

Profiling Youths' Art Engagement and The Links to University Aspirations

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INTRODUCTION

Arts engagement is rarely researched however for adolescents this activity forms part of a range of organised and structured activities that have been associated with positive university aspirations and post-high school educational trajectories (Denault & Poulin, 2009). Identifying, building, and supporting university aspirations are crucial during adolescence, particularly for disadvantaged and low socioeconomic status (SES) students (Sellar & Gale, 2011), and art engagement may contribute to the likelihood of young people going to university. The environment (school or community) in which arts activities are engaged in, and intensity of participation (number of hours per week) are two dimensions that inform student engagement in arts. Students' SES, age and gender also influence the salience of the engagement and university expectations, especially for low SES students where the salience of the engagement may be more pronounced (Blomfield & Barber, 2011). We sought to explore the association between arts engagement and the students' expectation to attend university after high school and whether this association differed between high and low SES groups.

Hypotheses:

- 1: Arts engagement predicts higher expectation to attend university
- 2: Higher intensity in arts engagement predicts higher expectation to attend university
- 2 a: This effect will be stronger for low SES students compared to high SES students.

METHOD

Participants:

- N = 1886 (59% Female, 41% Male; 58% Grade 8, 42% Grade 11)
- Recruited from 34 schools in Western Australia (34% Regional, 66% metropolitan)
- Wave 4 of the Youth Activity Participation Survey (YAPS) was administered in schools using laptops or paper format.

Measures:

- **Arts environment profiles:** 747 participants responded 'yes' to one or more arts activities in the school year.
 - School only: 361 (48%)
 - Community only: 143 (19%),
 - Both School and community: 243 (33%)
- **Intensity of art engagement:** Participants were asked how many hours per week did they engage in arts activities and clubs. Intensity was winsorized to 9 hours maximum (Tavakol & Wilcox, 2013).
 - School intensity: 1-9 hours (M= 1.22, SD = 2.27)
 - Community intensity: 1-9 hours (M = 0.72, SD = 1.85)
- **University Expectations:** One item -7 point Likert scale (1: Not at all likely; 7: Extremely likely).
 - 'How likely is it that you will go to university after high school?'
- **Moderators:** SES was measured as a continuous variable using Australian School ranking (ICSEA) ranging from 850 (low SES) to 1150 (high SES) (M = 1000, SD = 1.5).

Analyses Plan:

- **ANOVA:** Test group mean differences in arts engagement and university expectations.
- **Hierarchical regression:** understand the predictive nature of arts engagement on university expectations for high school students. SES was a moderator while gender was controlled for when testing for main and interactive effects.
- **Simple slopes analyses:** probe the interactive effects of SES on intensity for university expectations.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research reported in this poster was funded by a grant from the Australian Research Council to Bonnie Barber and Jacquelynne Eccles.

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RESULTS

- 40% of the sample participated in some form of arts activity.
- Of those doing some form of art activity, 48% do so in school-based activities, 19% in community, 33% engage in both school and community arts activities concurrently.
- Art engagement significantly predicted university expectations. The group with no arts participation reported the lowest scores in university expectations. School-based art engagement significantly predicted university expectations above the other groups.

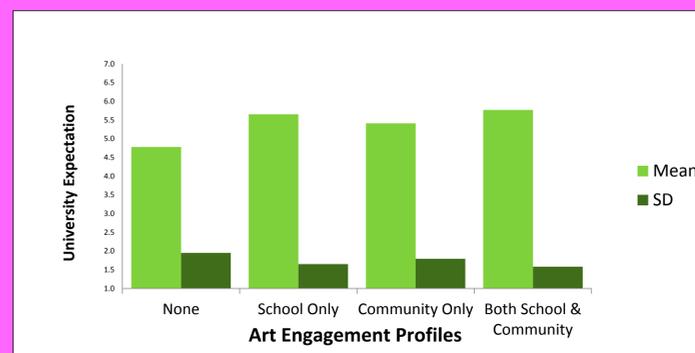


Figure 1. Mean differences for art engagement profiles

- Hierarchical regression was conducted to explore the main and interactive effects of hours of school art engagement on university expectations. There was a main effect of hours of school art, SES and gender on university expectations. There was a significant interaction between the hours of school art and SES for university expectations.

Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Regression at Model 3

| | B | SE | β |
|------------------------|------|-----|---------|
| SES | .70 | .04 | .37*** |
| Gender | -.39 | .08 | -.10*** |
| School art hours | .24 | .05 | .12*** |
| SES x School art hours | -.10 | .05 | -.05* |

- Simple Slopes Analyses probed the interaction between SES and school art engagement hours and found that for low SES students, with each 1 hour increase in art engagement, there was an increase of nearly half of 1 in the level of university expectation compared to high SES students which show an increase of .11 of 1 SD. There was an additive effect of gender such that females report more aspirations with more hours in school art engagement, $Y_f = 5.30$, $Y_m = 4.91$.

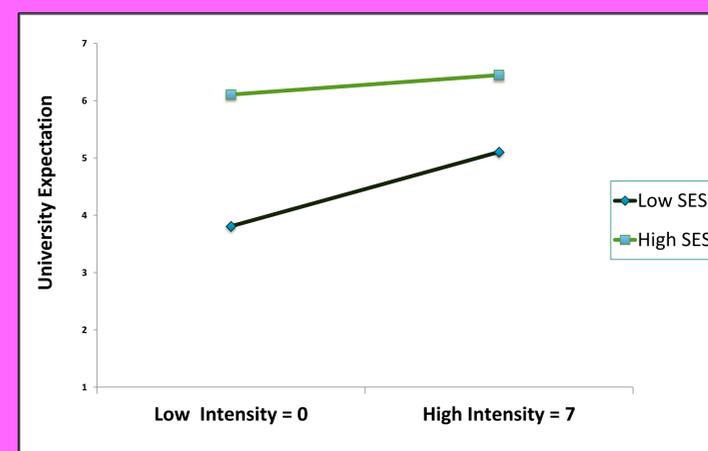


Figure 1. The two-way interaction between SES for school art engagement on university expectation

DISCUSSION

- The results of this study indicate that engagement in the arts is associated with adolescent's expectation of transitioning to university from school.
- We hypothesised that higher intensity in school-based art engagement would predict higher expectation to go on to university after high school, and this has also been supported. The school context in which art was engaged in is significantly stronger at predicting university expectation than community based art engagement.
- Further, our hypothesis that low SES students who participated in arts activities at school would report significantly higher scores in expectations of transitioning to university than the high SES group was also supported. These findings suggest that access and opportunity to engage in art activities is greater at school than in their communities and this could possibly be due to lack of quality community based arts programs. We suggest that this contributes to the salience of the positive developmental experiences gained during their high school years and is consistent with previous research which suggests that low SES and disadvantaged youth benefit more from positive experiences in organised activities than do their more advantaged peers (Blomfield & Barber, 2011).
- These results extend previous research by investigating the effects of arts engagement as an organised activity and offering an explanation for the relations between two dimensions of art activity engagement: intensity of participation and school/community-based context. This study adds to the scholarly knowledge about the unique and collective contribution that arts activity engagement provides to university expectations for adolescents.