



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Early Childhood Research Quarterly



Integrating the arts into head start classrooms produces positive impacts on kindergarten readiness

Mary Lou Greene^{a,*}, Shlomo Sawilowsky^b

^a Marygrove College, 8425 W. McNichols St., Detroit, MI, 48221, USA

^b Wayne State University, P O Box 48023, Oak Park, MI, 48237, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 January 2017

Received in revised form 18 January 2018

Accepted 19 January 2018

Available online xxx

ABSTRACT

Arts enrichment may provide important opportunities for the development of pre-academic skills, since much of what young children do as play, including singing, drawing, and dancing, engages the senses and primes the brain for learning. The Wolf Trap's *Early Learning Through the Arts* program, a national program that is designed to integrate performing arts into the early childhood education (ECE) curriculum and provide instructional training on delivery strategies, is an exemplar program that provides this type of experiential learning; and program implementation and teacher training approaches vary for each individualized program.

© 2018 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the Living Arts Detroit Wolf Trap program's approach on children's outcomes for those in Head Start centers in Detroit Michigan. 424 students who participated in the arts group were randomly matched to 406 comparison students who did not participate in the arts program. A series of ANCOVAs on the post-test score, with the pre-test score serving as the covariate, demonstrated that arts integration provides important opportunities for child pre-academic skill development including approaches to learning; social-emotional development; language, literacy, and communication; science and technology; and social studies and saw specific gains in emergent literacy and emotion regulation: these are among the cornerstone competencies that are necessary for future success in school. These findings provide further support for the benefit of arts integration in early childhood.

1. Introduction

Children are born ready to learn and form 85% of their intelligence and personality by age five. Those first years of life are the most important for lifelong development (NRCIM, 2000) and preschool achievement is regarded as a predictor for later school success (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Students from low socio-economic (low-SES) environments are often behind in academics even before

they enter school, thus the establishment of the Head Start program during President Johnson's "War on Poverty" in 1965. Although there are numerous studies on the positive impact Head Start has for low-SES preschool children, those same studies also recognize that despite the gains they make, Head Start children enter kindergarten still substantially below national averages on assessments (Zill et al., 2003). In 2006, the US Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth and Families reported Head Start attendance alone does not eliminate elementary school achievement gaps (Zill et al., 2006). Others note that at-risk students often are stressed by a variety of problems while in school that lead to emotional barriers to learning as well as loss of attention (Willis, 2008).

Arts integration's impact on academic achievement has been studied for decades. In the 1990s, a 4-year study of 25,000 secondary school students, using the National Educational Longitudinal Survey, found significant connections between students who had high involvement in arts learning and general academic achievement (Fiske, 1999). In the early 2000s, a compilation of research found that arts education and learning in the arts helps at-risk students "close the achievement gap", improves literacy skills (including reading and language development), and impacts students' motivation to learn (Deasy, 2002). Recently, The International Literacy Association (2016) redefined literacy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context" (para. 1) pointing to a link between the arts and literacy. In fact, studies conducted by cognitive neuroscientists show strong links between arts learning and cognitive

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mgreene@marygrove.edu (M.L. Greene), professorshlomo@gmail.com (S. Sawilowsky).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2018.01.003>

0885-2006/© 2018 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

development and control (D'Esposito, 2008). Students who are in arts integration classrooms reap initial and long-term benefits; 10 additional years of data from the 1999 cohort of the students in the longitudinal study referenced above found significant advantages later in life. Students from that study who were from low-SES backgrounds and engaged in the arts were positively impacted in the number matriculating to college and in their types of employment (Catterall, 2009).

At the Pre-K level, the arts are of particular importance. Much of what young children do as play, including singing, drawing, and dancing engages the senses and helps the brain get ready to learn. Students develop thinking tools needed in early learning, including pattern recognition and development; representations in multiple cognitive arenas; and observation skills among others (Sousa, 2006). Arts integration has also been shown to provide important opportunities for children of varied developmental levels to grow in pre-academic skills (Gregoire & Lupinetti, 2005).

Finally, the arts add an additional advantage for Pre-K students' "readiness for kindergarten": students in the arts develop higher order attention skills than students who do not participate in the arts (Posner, Rothbart, Sheese, & Kieras, 2008). In fact, three year olds who were in music training classrooms were found to have the ability to "selectively attend to auditory information" at a higher level than those not in a musical classroom (Neville, 2008). It has been noted that these attention skills influence child development, in general, and school readiness in particular (Blair, 2002).

2. Getting "ready to learn" through the arts

Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts Institute for *Early Learning Through The Arts* offers professional development to Pre-K teachers training them in integrating performing arts into their teaching. Several research studies conducted with Wolf Trap have shown that this methodology has promise for improving student outcomes (Burnaford, Brown, Doherty, & McLaughlin, 2007; Goff & Ludwig, 2013; Rabkin & Redmond, 2004). A recent study of their program in professional development and using the arts in mathematics instruction showed the following: 1) the intervention positively impacted the teachers' use of the methodology in their classrooms, and 2) student outcomes in mathematics were positively impacted. Students in this study had significantly higher scores on standardized math tests than those from non-intervention classrooms in years 1 & 2 of the program despite the fact that not all students from year 1 continued in intervention classrooms. "The first-year impact is equivalent to 1.3 additional months, or 26 additional days, of learning for students whose teachers had participated in the program. The second year impact amounts to 1.7 additional months, or 34 additional days, of learning" (for review, see Ludwig, Marklein, & Song, 2016).

Another study focused on Wolf Trap programs showed that at-risk students in an arts-integrated preschool achieved statistically significantly higher improvements in Language and Literacy, Approaches to Learning, Creative Arts and on the *Overall Early Learning Standards Inventory* test than a comparison group. This was a quasi-experimental study conducted in two Pennsylvania preschools, an arts integrated school and a traditional school, which were both Head Start programs serving low-SES students (Phillips, Gorton, Pinciotti, & Sachdev, 2010).

All of these studies confirm that arts integration has shown its potential to positively impact academic achievement for low-SES students and appears to have long-term impact. This study of Pre-K classrooms in Detroit Head Start programs that incorporate Wolf Trap *Early Learning Through the Arts* integration residencies was undertaken to test the strength of the methodology in impacting two early childhood indicators of future academic success: 1) emer-

gent literacy and 2) social-emotional learning. These two areas of skill development are essential elements in further success in school. In areas such as Detroit, with high poverty and high dropout levels, positively impacting these Pre-K indicators could decrease the dropout rate and, if implemented on a larger scale, could potentially change the academic achievement of at-risk students in other urban areas.

2.1. Emergent literacy

"Emergent literacy" refers to early knowledge about language, reading, and writing most of which is acquired during preschool. Early literacy is particularly important among school-readiness skills because instruction and learning in formal schooling is typically language-reliant (Phillips et al., 2010). An accurate predictor of school success, for example, is the number of book words a child has in their vocabulary at age five, because it is during the early childhood period when the foundation is laid for language development (Gee, 2008). Although Head Start does close the gap in letter recognition and other pre-reading skills, these students are still behind the national average upon entering kindergarten (Zill et al., 2003).

The arts help children build vocabulary and letter recognition and all of the art forms have proven impact on emergent literacy skills. For example, a meta-analysis of peer-reviewed studies of music training was conducted in 2015 and found modest gains in phonological awareness and specifically noted that there are correlations between music aptitude and phonological skills in children (Phillips et al., 2010). Further, music training strengthens basic auditory and speech processing, which in turn influences phonological perception and reading skills (Tierney & Kraus, 2013). Similarly, another study of 4- and 5-year old children showed that the more music skills children had, the greater their phonological awareness and reading development skills (Sousa, 2006).

The breadth of arts integrated into the Detroit residencies is extensive as is the custom for Wolf Trap *Early Learning Through the Arts* programs and includes music as a daily part of the curriculum. Our study should show similar results as those mentioned above demonstrating the intervention has a positive impact on emergent literacy identified as "phonological awareness, alphabetic knowledge, reading" among other skills.

2.2. Social emotional learning

Students' emotional health is strongly related to learning and has been studied for years. Over 40 years ago, a study of differential emotion theory and its effect on learning (Izard, 1971) showed Head Start programs promote skill building exercises for positive emotion and emotion regulation for low-SES children (Brown & Sax, 2013). Although Head Start aides students in adjusting their behavior and regulating emotions (Zill et al., 2003), many current studies suggest that the arts in particular help children dealing with poverty experience positive social-emotional outcomes (for a recent review, see Menzer, 2015) and promote regulation of emotions and behavior (Grytting, 2000; Gregoire & Lupinetti, 2005; Lobo & Winsler, 2006).

The National Endowment for the Arts conducted a literature review and gap-analysis of studies from 2000 to 2015 (Menzer, 2015) on the social and emotional benefits of participating in the arts. Specifically, the papers reviewed focused on three areas: prosocial behaviors (i.e., helping, sharing, cooperation, empathy), reductions in internalizing behaviors (i.e., shyness, inhibitions) and externalizing behaviors (aggression). Menzer documented positive impacts for children who participate in the arts in general. Those findings echoed other findings from research including: 1) more well-developed receptive vocabulary in students (many from low-SES backgrounds) who were involved with an arts program

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/11002140>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/11002140>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)