

The effect of a 3-week arts camp on self-perceptions,
life satisfaction and subjective vitality in underserved
youth

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Abstract

Seventeen underserved youth participated in a summer arts camp consisting of dance, drama and art. The objective of this study was to research the effects of an arts camp on aspects of well-being such as self-perceptions, life satisfaction and subjective vitality. Method: Seventeen (11 females, 6 males, mean age 10 ¼ years +/- 2.05) underserved youth partaking in a 3-week long summer arts camp participated in this study, along with a control group consisting of 9 females. The participants took part in each discipline everyday for 5 hours a day, 5 days a week. Participants filled out a booklet of questionnaires pertaining to self-perceptions, life satisfaction and subjective vitality. Results: A repeated-measures ANOVA revealed support for arts camp participation and positive effects on self-perceptions, life satisfaction and subjective vitality.

Self-perceptions, life satisfaction and subjective well-being are all factors that contribute to one's well-being. Between the ages of 6 to 10 and 11 to 14, development is "driven by a basic psychological need to achieve competence, autonomy and relatedness."¹ This then may be an essential age to expose and encourage children to explore and learn. If a child can have a positive experience, this can potentially lead to higher levels of competence, in return benefiting with a positive gain in well-being. One possible way to expose children to a variety of activities is to encourage camp participation. Participation in programs outside of the traditional school atmosphere allows children to learn in a way the child may consider to be an atmosphere that is more self-directed.

To delve deeper into the realm of competence, the Theory of Effectance Motivation was developed.² Effectance can be defined as the “possible nature of the motivational aspect of competence”. It was then proposed that human beings have innate desires to feel competent and in order to achieve these feelings of competency; one must possess key amounts of desire to achieve and be presented with the right amount of difficulty. This theory mostly places focus on the positive effects of success on competence and very little on the effects of failure, which is one area where Competence Motivation Theory³ differs.

Based on the Theory of Effectance Motivation, Competence Motivation Theory was developed. In this theory it is asserted that human beings are inherently motivated to attain competence in many different areas of achievement and by attempting to master these achievements; one can attain feelings that can negatively or positively affect their self-perceptions. Competence Motivation Theory states that self-efficacy is enhanced positively when attempts are successful and adversely affected with unsuccessful attempts at mastery. Positively enhanced competence is known as high competence motivation, while the latter is referred to as low competence motivation. Those individuals who are high in competence motivation, generally have higher levels of global self-esteem. In this theory it is also stated that in having high competence motivation, an individual can then be lead to successful task performance.

While very few studies exist on dance and its relation to enhancement in well-being, previous studies^{4,5} have revealed that dance involvement in either leisure or more formal situations can lead to a rise in self-esteem in children, with self-perceptions being the focus. The creative movement method of teaching has been shown to significantly influence the development of self-esteem. Children involved in creative movement have perceived themselves as more competent, which in return, promoted a positive growth in their self-esteem. Aerobic dance class participation and its effects on body image and physical self-perceptions in 13 to 14 year-old girls have shown some positive correlations to self-esteem as well. Aerobic dance class participation has been shown to significantly increase one's sports competence and physical self-worth. These findings show support for the connection between creative movement and dance with enhanced self-esteem.

Although virtually nothing is known about dance camp participation and its affects on well-being, sports camps have extensively been studied.^{6,7,8} Participation in sports camps have established some positive connections with enhancements of well-being, especially in the areas of athletic, social and physical self-perceptions.

The aim of this research project was to determine if an arts camp for underserved youth could have a positive impact on their self-perceptions, life satisfaction and subjective vitality over the course of 3 weeks as compared to a control group. It was hypothesized that the participants in the arts camp would

attain a more positive effect on their perception of self, life satisfaction and subjective vitality as compared to the control group.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were underserved youth participating in a summer arts camp in Preston, Washington, USA. Seventeen (11 females, 6 males, mean age 10 ¼ years +/- 2.05) participants were asked to complete a booklet of questionnaires on the first and last day of the 3 week arts camps. Selection into the arts camp was based upon recommendations by school counselors in the surrounding school districts that believed the candidates would benefit from participating in an arts camp. Counselors recommended children that came from broken homes, were latch-key kids (kids that come home to an empty house after school) and/or low income. A non-profit organization specializing in counseling and youth outreach programs also recommended children for the camp. Of the 17 participants, 5 of the males and 4 of the females were returning camp participants. Seven of the participants were also attending other camps during the summer, but none were involved in other camps during the same three weeks as the arts camp. A control group, made up of 9 females, also participated in this study. Arrangements were made to acquire signed consent forms prior to the start of camp. This project was granted approval by the university's ethics committee.

Procedure

Participants attended for 3 weeks, participating in dance, art and drama every weekday, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., from July 9-27, 2007, which culminated in two performances on the final day. Participants were administered 3 questionnaires on the first day of camp before their first dance lesson and the last day of camp, same time. At all times there were at least 2 other adults present.

Measures

Self -Perceptions

The Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC)⁹ was administered to measure self-perceptions. This 36-item questionnaire consists of survey type questions to determine a child's self-perception in 6 different areas. Those 6 different areas include one's perceived aptitude in both academic and athletic situations, acceptance in social situations, physical appearance, and behavioral conduct along with global self-worth. The participants were instructed to choose 1 of 2 statements that were more true for them such as, "Some kids find it hard to make friends" BUT "Other kids find it's pretty easy to make friends." Then from there, were asked to mark the box "sort of true for me" or "really true for me." A previous study¹⁰ revealed Cronbach Alpha scores of between 0.71 and 0.86, along with recommending the use of the profile for anyone assessing self-perception in children. The Cronbach Alpha scores for this current study were between 0.70 and 0.81. The 5 subscales used for this study were social

acceptance, athletic competence, physical appearance, behavioral conduct and global self-worth.

Life Satisfaction

The 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)¹¹ determines how satisfied one is with life on a global level. The format is in a 7-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Statements include “In most ways my life is close to my ideal.” In a previous study,¹² researchers found the scale to have a reliability of 0.921. In that same study, the scale was also found to have sound psychometric properties and that it functions equally well for both males and females. The Cronbach Alpha score for this current study was 0.57.

Subjective Vitality

A modified version of the 7-item Subjective Vitality Scale (SVS)¹³ was used to examine how much feeling of energy and liveliness one has at both the individual difference level (overall) and at the state level. Vitality has been described as the “energy that is perceived to emanate from the self”.¹⁴ The questionnaire has a 7-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true) for both the overall and state levels. Statements at the overall level read as, “I feel alive and vital,” while on the state level they would read, “At this moment, I feel alive and vital.” A previous study¹⁵ has shown that by omitting the one negatively worded item, it actually made the questionnaire more reliable and valid. Therefore this item was omitted for in the current study. In the same

study, validation was confirmed with scores of 0.80 for overall feelings and 0.89 for state level, showing similar results to the original findings of 0.84 and 0.86 consecutively. The Cronbach Alpha score for this current study was 0.78 for individual difference level and 0.85 for the state level.

Analysis

Results for all the questionnaires were entered and the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were calculated. Statistical analysis was only conducted on the female participants of the 2 groups. Significance was set at $p= 0.05$. Findings that were not significant (between .05 and .10), but were still relevant were reported as trends. A repeated-measures analysis of variation (ANOVA) was conducted to compare between group differences over time in self-perceptions, life satisfaction and subjective vitality as measured by the Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC), The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) and the Subjective Vitality Scales (SVS). Interaction effect was measured to reveal if there was a same change in scores over time for the 2 groups. Main effect was measured for within-subject changes across the 2 time periods. Test of between-subjects was measured for significant differences in scores between the 2 groups.

Results

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics states for the camp and control.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics –Camp and Control-Pre and Post

Questionnaires	Camp Mean (SD)	Control Mean (SD)	Difference Camp-Control
SPPC-Social Acceptance			
Time 1(Pre)	2.93 (1.02)	2.93 (1.13)	0.00
Time 2 (Post)	2.58 (1.09)	2.69 (1.07)	0.11
Difference	-0.35	-0.24	0.11
SPPC-Athletic Competence			
Time 1	2.60 (1.01)	2.85 (1.17)	0.25
Time 2	2.69 (1.15)	2.31 (1.07)	0.38
Difference	0.09	-0.54	0.63
SPPC-Physical Appearance			
Time 1	2.78 (1.04)	2.58 (1.22)	0.20
Time 2	3.03 (1.13)	2.50 (1.11)	0.53
Difference	0.25	-0.08	0.33
SPPC-Behavioral Conduct			
Time 1	2.70 (1.09)	3.04 (1.07)	0.34
Time2	2.85 (1.18)	2.63 (1.12)	0.22
Difference	0.15	-0.41	0.56
SPPC-Global Self-Worth			
Time 1	2.93 (0.80)	3.27 (1.07)	0.34
Time 2	3.07 (0.98)	3.08 (1.05)	0.01
Difference	0.38	-0.19	0.57
SWLS			
Time 1	5.04 (1.78)	5.74 (1.10)	0.70
Time 2	5.99 (1.44)	5.33 (1.49)	0.66
Difference	0.95	-0.41	1.36
SVS-Individual			
Time 1	5.62 (1.73)	5.10 (1.69)	0.52
Time 2	6.21 (1.27)	5.47(1.56)	0.74
Difference	0.59	0.37	0.22
SVS-State			
Time 1	5.40 (1.97)	4.76 (2.29)	0.64
Time 2	6.31 (1.25)	5.67 (1.73)	0.64
Difference	0.91	0.91	0.00

SPPC

The social acceptance sub-domain was statistically significant in main effect for time [$F(1,106)=5.07, p=.03$]. Interaction effect did not reach statistical significance [$F(1,106)=.14, p=.71$]. Test of between-subjects effects did not reach statistical significance [$F(1,106)=.16, p=.74$].

Although not statistically significant the athlete competence sub-domain revealed a trend in the main effect for time [$F(1,106)=3.15, p=.08$]. Interaction effect was statistically significant [$F(1,106)=6.64, p=.01$](See Figure 1). Test of between-subjects effects did not reach statistical significance [$F(1,106)=.15, p=.70$].

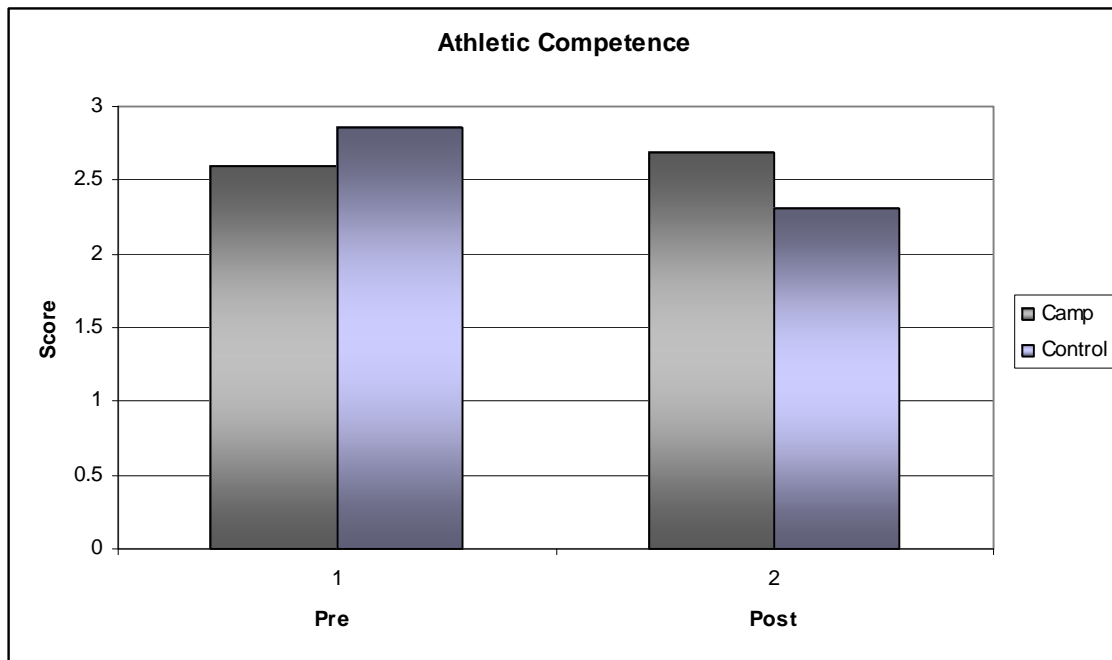


Figure 1. Athletic competence: Mean group changes over time

The physical appearance sub-domain did not reach statistical significance in main effect for time [$F(1,106)=.99, p=.32$]. Trends were revealed in both

interaction effect [$F(1,106)=2.77, p=.09$] and between-subjects effects [$F(1,106)=5.63, p=.07$].

The behavioral conduct sub-domain did not reach statistical significance for both main effect for time [$F(1,106)=1.69, p=.19$] and between-subjects effects [$F(1,106)=.13, p=.72$]. Interaction effect was statistically significant [$F(1,106)=6.35, p=.01$] (See Figure 2).

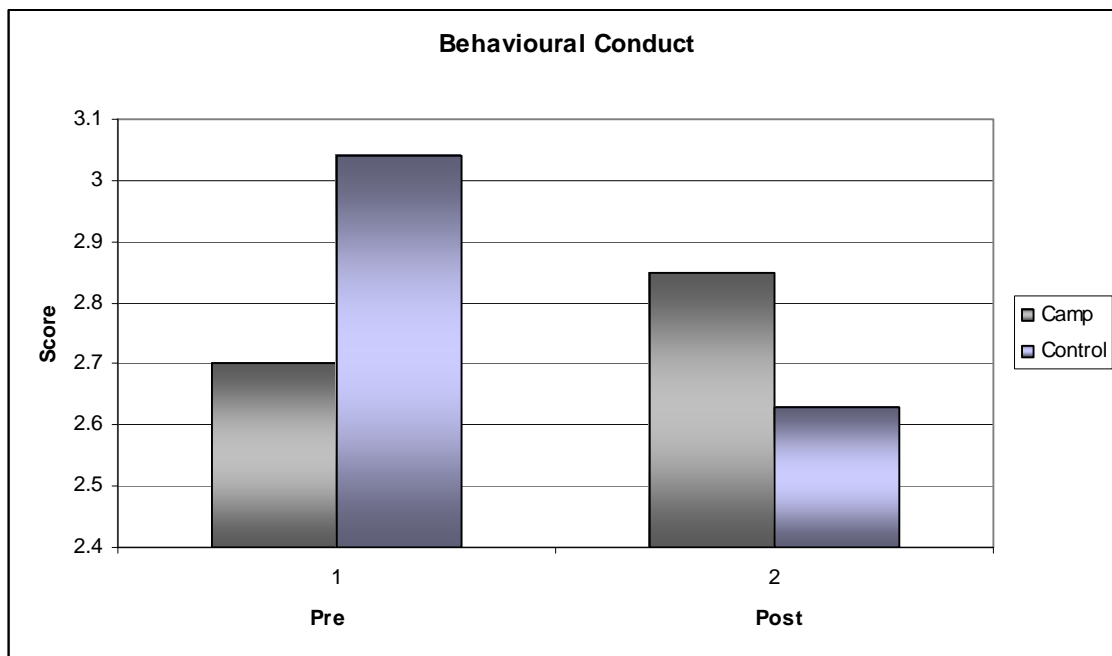


Figure 2. Behavioral conduct: Mean group changes over time.

Global self-esteem did not reach statistical significance in main effect for time [$F(1,106)=.003, p=.96$, interaction effect [$F(1,106)=2.33, p=.13$] and between- subjects effects [$F(1,106)=1.35, p=.25$].

SWLS

Life satisfaction did not reach statistical significance in main effect for time [$F(1,106)=1.69, p=.19$] and between-subjects effects [$F(1,106)=1.75, p=.19$]. Interaction effect was statistically significant [$F(1,106)=10.87, p=.001$] (See Figure 3).



Figure 3. Satisfaction with Life: Mean group changes over time.

SVS

Individual difference levels of subjective vitality were statistically significant in main effect for time [$F(1,106)=7.194, p=.008$] and between-subjects effects [$F(1,106)=6.63, p=.01$]. Interaction effect did not reach statistical significance [$F(1,106)=.22, p=.64$].

State levels of subjective vitality were statistically significant in main effect for time [$F(1,106)=15.89, p=.000$] and between-subject effects [$F(1,106)=5.01, p=.03$]. Interaction effect did not reach statistical significance [$F(1,106)=.05, p=.82$].

DISCUSSION

One of the aims of this study was to discover if an arts camp for underserved youth could produce a more positive effect on children's self-perceptions, life satisfaction and subjective vitality as compared to a control group of underserved youth whom were not participating in an arts camp. It was hypothesized that the arts camp participants would reveal a more positive impact on their self-perceptions, subjective vitality and life satisfaction over the control group. Results revealed some support for this hypothesis. These results also reveal that as a result of increased competence, camp participants may be seen as being high in competence, as defined by the Competence Motivation Theory.

SPPC

Of the 5 domains of the SPPC, an increase was seen in 4 sub-domains in the camp participants. Significant differences were revealed in athletic competence and behavioral conduct. Social acceptance also revealed significance, although it was the only domain to reveal a decline in scores in the arts camp. One reason for the decline may be that although the camp stresses group cooperation and equality, the camp design is set up to be autonomous driven. Camp participants are encouraged to create their own lines and character, choreograph sections of a dance and produce a costume. This idea

relates back to the idea¹ that programs outside of traditional schooling tend to be more self-directed, which is intended to allow children to explore their own paths. In return, the outcome may have been that the children were intrinsically motivated to succeed in their tasks of creating, choreographing and producing, potentially causing a decline in social acceptance.

Overall, most of the scores for the SPPC may have increased due to the participants in the arts camp feeling competent at their tasks proposed to them, supporting a previous study.⁵ In that study, it was found that children involved in creative movement had increased feelings of competency, in return promoting self-esteem. These high levels of perceived competence can lead to successful task performance, which could be indicated by the significant statistical analysis of the arts camp, feeling successful at their tasks. These findings seem to reveal support for the Competence Motivation Theory. All of the SPPC scores in the control group reported losses from pre to post. One may surmise from this data that no camp involvement over the summer months may lead to a decrease in feelings of competence, though further research is needed.

SVS

Pre scores revealed the controls reported higher individual difference levels of subjective vitality. Post scores revealed the camp participants reporting higher scores with a greater Mean (M) gain of 0.59, with the controls reporting less of a gain (M=0.37). Reports from parents of past participants include written letters in support of the camp; along with self-report in letters by the participants. Although not quantitative evidence, these letters relay the child's excitement of

participating in the camp and the parent's perception of their child's individual difference levels of vitality were sustained throughout most of the school year in anticipation for the camp next year.

State level subjective vitality scores were reported higher throughout in the camp participants, with equal gains for both groups ($M=0.91$). It has been reported¹⁶ previously that state levels of subjective vitality may be increased when an environment is conducive to being intrinsically motivated, which may support the current findings. As reported earlier, camp participants may have felt intrinsically motivated to succeed at the tasks placed before them (choreographing, designing costumes, and producing characters). On the first day, most children come to the camp not knowing what to expect, which were revealed in the reported lower levels of state level vitality, but by the last day, performance day, state level vitality was heightened greatly.

SWLS

Pre scores for life satisfaction revealed the control group reporting a higher score. Post scores revealed the camp reporting a higher score, with a positive gain ($M=0.95$). Control groups reported a decline in life satisfaction ($M=-0.41$). Of all the questionnaires, life satisfaction had the greatest increase in the camp participants. With an overall increase in most of the questionnaires, it would seem logical that life satisfaction would increase. Life satisfaction seems to encompass all the other factors. One's subjective well-being is increased when one feels competent, autonomous and a sense of relatedness.¹⁶ These same 3

factors are the impetus for development in children between the ages of 6 to 10 and 11 to 14.¹ Given this, this may be an essential age to expose and encourage children to explore and learn. If a child can have a positive experience, this can potentially lead to higher levels of competence. Since 4 of the 5 sub-domains in the SPPC increased, with 2 significantly increased, along with both levels of subjective vitality, this may contribute to the feelings of competency reported by the children, in return increasing their life satisfaction. Life satisfaction may have also increased due to the background most of these children are from. Children will display lower levels of life satisfaction when they are from backgrounds that have parents whom are either divorced or fight in front of the children.¹⁷ Exposure to the arts camps may have influenced the rise in life satisfaction.

LIMITATIONS

During the course of the study, some limitations became apparent. The first limitation of this study included a small research sample in both the arts camp and the control group. A larger sample size, as with all studies, reduces the uncertainty around conclusions. Another limitation included the lack of previous research on the effects of art/dance camps in general on self-perceptions, subjective vitality and life satisfaction in children. A majority of the previous research was based on sports participation. In fact, no studies were found by the researcher specifically on arts camps and their effects. Sports and dance have been compared in older participants, with differences, but age may make a difference in how the perceptions can change and to what activity is being done

to influence those changes.¹⁸ In having data on arts camps, this would make a more viable distinction between sports and the arts and their possible differences in one's well-being.

Future Research and Conclusion

Future research should include a repeat of the questionnaires on future camps with a larger research sample. This future study should also include more in-depth questionnaires pertaining to motivation and achievement goal orientations. A comparison study with not only a control group, but a sports camp should also add to the validity of the project. Possibly include a more longitudinal study of repeating the measures for a third time to see if levels of self-perceptions, vitality and life satisfaction are sustained later in the year.

The study of children's self-perceptions and well-being seems to be in the forefront of topics relating to children, with most of the emphasis being placed on sports as the factor. This leads one to believe there is a need for other areas of study, like the arts, i.e. dance, theatre and fine arts. If research supports the idea that sports participation can increase self-perceptions and well-being, the same may be said about creative based programs, with the possibility of even greater enhancements. The few studies conducted on dance and its relation to self-esteem has revealed great promise for this topic. Results of this current study support this idea, though further research is needed.

This study could show the importance of dance and its positive relation to enhancements in self-perceptions, subjective vitality and life satisfaction, especially if learned in a more autonomous environment, like a camp setting. It

also may prove to be a constructive creative, energy or stress outlet for children, contributing to the aforementioned factors. Furthermore, the decline in scores for the control group may show support for the importance of involvement in such activities, outlets and stimulation over the summer months for children. More research needs to be conducted along the same design, but these results show promise for the positive effects arts camp participation may have on self-perceptions, subjective vitality and life satisfaction in underserved youth.

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