Guiding Question: How might theater-based literacy activities help second graders feel more understood and valued while building social awareness and empathy for others' perspectives?

JACKIE ADONIS, THEATRE, ARTS FOR LEARNING VIRGINIA

PROCEDURE

Focus Area: Student social awareness

Strategies Explored:
- Share-and-share partner structures to center student voice and active listening
- Student choice in roles (actor, composer, crew) to honor identity and agency)

Projected Outcomes:
- Students will be more actively engaged in collaborative conversations and storymaking.
- Students will show increased self-drive and confidence in literacy tasks (reading, sequencing, recalling stories)
- Students will feel safe enough to be vulnerable with peers, sharing personal connections and emotions.

Performance Indicators:
- Students turn toward one another, nod, and respond to peers' ideas, demonstrating active listening and empathy
- Shy or previously disengaged students take visible risks (auditioning, performing, or leading backstage/creative tasks)

Sources of Data/Evidence Collected:
- Video/photo documentation of instruction and student work over the residency
- Classroom teacher and principal interviews reflecting on student growth, engagement, and climate.

FINDINGS

Performance Indicators:
- Student ownership: students independently chose roles, memorized lines, and contributed original music, costumes, and set designs.
- Struggling readers became more confident, participated more readily.
- Peer empathy and community: students listened closely, encouraged one another, and combined their individual skills into a cohesive ensemble

Reflections:
- Most successful: long-term, twice-weekly residency structure that allowed trust to build, plus student-driven choice (roles, creative decisions) which fueled buy-in and literacy growth.
- Also successful: trauma-conscious, healing-centered stance (seeing students as whole people, honoring culture, inviting vulnerability) that deepened relationships and classroom community.

Next Steps:
- Involve the classroom teacher and school leadership earlier in co-designing specific social-emotional and literacy indicators they want to see, and align documentation to those.
- Build in more structured reflection moments for students (quick writes, exit reflections) about empathy, friendship, and agency after drama activities.