
Synthesis

Arts participationⁱ

Low impact for low cost, based on moderate evidence



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Arts participation is defined as involvement in artistic and creative activities, such as dance, drama, music, painting, or sculpture. It can occur either as part of the curriculum or as extra-curricular activity. Participation may be organised as regular weekly or monthly activities, or more intensive programmes such as summer schools or residential courses. Whilst these activities have educational value in themselves, this Toolkit entry focuses on the benefits of arts participation for core academic attainment.

How effective is it?

Overall, the impact of arts participation on academic learning appears to be positive but low. Improved outcomes have been identified in English, mathematics and science. Benefits have been found in both primary and secondary schools, with greater effects on average for younger learners and, in some cases, for disadvantaged pupils.

Some arts activities have been linked with improvements in specific outcomes. For example, there is some evidence of a positive link between music and spatial awareness and between drama and writing.

Wider benefits such as more positive attitudes to learning and increased well-being have also consistently been reported.



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Latin American Evidenceⁱⁱ

The empirical research carried out in Latin America on arts participation is limited. Some of the studies argue that arts elements can be used to enhance students' socio-emotional competences, and, in turn, develop more creativity and indirectly impact on better academic performance.

Another study concludes that students performing activities such as dance, drawing, music, and theatre have more potential to generate original and innovative ideas. Similarly, a pilot evaluation of a comprehensive program aimed at promoting creativity in public schools in Chile, highlights that positive effects were found on emotional, affective and creative dimensions of students' all-round development. It also showed a positive impact on academic achievement in all subjects considered, such as language, mathematics, art and physics.

The existing evidence is limited regarding the impact attributed to arts activities on academic performance. Although the studies are promising in terms of its positive effect, they need to be replicated at a large scale to gain confidence about the specific impact arts participation has on learning outcomes.

How secure is the evidence?

There are a number of systematic reviews and meta-analyses which have found small benefits for arts participation. The two months' progress figure reflects this pattern of findings. The evidence quality is rated as moderate because although there are five reviews, based on experimental studies, effect sizes vary widely.

What are the costs?

The costs vary considerably. These can range from small groups of acting and theater, regular dance groups for young people, to individual tutoring of small groups of high quality music. Despite this diversity of costs, these interventions are generally considered low cost.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. The research evidence shows a wide range of effects from the programmes studied. What is the link between your chosen arts intervention and the outcomes you want to improve, and how will you tell if it's successful?
2. Improvements in learning appear to be more achievable with younger learners.
3. The evidence supporting the academic impact of learning to play an instrument is particularly promising.

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4. Arts-based approaches may offer a route to re-engage older pupils in learning, but this does not always translate into better attainment. How will you use increased engagement to improve teaching and learning for these pupils?
 5. Arts interventions have educational value in themselves, but they are not, on average, a highly effective way to raise core academic attainment.

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