

Arts Participation and Future Outlook Among Youth of Color

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Abstract

Previous studies have found that arts education for children can increase empathy, create social bonds, and improve their behavior and critical thinking skills (Bowen and Kisida 2023). I explored the impact of participation in arts-based programs on these benefits and others, focusing on the future outlook for youth of color. I developed the term future outlook, which refers to the perception that one has of their time ahead and any expectations they may have about what they can accomplish. A young person's future outlook can shape how they go about their life, including their decisions and beliefs. Having a positive future outlook means that a person has high hopes for their future, believes they can achieve their goals, and their present situation does not limit them. By contrast, having a negative future outlook means that a person has little to no hope for their future; they may see little use in seeking educational or professional advancement because it will not help change their circumstances or achieve their goals. Many factors, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc., can influence future outlook. I explored whether participation in arts-based programs is one of these factors.

Through observations of arts-based programs for youth and qualitative interviews with youth of color who participate in them, I explored their perceptions of these programs, their future outlook, and how these two factors are related to each other. My analyses of field notes and interview transcripts focus on some sentiments and statements that relate to future outlook, including career, college or educational plans, self-expression and self-efficacy, cognitive ability, and emotional well-being. My findings revealed that participation in arts-based programs has an incredible impact on youth of color, especially their future outlook. The participants I interviewed and observed will come out of their arts programs with new skills and a passion for a career that involves the arts.