get to decide what they will make and what materials they will use--

allowing them to make independent choices and decisions for perhaps the first time since their incarceration.

Participants in this study were found to be statistically more likely to have control over their emotions if they had studied or practiced art in the past (Table 12). We might expect those who are more capable of controlling or managing their emotions in stressful situations to have fewer disciplinary reports. As we noted in the literature review, other studies have found a significant reduction in disciplinary actions among those participating in arts programs. You may recall that we also asked the inmates who had participated in Arts-in-Corrections if their behavior changed while taking AIC classes.

Table 5 shows 38% of those who were in AIC for a year or less reported no change in their behavior. However, the longer inmates were in the program, the more their behavior changed, and in a positive direction. For example, only 18% of those who were in the program between 2 and 4 years reported no change, and only 9% of those in the program for 5 or more years said their behavior didn't change much.

However, 61% of those in the program 5 or more years self-reported fewer disciplinary reports, compared with only 13% with less than a year in Arts-in-Corrections. A significant majority of former AIC inmates, regardless of years in the program, reported that they got along better with other inmates, and a little more than half of those in the program for 2 or more years got along better with the staff. A 1983 Cost-Benefit evaluation of Arts-in-Corrections found a significant reduction in disciplinary

reports for inmates active in the program (Brewster, 2012). [We plan to confirm the improved behavior of artist-inmates through a review of their records].

Former AIC participants also were asked if they thought the arts program helped them to express themselves, relieve stress, make better choices, connect with family, and have a better understanding of self. Table 4 shows that a significant percentage of AIC participants experienced positive changes in their lives through the program. For example, 83% of those in the program 5 or more years reported that practicing their art helped to relieve stress and made them feel happier. Three-quarters (75%) made better choices as a result of the program, while 58% reported that their art helped them to connect (or reconnect in many cases) with family. For example, when interviewed, Robert spoke about his two young sons and how his art gave them something to talk about besides the weather...

What the Arts-in-Corrections program did, I think, was give me and my boys something to talk about in the visiting room...a topic of conversation other than the idle or awkward chit-chat you so often hear among families during visitation. We'd draw pictures on napkins and talk about fine art and my guitars and music. Because I was enrolled in other art courses, it wasn't just the guitars that we talked about. There was always something of interest that helped us to communicate and that made my boys proud of me...They could talk with their friends about how their dad made guitars and painted pictures...They showed their friends the guitars I made for them, and eventually they learned to play, and today one is a musician and the other helps me in my business. They tell me it helped to erase the stigma of having their father in prison (Brewster & Merts, 2012, 91).

**Social Competence:** Among the important affective skills and traits to live a successful and happy life is the ability to collaborate, cooperate and work with others. We

found, as have other researchers, a statistically significant correlation between arts education and feelings of social competence (Table 12). Inmate-artists were more likely to strongly agree or agree that they are "successful or competent in social situations" and "communicate well with people" than those without prior arts experience.

### **Pursuit of Other Educational and Vocational Programs**

Researchers have found a strong correlation between arts education and practice, and the pursuit of knowledge through other educational and vocational programs. Arts and the creative process help to develop the "right brain", and to build confidence and self-esteem, all of which prepares and encourages individuals to expand their learning in other disciplines. Studies have shown this relationship is particularly powerful for those who are alienated from the formal education system--often the case with inmates. As we previously reported, prison arts programs have served as a gateway to further learning.

The participants in this study were asked if they had enrolled in other educational or vocational programs, and then controlled for those who had studied or practiced art and those who hadn't. Table 13 indicates that those with previous art experience are more likely to pursue other educational opportunities either currently (37%) or have pursued educational opportunities in the past (57%) than those who haven't studied or practiced art (27% and 30%) respectively. Further, those who pursued educational opportunities in the past (83%) or currently (78%) are more likely to have had past art experience than are those who report not having pursued educational opportunities (28%). These results are statistically significant with a Chi-square = 21.866, df=2, p<.001.

**Table 13**  
**Comparison of Arts Education and Participation in**  
**Other Education & Vocation Programs.**

	Pursuing Education currently	Pursued education in the past	No Education
Previous Art Experience (N=79)	36.70%	57.00%	6.30%
No Art Experience(N=30)	26.70%	30.00%	43.30%

We asked former Arts-in-Corrections inmates if the program had helped them to decide to take courses in other academic or vocational programs. Table 14 shows that a significant majority were motivated by AIC to pursue other programs, and that their arts education and practice gave them the confidence to engage in other learning opportunities. Developing self-discipline through the program also was an important factor, especially for those who studied art 2 or more years.

**Table 14**  
**How AIC Helped Inmates to Take Other**  
**Education or Vocation Programs**

	5+ years (N=82)	2-4 years (N=11)	1 or less years (N=8)
Gave me confidence	90.90%	72.70%	50.00%
Helped to motivate me	81.80%	90.90%	62.50%
Helped me to develop self discipline	77.30%	72.70%	37.50%
Made me want to work harder	59.10%	54.50%	37.50%
Showed me to complete projects	50.00%	54.50%	25.00%

No	13.60%	9.10%	50.00%
	3.727	3.544	2.625

### **Pre- and Posttest: Inmates Without Prior Arts Education**

Pre- and posttest surveys, designed to measure any change in attitudes during the 12-week art classes (8-weeks for the Actors' Gang theater program), were administered to participating inmates with no previous arts education or practice. Although the sample for this population was only 31 men, they nevertheless provided an opportunity to directly measure the relationship between professionally delivered arts education and changes in "life effectiveness" skills. To preserve anonymity and confidentiality, we did not identify and compare individual participant responses. Therefore, the analysis is in the aggregate, using independent samples tests (Table 15).

The seven attitudinal scales were tested for significance using parametric T-test and non-parametric tests. The T-tests show a statistically significant correlation between Time Management, Achievement Motivation, Intellectual Flexibility, Active Initiative and Self-Confidence and participation in the arts program. Although not statistically significant at the .10 level, there also was positive change in Social Competence and Emotional Control (Table 15).

The fact that a relatively brief exposure to arts education--an 8 to 12 week program-- resulted in positive change in emotional control and social competence is

encouraging. After all, finding ourselves is an enlightening journey that takes time. Once we know ourselves better, we can begin to recognize our own emotions and how they affect our thoughts and behavior. In the words of Lao Tzu, the Chinese philosopher, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Ideally, arts training and practice for inmates is ongoing, enabling them to continue their personal development through the creative process. You will recall that we found inmates who were part of an arts education program for two or more years were statistically more likely to self-regulate or control their emotions, and believed themselves to be more socially competent.

**Table 15**  
**Pre- and Posttest: Inmates with No Arts Education or Experience**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Equal Variances assumed</b>	<b>Equal Variances not assumed</b>
***Achievement motivation	2.952	2.883
***Self Confidence	2.612	2.568
***Active Initiative	2.56	2.466
***Intellectual Flexibility	2.476	2.453
**Time management	2.003	1.977
Emotional Control	1.53	1.519
Social Competence	0.625	0.62

## **Summary and Recommendations**

Research and experience suggests that prison arts programs have significant benefits and positive outcomes for the incarcerated, their families, the prison environment, and society. Unfortunately, these and other educational and vocational programs were victims of the great recession, and are still struggling to regain their place in the myriad programs intended to prepare inmates for their eventual release back to their communities.

The importance of prison arts education can be understood through attitudinal and behavioral changes in inmates. This study and other researchers have found, for example, that inmate-artists discover new things about themselves and the world through the creative process. We learned in this study, for example, that inmates with arts education and practice are statistically more likely to approach problems with greater creativity and intellectual flexibility compared with those without exposure to the arts. Further, we found a very strong correlation between arts education and self-confidence, motivation to pursue other educational and vocational programs, and self-discipline to manage time more efficiently and effectively. These findings also are confirmed in other prison arts program evaluations.

One of the more important life effectiveness measures in this study was the ability or inability of inmates to self-regulate their emotions, especially when confronted with difficult or stressful situations. Likely, the inability to react to situations appropriately is an important reason why many men and women find themselves in trouble in the first place. A measure of maturity is the ability to manage our emotions in socially acceptable

ways. We found a statistically significant correlation between training and practice in the arts and emotional control. This correlation is strongest among those who have studied and practiced art for at least two or more years. Similarly, we found a strong, positive relationship between arts education and improved social competence--the ability to work collaboratively, and to communicate well with others.

In light of these findings, it may not be surprising that inmate-artists say that their behavior toward other inmates and prison staff is better when involved in the arts program, including a reduction in disciplinary actions. The longer an inmate is involved in prison arts programs, the more likely he will experience positive behavioral changes.

Researchers have found a strong correlation between prison arts education and success in other academic and vocational pursuits. In fact, the literature in multi-disciplinary fields shows that children and adolescents are much more likely to do better in other disciplines if the arts are an integral part of their curriculum. This relationship is strongest among those from disadvantaged homes, and for those who may have had unhappy educational experiences in their earlier life. This profile certainly fits many, if not most, inmates. For example, there is compelling evidence that art educators can play an important role to inspire inmates and guide creativity, growth, and understanding. They often are the first positive role models for incarcerated men and women, especially in an educational context.

We found that the inmate-artists in this study were far more likely to pursue other educational and vocational programs than inmates without arts experience or education.

A significant majority of the inmates who had been involved in the Arts-in-Corrections program said that their enhanced self-confidence and motivation to study in other programs was at least partially attributable to the arts program.

The pre- and posttest of the sub-sample of men without arts experience or education showed a positive change of attitude on each of the life effectiveness scales, and statistically significant change in achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, and self-confidence. The evidence in this study, and that of other research, suggests that the longer an inmate is exposed to the arts and the creative process, the more likely he or she will experience greater emotional control, time management and social competence.

We are encouraged by the findings in this study. They confirm the results of many other evaluations of prison arts programs, and interdisciplinary research on the relationship of arts education and human development. Although the sample size for this study is sufficiently large for statistical analysis, we hope to continue and expand the study to include additional arts classes and inmates--men and women. We also are working with prison staff and the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to confirm the reduction of disciplinary actions reported by the participants in this study through a review of their files.

In our ongoing evaluation of prison arts, we hope to measure rates of recidivism for inmate-artists compared with the general prison population. We acknowledge that the ultimate goal of any rehabilitation program is to assist inmates with their successful reintegration into society. There is evidence to suggest that the arts can be instrumental in

the emotional, social and psychological development of incarcerated men and women. We are eager to investigate what happens to inmate-artists who gained skills, personal insights and greater emotional and social stability through their study and practice of art

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