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National Arts & Youth Demonstration Project



Highlights



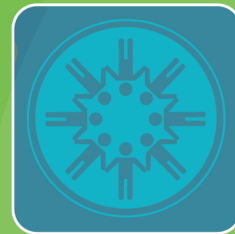
creativity



skills



community



McGill

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National Arts & Youth Demonstration Project
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This booklet reflects the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the funders.

Dedication to the Late David R. Offord, M.D.



We would like to dedicate the National Arts & Youth Demonstration Project Symposium to Dr. David R. (Dan) Offord who passed away in April 2004 after a battle with cancer. Dan Offord was one of Canada's leading child psychiatrists, a renowned researcher, clinician and teacher. As co-investigator of the NAYDP, he helped develop the conceptual framework and methodology of the study.

As a mentor and friend, his dedication, optimism and courage towards improving the lives of children and youth have been an inspiration to us.

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Foreword

A Russian artist once wrote that art is part of "the ecology of the human soul" and that a child's soul is not shaped by the scientific fact that the earth is round but by the wonder and delight at its infinite and varied possibilities. The National Arts and Youth Demonstration Project (NAYDP) is an attempt to assess the value of the arts in enriching the lives of children and youth.

It is a matter of international agreement that all children have the right to realize their full potential as individuals and to grow in environments that ensure their safety, well-being and development. Indeed, these rights are fundamental to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada and 191 other countries around the world. The Government of Canada has made achieving these goals a top priority. Recently in April, I submitted to the United Nations, on behalf of the Government of Canada, a report entitled "A Canada Fit for Children" which represents the government's plan of action in response to the May 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children. In this plan of action, the government expresses its recognition of and commitment to the arts and culture as essential to the healthy development of children.

In spite of the considerable advances made over the years, the NAYDP reminds us that there is still much work to do. Children in Canada continue to have unequal access to life-enriching opportunities, such as those afforded through the arts. Unfortunately, we see that the effects of socio-economic inequality extend well into the areas where children learn. As evidence is mounting that the gap between rich and poor is widening in Canada, it is vital that we take wide-ranging measures to ensure that poverty is not a permanent handicap, particularly for the most vulnerable: our children.

The arts programs in the NAYDP were designed to give children opportunities in which to expand their range of experiences, discover new talents and skills, develop their innate artistic and social abilities, and feel rewarded for their achievements. The reports given by children, parents and program staff indicate that the programs enhanced the children's arts skills, confidence and well-being. One of the most important findings of the study demonstrates that once barriers to participation are removed, children in lower-income communities will participate willingly and joyfully in structured programs designed with learning expectations.

The findings of the NAYDP further demonstrate that community-based arts programs have great potential to offer safe, engaging and constructive environments for children and youth. These types of programs deserve the support they need in order to continue and to flourish, particularly if they are to reach the significant numbers of children and youth who remain without access to these programs. Support for research is also important so that we may gain an increasing understanding of the ways that art can make a difference in children's lives.

The NAYDP provides new and important evidence with which to plan and implement tangible initiatives that will enhance the lives of children in lower income communities. The study has successfully cleared a path; the challenge remains ours to meet the promise that is contained within the findings.

*- The HONOURABLE LANDON PEARSON
The Senate of Canada Advisor on Children's Rights*

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Acknowledgments

The National Arts & Youth Demonstration Project (NAYDP) is the result of the cooperation and efforts of many individuals.

We would first like to thank the Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, especially Mr. John Hobday and Ms. Gisele Rucker who supported the development and planning of the NAYDP as well as its implementation. We would like to thank the foundation not only for their generous financial contributions but also for its vision of the importance of arts for improving the well-being of children.

We would also like to thank the Department of Justice, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, and Youth Justice Branch, the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Ontario Ministry of Culture for their important financial contributions, especially Ms. Catherine Latimer, General Counsel and Director General, Justice Canada, Youth Justice, M. Tim Peters, Senior Evaluation Analyst, Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada, Research and Evaluation, Ms. Andrea Rowe, Senior Policy Analyst, , Canadian Heritage, Exchanges, and Ms. Robin Fitzgerald, Senior Advisor, Special Studies, Statistics Canada, Integration and Analysis for their support throughout the project.

The NAYDP is grateful for the support and guidance of the Expert Advisory Group, especially Dr. J. Douglas Willms, Director of the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy, University of New Brunswick and Dr. Helena Kraemer, Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University, for their invaluable support and consultations since the project's inception.

To the community-based organisation directors, program coordinators, research assistants, artists and volunteers, especially, Ms. Carol Henriquez, Mr. Paul Larocque, Mr. Bill Crook, Mr. Franz Gauthier, Ms. Linda Albright, and Ms. Mira Coviensky, we thank you for your dedication and contributions to the cultural life of your communities and the well-being of children.

Finally, we thank all the participating children and parents who completed the questionnaires and who wanted to know the results of the study as much as we did.

Preface

This booklet describes the methodology and selected findings from the National Arts & Youth Demonstration Project (NAYDP), a three-year study initiated in 2001. The NAYDP was implemented in five sites in different areas of the country: Montreal, QC, Toronto, ON, a rural town in Ontario, Winnipeg, MB, and Vancouver, BC. The sites reflected the cultural diversity of the Canadian population. The target population was youth in low-income and multicultural neighbourhoods that were underserved by arts and recreation programming. A total of 183 youth aged 10-15 years were engaged in structured arts instruction twice a week over a nine-month period.

The NAYDP was designed primarily to explore the extent to which community-based organizations can successfully recruit, engage and sustain children and youth, 10-15 years of age from lower-income and multicultural communities, in artistic endeavors; and to determine whether involvement in arts programs demonstrates positive outcomes with respect to child and youth psychosocial functioning.

Three sets of findings are highlighted: those relating to the recruitment and sustained participation of children and youth, findings on the children's behaviour and arts skills development in the arts programs, as well as program effects on specific outcomes relating to child and youth psychosocial functioning.

This booklet is intended as a very general overview of the National Arts & Youth Demonstration Project research to date. Readers wishing more information on the methodology or the results of the study should write to:

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Introduction

Arts programs for youth have long been thought of as life-enriching endeavours. Although research on the effectiveness of these programs in communities is largely anecdotal, the literature in the area is replete with the potential benefits of arts programs. For example, exposure to the arts is assumed to be an essential element for building self-esteem and achievement; students who participate in arts-related activities are less likely to drop out of school or use drugs; children involved in the arts perform more community service, and watch less television.

Currently in Canada, the children from lower-income communities who need these arts programs are not getting access to them. Data obtained from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth in Canada (NLSCY) shows that the rates of participation are the lowest for the poorest children in Canada.


The rationale for an arts and youth demonstration project was to determine what strategies can bring about universal access, and participation in community-based arts programs. Before we can argue that these programs need to be set up in Canada on a universal basis, it is critical to understand the effectiveness of arts programs in enriching children's lives.

Methodology

Project Design

The NAYDP is an exploratory descriptive multi-method study. Five community-based organisations, located in lower-income communities across Canada, were selected. The sites were located in Montreal, QC, Toronto, ON, a rural town in Ontario, Winnipeg, MB and Vancouver, BC. These sites were identified as offering high-quality arts programming, and reflected the cultural and regional diversity of Canada. The target population was children and youth aged ten to fifteen years living in the selected communities.

Selected Community-based Organisations



Selection Criteria

- Lower-income communities
- Organisations with historical and projected stability
- Cultural and regional diversity
- Rural and urban
- High-quality art programming
- Children and youth 10-15 years

Community-based Arts Programs

During the NAYDP period, the sites offered an after-school arts program to 183 children and youth twice a week over the nine-month school year. The arts program was divided into three terms of three months each. From one term to the next, children were engaged in activities with increasing levels of skill challenge. Almost all of the sites developed a program based on theatre, although an effort was made to include visual arts (e.g. painting, mask-making) and media arts (e.g. digital filmmaking). The curricula focused on social as well as artistic goals.

All potential barriers to participation were addressed: the programs, including materials, were offered to participants free of charge, transportation was provided to and from the program, and snacks were offered.

Recruiting Children and Youth to the Project

Because children and youth living in lower-income communities have little or no access to arts programs, an active recruitment process took place. The sites conducted a “community mapping” exercise that identified the appropriate locations for community outreach. The sites also distributed information through community partners and set up information booths in grocery stores, shopping centres and apartment complexes. Parent information sessions detailing the goals of the study were also held.

How the Data Were Gathered

The study collected data in the following ways:

- **Attendance forms** documented children’s attendance in the arts programs.
- **Pro-social and arts skills forms** (completed by research assistants) measured children’s behaviour and arts skills development.
- **Questionnaires** filled in by the participating children and youth collected information about self-esteem, hyperactivity, conduct and emotional problems.
- **Questionnaires** for the parents collected demographic data and information on family functioning and children’s behaviour.
- **School record forms** gathered information on each participant’s school grades, attendance, and behaviour.
- **Interview guides** were used to conduct in-depth interviews with randomly selected children and parents. Site directors, artists and research assistants were also interviewed.

Findings

Program Effect of Participation

The first objective of the NAYDP was to explore the extent to which community-based organizations could successfully recruit, engage and sustain children and youth, 10-15 years of age from lower-income communities, in artistic endeavors. If traditional barriers to participation were removed and high-quality arts instruction was offered, would children and youth participate willingly?

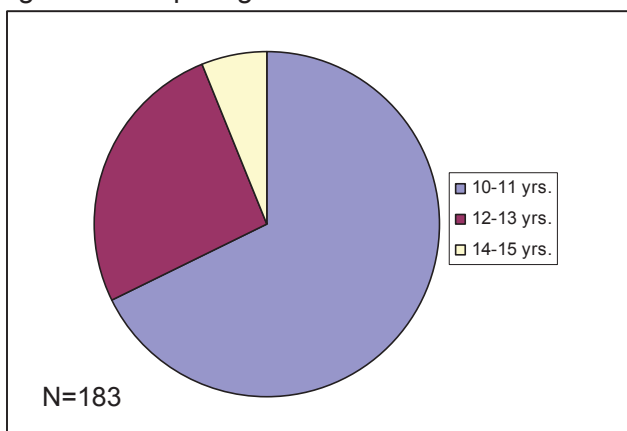
Participating Children and Youth

Based on an analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the participating NAYDP families, the project attracted youth who traditionally get little or no exposure to arts programs. In fact, 40% of the families reported a total household income from all sources of less than \$20,000.

In addition, the participants reflected the cultural and regional diversity of Canada. Across all sites approximately 59% of the participants were identified as White; 26% Aboriginal; 11% Black; 6% Asian; 5% Latin American, and 4% identified themselves as “other”.

A total of 183 children and youth, aged 10 to 15 years, participated in the project. Two-thirds of the children were female, and one-third was male. Sixty-seven percent of the children were between 10-11 years of age, 26.2% between 12-13 years of age, and 6% between 14-15 years of age.

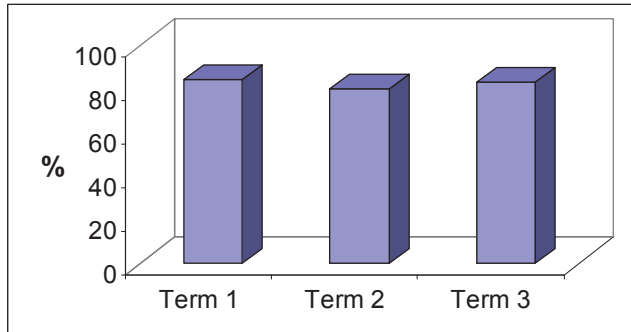
Age of Participating Children and Youth



Sustaining Participation

Levels of attendance in the arts programs were relatively high and sustained across the three terms. As can be seen in the following figure, participants attended on average 84% of the sessions in Term 1, 80% of the sessions in Term 2 and 83% of the sessions in Term 3. Attendance rates were slightly higher for girls than for boys.

Attendance Rate by Term



Forty-six interviews with children, parents, site directors, artists and research assistants showed that participation in the program was enhanced by the following:

- Classes, transportation and snacks were provided free of charge
- Follow-up telephone calls were made to parents to encourage attendance
- Arts curricula was adapted to the participants' needs and skill levels
- Effective conflict resolution between participants was facilitated by program staff
- Child management issues were resolved creatively

The high participation rates over a nine-month period support the contention that children and youth can be sustained in a long-term arts program once the barriers to participation have been removed. It is unlikely that we could have sustained this level of participation without providing transportation, implementing active recruitment strategies and maintaining parents and other community stakeholders engaged.

Program Effect on Participants' Psychosocial Functioning

The second objective of the NAYDP was to determine whether involvement in arts programs demonstrates positive outcomes with respect to child and youth psychosocial functioning.

Outcomes are categorised as direct, intermediate and long-term. The contention is that if children participate in high-quality, structured and cumulative arts instruction, they will participate joyfully, develop arts skills, demonstrate better task completion and develop pro-social skills (direct outcomes). Consequently, this will build their self-esteem and will result in fewer conduct and emotional problems (intermediate outcomes). Finally, long-term outcomes include a decrease in anti-social behaviour, academic failure and drug and alcohol use. (Note that it is too soon to report on long-term outcomes in the present study. A longitudinal follow-up study of the participating children and youth is recommended to further explore the impact of arts programs on long-term outcomes. See Future Research Directions.)

Direct Outcomes: Children's Behaviour and Arts Skills Development in the Arts Programs

Research assistants observed and collected data on the children's behaviour and arts skills development over the course of the nine-month program. Data were collected six times at fixed intervals. The following were measured:

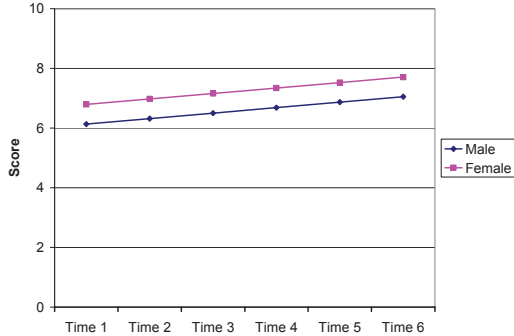
- **Participation:** A three-item scale measuring children's general enjoyment of the arts sessions and their degree of involvement in the arts activities.
- **Arts skills development:** A two-item scale measuring children's achievement of the goals of specific art sessions and improvements in their arts skills.
- **Task completion:** A twelve-item scale measuring pro-social communication, cooperation with adults and other children, respect for adults and other children in the art sessions, problem-solving capabilities and following group rules.
- **Pro-Social skills:** A seven-item scale measuring children's ability to follow instructions, put effort into their work and complete a task within the allotted amount of time.

These scales were later standardised to range between 0 to 10, with higher scores indicative of better behaviour and arts skills development.

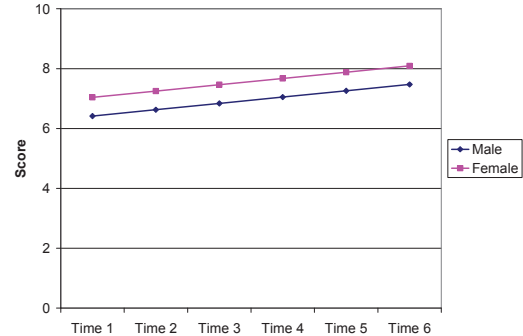
As can be seen in the following charts, girls rated slightly higher than boys for all outcomes, a difference that is statistically significant (note, however, that the rates of change from measurement to measurement were similar for boys and girls.)

The increases in participation, arts skills development, task completion, task completion and pro-social skills are all statistically significant.

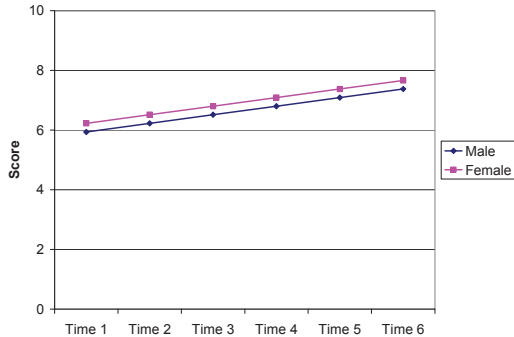
Program Effect on Participation



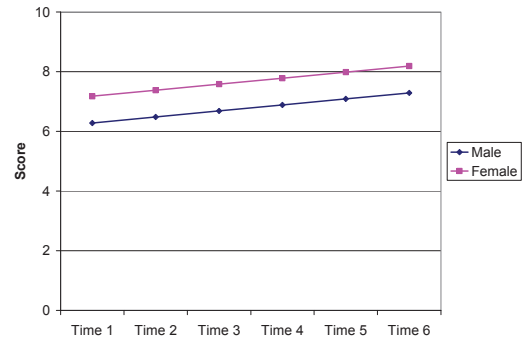
Program Effect on Task Completion



Program Effect on Arts Skills Development



Program Effect on Pro-social Skills



These are very encouraging results. When developing the arts programs, the sites were asked to establish non-competitive and supportive environments. We believe that it was this supportive ecology that ensured that no matter what their starting skill level, the participants would show uniform improvement.

Intermediate Outcomes: Conduct and Emotional Problems

The questionnaires for participants and parents were completed five times at equal intervals during the project. They measured psychosocial outcomes such as children's conduct and emotional problems, hyperactivity, self-esteem and indirect aggression. We will focus on conduct and emotional problems in this section. Both outcomes were analysed using growth curve analysis, a method that allows us to explore how outcomes change over a long period of time.

Program Effect on Conduct Problems

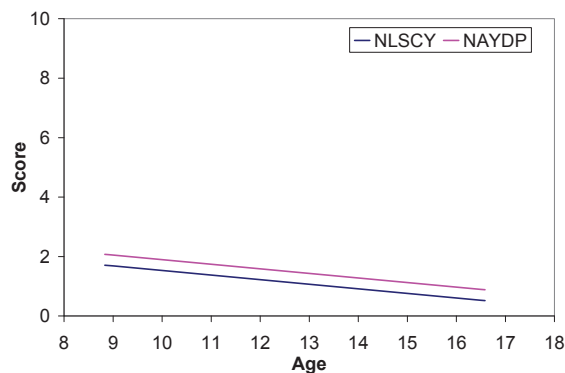
Conduct problems were charted on a seven-point scale measuring children's antisocial behaviour (e.g. getting into fights, bullying and vandalism, etc.). This scale was later standardised to range between 0 to 10, with higher scores indicative of more behavioural problems.

Growth curves for the NAYDP participants were compared (with corresponding scales) to a control group from the NLSCY. Children from both groups were matched based on income, parents' education and selected psychosocial functioning outcomes.

As we see below, the NAYDP children score slightly higher on the scale in terms of behavioral problems when compared to the control group. The NAYDP children show a decrease in conduct problems over the course of the program, although this is not significantly different from the control group.

It is a promising trend that although NAYDP children start off with a higher score on the conduct problem scale, they decrease at the same rate as the control group.

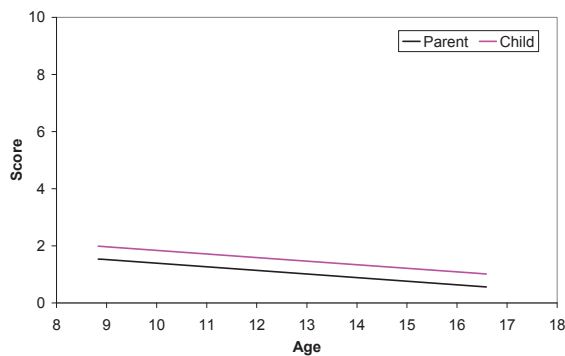
Program Effect on Conduct Problems



Next, we looked at the differences between how participants and parents rated conduct problems. As we see below, children rated themselves higher (i.e. they saw themselves with more problems) than their parents rated them. Note that the decrease in conduct problems over time is statistically significant for both the participants and parents.

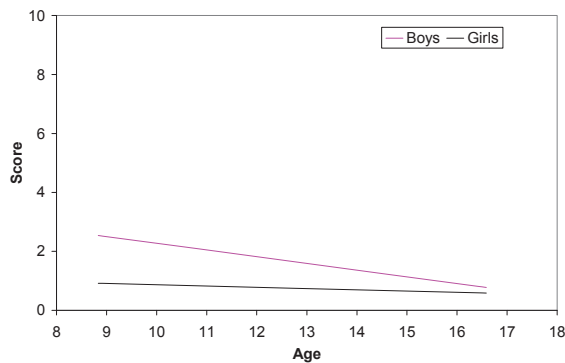
It is interesting to note that recent studies have shown that youth who participate in low-structured after-school programs show an increase in anti-social behaviour when compared to youth who did not participate in any programs at all. The fact that the NAYDP participants show a significant decrease in conduct problems demonstrates that the sites offered high-quality arts programs with a focus on cooperation, conflict resolution and respect for others.

Program Effect on Conduct Problems as Reported by Children and Parents



We also looked at the gender variations for conduct problems. According to their parents, boys score higher on the conduct problems scale than girls. Although conduct problems decreased for both boys and girls, only the program's effect on the boys' conduct problems is statistically significant.

Program Effect on Conduct Problems by Gender



It is not surprising that boys rated higher on the conduct problems scale. Since girls' rated so low on the conduct problem's scale, we were not expecting a significant decrease. However, the fact that the NAYDP program seems to have had a significant effect on decreasing boys' conduct problems is a finding of importance. Boys are traditionally under-represented in art programs. This finding suggests that engaging boys in art programming may have benefits in reducing behavioural problems.

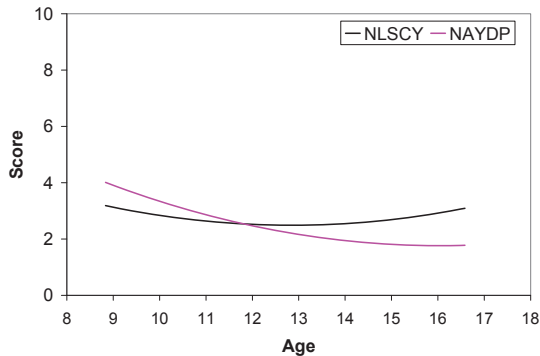
Program Effect on Emotional Problems

The emotional problems outcome (e.g. unhappiness, depression, anxiety, etc.), was measured on an eight-point scale, later standardised from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicative of more emotional problems.

There is a statistically significant decrease in the emotional problems outcome of the participants after the 9-months of arts instruction when compared to the NLSCY comparison group. The NAYDP participants start off with a higher emotional problems score, but as time goes on, their level of emotional problems decreases at a faster rate than that of the NLSCY children.

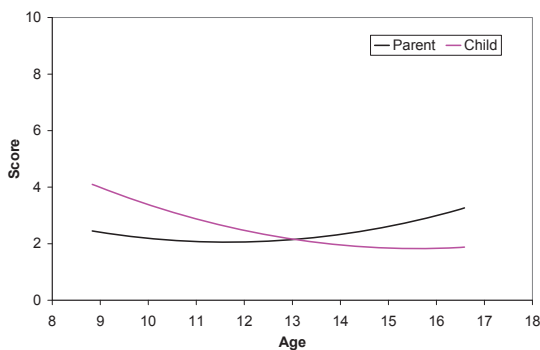
It is interesting to note that emotional problems actually increase among youth in the general population as they progress through the teen years. NAYDP participation seems to reverse that trend. Continued tracking of the participants over the next few years would help to answer this research question more definitively.

Program Effect on Emotional Problems



This important finding led us to explore if participants and their parents rated the children's emotional problems differently. As we see below, the participants rated themselves higher in the beginning on the emotional problems scale than their parents did. This difference is statistically significant. According to the participants, there was a statistically significant decrease in emotional problems over the period of the program. (The increase in emotional problems according to the parents, however, is not statistically significant.)

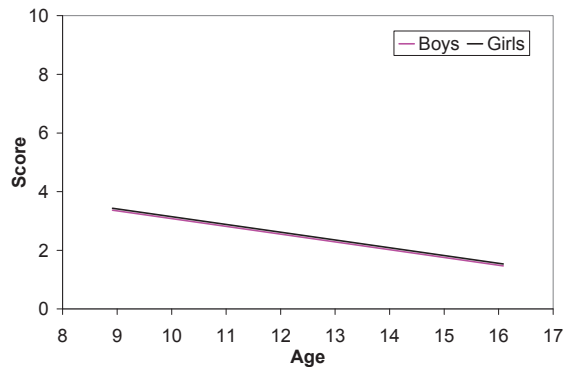
Program Effect on Emotional Problems as Reported by Children and Parents



These findings are important because often emotional problems in children go undetected. As we have seen, the parents rated their children's emotional problems quite differently than the participants. Undetected emotional problems may lead to clinical depression and suicidal ideation. The fact that the NAYDP programs seem to have an effect on these early danger signs warrants further exploration. Are youth who participate in arts programs less likely to be clinically depressed or commit suicide? This would be an important question for future research.

Finally, we looked at how boys and girls rated themselves. As can be seen below, there is no significant difference between how boys and girls rated themselves for emotional problems. They both show a significant decrease in emotional problems.

Program Effect on Emotional Problems by Gender



Benefits of Participation

The above findings are supported by the interviews with children, parents, site directors, artists and research assistants. They reported that the benefits to participating in the program included:

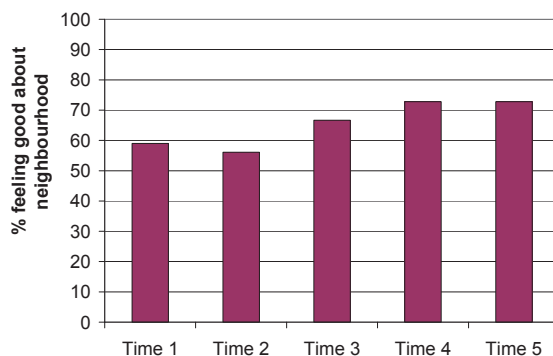
- Increased confidence
- Improved interpersonal skills
- Improved conflict resolution skills
- Improved problem solving skills
- Skills acquisition in arts activities

Perception of Neighbourhood

Parents were asked about their perception of the neighborhood they live in: whether there were role models for their children, adults looking out for them (besides themselves), and a sense of solidarity and helpfulness. Over the nine-month duration of the arts program, there was a positive increase in how parents perceived their neighborhoods. We believe that the involvement of parents in family nights, witnessing their children's performances at the community-based centres, and constant contact with program staff enquiring about their children's well-being had the effect of making the parents feel that they belonged to a community.

Furthermore, interviews with parents revealed that they were deeply appreciative of their children's participation in the arts program. They commented on what a wonderful opportunity it was for their children and that they hoped the programming would continue in their community.

Program Effect on Perception of Neighbourhood



Program Challenges

For the program staff, the major challenges reported were:

- Managing the behaviour of the participants
- Creating supportive environments
- Organizing transportation, and finding time for follow-up phone calls to parents
- Keeping roles of staff clearly delineated
- Integrating research tools

Overall, the major challenge identified by participants and their parents was the completion of the research questionnaires. Parents described the forms as long and redundant. Youth found the forms hard to fill out, long, and personal.

Summary of Findings

Results from the quantitative and qualitative components of the NAYDP have shown:

- Active recruitment and addressing barriers to participation are key to reaching underserved children.
- Qualified and supportive arts instructors and on-going parental involvement promotes high and sustained levels of participation.
- Structured, cumulative and high-quality arts programming has a positive impact on children's participation, arts skills development, task completion and pro-social skills.
- Statistically significant changes in intermediate outcomes (such as fewer emotional problems) are already evident among NAYDP children and youth when compared to a control group.

Where do we go from here?

Policy Implications and Future directions

Policy Implications

Social Justice

Currently in Canada, the children who need arts programs are not getting access to them. Data obtained from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth in Canada (NLSCY) shows that the rates of participation are the lowest for the poorest children in Canada.

If exposure to the arts benefits child development, it is incumbent upon policy makers to ensure that all children, especially those from lower-income communities, are exposed to these activities. Access to the arts should not be restricted only to those who can afford it; it should be provided for much wider sections of the community.

However, in order to ensure social inclusion, programs will have to be carefully designed and marketed to attract children, youth and families who need them the most. As the NAYDP findings have shown, if barriers to participation such as program costs and transportation are removed, children's participation in structured arts programs can successfully be sustained.

Research Evidence

The use of research evidence should be a key factor in influencing program funding for child development initiatives such as the NAYDP. In this sense, we strongly recommend that an evaluation protocol be included in funding proposals. If community-based organizations are to offer child-focused art programs with specific social goals, it is important that they demonstrate in their proposal how they intend to measure and reach targeted goals.

Unfortunately, many programs are evaluated after programs have started – an approach that inevitably leads to weak evaluation designs and findings that are only marginally useful for understanding program effectiveness.

Standard Practices in Art Programs

Research evidence should also be used for the future development of programs. Findings from the NAYDP have shown a need for:

- Strategic outreach in communities with a focus on lower-income, multicultural and Aboriginal communities
- Programs, transportation and snacks that are offered free of charge
- Structured, cumulative, child-focused programs developed with clear activity and social goals related to skill development
- Flexibility of the curriculum based on unique community characteristics
- Engagement and inclusion of parents needs to be encouraged
- Documenting what arts activities are implemented, how they are implemented, their duration and the intensity (e.g. how long, how often), and where the activity took place
- Collecting and maintaining program records such as demographics and attendance (e.g. who comes and how often)
- Highly qualified staff, recruited for their skill and commitment to working with children/youth and who view themselves as mentors and as having an impact on children's overall development and well-being
- Public recognition of children's efforts
- Staff and teachers who are from the same cultural background as the participants so that they can "see themselves"
- Orientation to staff about organizational policies, and staff training in child management practices where appropriate
- Collaboration with schools and community police

Funding Matters

Community-based art programs suffer from a chronic lack of stable funding and personnel in these programs spend an inordinate amount of time writing proposals for funds. In many cases funding is available for short-term programs with no sustained or core funding for infrastructure. Consequently, it has been challenging for community-based art organisations to invest in program evaluation and in the training of staff. Stable funding is necessary for building the expertise of community-based art organizations in developing, implementing and evaluating art programs that are focused on child development and the acquisition of art skills.

To support the development and implementation of community-based art programs that address social inclusion, include an evaluation protocol, and show evidence of standard practices in programming, appropriate funding needs to be in place.

Future Research Directions

The NAYDP results have shown sustained attendance in the art programs and improvement in the children's behavioural and emotional well-being. A long-term follow-up of the participating children would further examine the impact of art instruction on psychosocial functioning as well as drug and alcohol use, school drop-out and antisocial behaviour. Future research would also need to focus on program effect variations such as age of children, duration and intensity of programming, and quality of instruction.

Second, the NAYDP was a program offered on a universal basis to children in targeted communities. It is therefore relevant to explore the impact of art instruction on a higher-risk population.

Finally, the expansion of community-based art programming based on the specific criteria noted above is recommended in order to offer these life-enriching programs to more children in Canada. Community-based art programs are not only beneficial because they expose children and youth to the skills and creativity of the arts but because they also have the potential of contributing to their overall well-being as promising child development initiatives.

Conclusion

The results from the NAYDP were achieved by offering high-quality art programming. Future planning should focus on establishing standards with respect to developing, implementing and evaluating art programs in community-based organisations. In addition, issues of program sustainability and barriers to access, participation, and equitable outcomes for children in lower-income communities should be addressed.