

Research shows involvement in the arts has wide-ranging benefits for young people

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(Phys.org) —A joint study by the University of Sydney's Faculty of Education and Social Work and the Australian Council for the Arts has found that engagement in the arts benefits students not just in the classroom, but also in life.

Students who are involved in the arts have higher school motivation, engagement in class, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, researchers discovered.

The results, published in the latest issue of the prestigious *Journal of Educational Psychology*, found [students](#) who participate in dance, drama, music, and visual arts showed more positive academic and personal wellbeing outcomes than students who were not as involved in the arts.

The comprehensive study, titled "The Role of Arts Participation in Students' Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study of School, Home and Community Factors," examined 643 primary and [high school students](#) from 15 Australian schools, tracking their academic and personal wellbeing outcomes over two years.

Academic outcomes included motivation, homework completion, class participation, enjoyment of school, and [educational aspirations](#), while personal wellbeing measures considered such factors as self-esteem, [life satisfaction](#), and a sense of meaning or purpose.

Some of the strongest effects were found for students who spent high amounts of quality time in creative and performing arts subjects at school. Positive effects also resulted from home influences, such as how often parents and their children talked about and participated in the arts.

Active participation, more than simply being an observer or audience member, also yielded stronger positive effects on school and personal wellbeing outcomes in the study.

According to lead author, Professor Andrew Martin: "The study shows that school participation in the arts can have positive effects on diverse aspects of students' lives.

"Whereas most previous research has been small-scale or focused on students' enjoyment in specific arts subjects, such as music, dance, drama, and visual arts, our research was large-scale and assessed outcomes beyond the arts domain," he said.

"It shows that the arts can impact broader academic and personal wellbeing outcomes for young people."

At a time when different subject areas must compete for space in the school curriculum, the study's findings also emphasise the importance of the arts in the school curriculum, according to Associate Professor Michael Anderson, one of the study's co-authors.

"This study provides new and compelling evidence that the arts should be central to schooling and not left on the fringes," he said.

The results raise significant policy implications for how arts-based learning is integrated into the [school](#) curriculum, says Australia Council Acting Director Community Partnerships, Dr David Sudmalis.

"Not only does this study demonstrate that the arts help deliver positive outcomes in engagement and motivation for students outside of the arts domain, it also shows that high quality, participatory arts education has the greatest impact," Dr Sudmalis said. "These important findings show the significance of partnerships between the arts and education sectors, where artists and teachers work together to develop students' expertise in and through the [arts](#)."

The analysis was funded by the Australian Research Council, in partnership with the Australia Council for the Arts.

The study team, led by Professor Andrew Martin, included Associate Professor Michael Anderson, Dr Robyn Gibson, and Ms Maryanne Mansour, all from the University of Sydney, as well as Dr David Sudmalis from the Australia Council of the Arts.

A copy of the research is available at the *Journal of Educational Psychology* website.

More information:

psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy&id=2013-14506-001

Provided by University of Sydney

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