Creative Arts Programming: Instrumentation to Assess Youth Self-Motivation

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Abstract

This presentation describes our partnership with a local nonprofit organization to create an instrument that assesses self-motivation of youth engaged in a creative arts afterschool workshop. An overview of the current research about creative arts programs and protective factors associated with self-motivation related to such programming are explored. Based on our findings, we designed two assessment instruments; one for youth engaged in the creative arts workshop and one for instructors of the workshop. Discussions include: instrument design and delivery process, implications for the nonprofit organization, and implications for school counselors.

Introduction

The Pemi Youth Center (PYC) provides a Creative Arts Workshop for youth after school. The PYC would like to add more structured Workshop and assess outcomes of participation. The aim of our study is to provide guidance in implementing structure based on best practices.

Research explores how youth-focused creative arts programs foster social-emotional learning (SEL). Creative arts programming examined focused primarily on visual arts. SEL programs promoted the protective factor of well-being (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017), and social and emotional intelligence protective factors which are associated with a lower likelihood of depression and aggression (Van Velsor, 2018). Our research examines the SEL category of self-management--the skills used to regulate emotions—and the ability to set goals and be self-motivated (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2018). Self-motivation is defined as "motivated to do or achieve something because of one's own enthusiasm or interest, without needing pressure from others" (Oxford Dictionary Online, n.d.).

Literature Review

Research indicates participation in creative arts programs results in the improved interpersonal skills of problem solving skills; increased cooperation, including the ability to work as part of a team, or in a leadership role; communication skills; and a sense of connection with peers and adults (Ersing, 2009; Wright, John, Alaggia & Sheel, 2006). Outcomes related to intrapersonal development include: greater sense of confidence, better self-esteem, and ability to manage emotions (Averett, Crowe & Hall, 2015; Ersing, 2009). For at-risk youth, research shows a correlation between creative arts involvement and an increase in skills, attitudes, and a sense of efficacy and accomplishment (Stinson, 2009).

Curricular best practices that lead to positive outcomes include life skill development—defined as social and emotional skills—resulting in pro-social behaviors; focusing on themes related to community and emerging adulthood to support positive youth identity development; and inclusion of recognition ceremony (Miller & Rowe, 2009). Additionally, working with youth from a strengths-based perspective is considered an important factor for positive outcomes (Ersing, 2009; Stinson, 2009).

Public engagement of youth with their community through mural paintings, recitals, performances, and exhibitions lead to increased individual investment, sense of belonging, and participation as a member of the community (Averett et al., 2015; Ersing, 2009). By showcasing their work to the community, youth were incentivized by the opportunity for recognition outside of the program (Miller & Rowe, 2009), which has shown to increase self-confidence, self-regulation, and a sense of belonging (Averett et al., 2015). Female residents in a juvenile detention center whose work was displayed in a nearby museum included participants' recognition of their achievement, improved self-esteem, and a belief in their ability to accomplish specific tasks and goals (Stinson, 2009).

In addition to public recognition another showcasing method is to engage participants in award ceremonies (Averett, Crowe, & Johnson, 2018). Such ceremonies can take place within the venue where the arts program is offered, or within the greater community through partnerships with local businesses or venues providing a form of recognition (Ersing, 2009).

When given opportunities to display art, participants noted benefits of giving back to the community by adding beauty and demonstrating examples of youth activities for the public to view, positively affecting participants, family members, and community (Averett et al., 2015).

While existing research examines the broad outcomes from creative arts programming, no studies were found that pinpoint specific skills gained through creative arts programs, or that focus on skills related to particular components of the programs.

Pemi Youth Center Creative Arts Workshops

The PYC is a local non-profit organization that provides after school programs at no cost to families for youth ages 10-17 (PYC, 2018). The population of youth live in a rural area of New Hampshire. There is potential for youth in this population to come from homes with a low socio economic status (SES), there is less likelihood for ethnic and racial diversity (Data USA, n.d.), and there are fewer opportunities for exposure to arts and culture than might be available in more urban settings. One of the programs offered by the PYC is a Creative Arts Workshop that provides youth with the opportunity for creative expression through art in a safe and welcoming environment (PYC, 2018).

Instrument Development

Art Engagement Student Survey

The Art Engagement Student Survey is a pre- and post-survey measuring students' attitudes and habits regarding art completion within the framework of assessing self-motivation skills. It is a 6-item survey measured by a Likert scale ranging from *never* to *always*. It also contains 3 items assessing participant attitudes and beliefs based on involvement in the Creative Arts Workshop. PYC staff will deliver the Art Engagement Student Survey (pre-survey) to participants upon the initiation of the Creative Arts activity that will later be publicly recognized. Participants will complete the Art Engagement Student Survey (post survey) after the public recognition event has occurred. The pre-survey should be conducted before the students are aware that a public

Instrument Development (cont.)

recognition event will take place where they will have the opportunity to display their art. The pre-survey can be given over the course of a number of weeks in order to reach the largest number of participants possible and establish a baseline. The post-survey should be implemented immediately after the public recognition has taken place.

The Art Engagement Student Survey was developed by graduate students and has not been proven to be reliable or valid. Additionally, it has not been normed for any populations, including youth. The sample population will be a convenience sample of rural youth between the ages of 10-17 enrolled as PYC participants. The control group will be students that choose not to participate in the public recognition component of the program. External variables directly related to the youths' experiences with the Creative Arts Workshops include: content and structure of the curriculum, method of instruction, and additional resources such as guest artists or videos, and external life events.

Art Engagement Teacher Survey

The Art Engagement Teacher Survey is a pre- and post-survey for instructors of the Creative Arts Workshops. The survey consists of 7 items that assess teachers' perceptions of students' engagement in the Creative Arts Workshop on a Likert scale (*never* to *always*), and one qualitative item indicating participant involvement in the public recognition event. This survey was developed by graduate students and has not been proven to be reliable or valid, nor has it been normed for this population. PYC staff will complete the Art Experience Teacher Survey (pre-survey) on each student upon engagement in the Creative Arts Workshop, and again upon immediate completion of the public recognition event. Three month follow-up student and teacher post-surveys could be given to assess whether motivation skills were sustained over time.

Discussion

The quantitative data of the Art Engagement Student Survey measures participants' attitudes and perceptions of their self-motivation behaviors. This survey's qualitative data allows participants to provide feedback about the event. The Art Engagement Teacher Survey's quantitative data will provide addition insight when compared to the surveys completed by student participants. Both types of pre- and post-surveys allow the PYC to assess whether the public recognition variable influences self-motivation. They will also assist the PYC in gathering information about implementing SEL in the Creative Arts Workshop in the future. Furthermore, the data gathered can inform future practices at the PYC and can support future funding and grant efforts. Limitations of the surveys include: non-anonymity of the student surveys; subjective nature of instructor reports, and student self-report.

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors can consider the importance of incorporating art into classroom curriculum. This can include using art in classroom counseling lessons and working directly with teachers to incorporate art into coursework. School counselors can advocate for public recognition events to support students' self-motivation and related behaviors. The Art Engagement Student and Teacher Surveys can be used in the same manner as outlined above. Data collected from the Art Engagement Student and Teacher Surveys can be used to advocate for art programming in schools, including afterschool. Additionally, school counselors can partner with non-profit organizations to offer such art programming during and afterschool. School counselors can also work with local businesses and venues to publicly recognize student art, underscoring the effort to build supportive communities for youth. The data outcomes can be use to apply for grant funding, and to advocate to stakeholders about the importance of art in schools.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research project was to examine how youth creative arts programs foster social-emotional learning. Through examination of various positive outcomes and specific aspects of SEL, the hypothesis put forth is that by using public recognition to exhibit student art, students' self-motivation skills will increase. By using the Arts Engagement Surveys, the PYC can assess whether public displays of recognition can influence self-motivation skills in youth engaged in the Creative Arts Workshops.