



Expanding **minds** and Opportunities

Leveraging

the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success

This article is an excerpt from the groundbreaking book, ***Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success***. This landmark compendium, edited by Terry K. Peterson, PhD, is composed of nearly 70 research studies, reports, essays, and commentaries by more than 100 researchers, educators, community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners.

Collectively, these writings boldly state that there is now a solid base of research and best practices clearly showing that quality afterschool and summer learning programs—including 21st Century Community Learning Centers—make a positive difference for students, families, schools, and communities.

Together, the collection of articles demonstrates the power of quality expanded learning opportunities to:

- **promote student success and college and career readiness;**
- **build youth assets such as character, resilience, and wellness;**
- **foster partnerships that maximize resources and build community ties; and**
- **engage families in their children's learning in meaningful ways.**

For information on how to order the full book, download sections and individual articles, or explore the topic areas, visit www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds.

About the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project

The Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project is a 50-state initiative harnessing the power of networks and leaders to help schools and communities leverage the time beyond school to accelerate student achievement. A partnership of funders led by the C.S. Mott Foundation support the Expanded Learning and Afterschool Project. More information about the book and the project, as well as additional resources, can be found at www.expandinglearning.org.

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Community-Based Afterschool and Summer Arts Education Programs: Positive Impact on Youth and Community Development

Community-based arts education programs can have a significant and positive impact on participating youth—and on overall community development. Typically delivered after school, over the weekend, and during the summer, such programs should be regarded by community, state, and federal leaders as an effective tool for responding to 21st century educational and civic challenges.

Like other forms of out-of-school-time programming, the value of community-based youth arts programs is often assessed against measures used to gauge school success—for example, participants' test scores, school attendance, graduation rates, or progress in mathematics and literacy development. These measures are important, and research finds a positive relationship between participation in afterschool and summer community arts programs and these types of outcomes (Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998).

In this article, however, we focus on the impact of community-based arts programs on youth development and community development—two other key areas of outcomes highlighted in research and best practice in community arts. We do this for two reasons. First, we believe that these impacts often mediate or help to explain some of the impacts seen on school-related indicators—that is, that positive development and an opportunity to have a meaningful impact in one's community are key to engagement and success in school, life, and work. Second, youth and community development are important domains of impact in their own right and are essential for addressing civic challenges of the 21st century—a century in which communities are increasingly diverse and in which educational, racial, and socio-economic inequality persist.

For this article, we weave together evidence from research—in particular, the body of studies in the new arts education research clearinghouse, ArtsEdSearch (www.artsedsearch.org)—with evidence from best practice at the Destiny Arts Center in Oakland, California (Destiny). The latter, we present from the perspective of Destiny’s executive director (Cristy Johnston Limón), one of its youth leaders (Tilly Reclosado), and a researcher who conducted a study at the organization (Lauren Stevenson). Destiny provides dance, theater, and martial arts instruction to youth ages 3–18, intentionally serving some of the most chronically underserved young people in Oakland, as well as middle-income and affluent families seeking exposure to culturally and socio-economically plural communities. Young people come to Destiny’s center in North Oakland for classes after school, on weekends, and during the summer, and Destiny sends instructors to teach in afterschool programs in over 45 public schools in the East Bay.

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Youth Development

Describing Destiny’s impact from her perspective as a youth participant, Tilly Reclosado says, “At Destiny I got to work with choreographers, write a script, learn lines and act, all whilst building a family in a safe community outside of my home. Destiny taught me to be more aware—of myself, of the people and world around me, and of all things artistic. Creating and performing a show enlightened me on the significance of hard work, planning ahead, and thinking on my feet.” Reclosado’s words echo the research on community youth arts programs, which finds that such programs are not only effective

Qualities of Community Youth Arts Programs That Promote Positive Youth Development

- **Youth-centered.** Effective community youth arts programs respect young people as artists and support them in cultivating their own artistic voice.
- **Knowledge-centered.** In community arts programs, young people develop knowledge in an art form and knowledge about themselves, their communities, and ideas they wish to express in their artwork.
- **Assessment-centered.** The arts involve cycles of planning, practice, and performance and opportunities to make learning visible.
- **Community-centered.** Effective arts programs forge a sense of community among participants that facilitates the risk-taking and self-expression required in artistic endeavors.

at fostering young people's artistic development but also their cognitive, social, and personal growth. The arts learning environment that these programs offer embodies the qualities that youth development scholars (McLaughlin, 2000; Eccles & Gootman, 2002) find are key for effective youth development programs (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005). They are, following the phrasing of youth development expert Milbrey McLaughlin (2000) and cognitive scientists at the National Academy of Sciences (Bransford, Brown, & Cockings, 1999), youth-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered.

Research has identified a range of youth development outcomes associated with participation in community youth arts programs. These include skills and capacities prized in the Common Core and by leaders wishing to prepare students for life and work in the 21st century, including persistence, leadership, and collaboration (Weinstein, 2010, Kang Song & Gammel, 2011), creative thinking (Heath & Roach, 1999, Hui & Lau, 2006); problem solving (Rostan, 2010); agency (Stevenson, 2011), motivation (Catterall & Chapleau, 1999; Rostan, 2010), and empathy (Catterall & Chapleau, 1999).

Not surprisingly, given the centrality of self-discovery and self-expression to artistic practice, research also finds that community youth arts programs help young people develop self-confidence, self-efficacy, and self-awareness (Heath & Roach, 1999; Stevenson, 2011); and the ability to self-regulate and express emotions (Ross, 2000; Stevenson, 2011). Reclosado underscores the importance of this set of outcomes in her experience at Destiny. "The act of transforming myself into a character," she says of her training in theater in particular, "made me much more aware of myself and the emotions I feel. I find that I analyze the way I feel and try to find out why I feel that way. I feel more in control of myself when I can understand what I am feeling and the reasons behind it."

Due to the collaborative nature of the artistic practice at Destiny, as participating youth become more capable of self-awareness and self-expression, they also become more visible to and more aware of one another and forge connections across lines of social difference that divide them in their schools and neighborhoods (Stevenson, 2011).

Importantly, research finds that the positive development that young people experience in community arts programs is related to success in other areas of their lives. Youth who participate in such programs, for example, are less likely than their peers to engage in delinquent and violent behavior (Respress & Lufti, 2006) or exhibit behavioral and emotional problems (Wright et al., 2006), and they are more likely to participate in school leadership and have better attendance and higher academic achievement (Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998).

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Community Development

In research at Destiny, Stevenson (2011) found that participating young people extended Destiny's impact to their surrounding community in two ways. First, having experienced personal growth by learning about themselves, one another, and social issues addressed in their performances, Destiny youth "walked differently in the world" (Stevenson, 2011, p. 126). They related to the world with more awareness, openness, confidence, and understanding, and in doing so, had positive effects on their families, schools, and communities. Second, she found that Destiny youth had impact through their performances, which sparked audience members to think differently about their own lives, learn something that would change the way they treat other people, want to take action to make their community a better place, and learn something about people of a different racial and/or ethnic background from their own. In these ways, Stevenson found that Destiny's impact "scales radially" (Stevenson, 2011, p. 130)—participating young people create waves of positive impact that ripple outward into their surrounding communities.

As the executive director at Destiny, Cristy Johnston Limón intentionally leverages young people's involvement in Destiny programs to engage their families and facilitate community development in Oakland. "By engaging young people in meaningful ways," she says, "youth arts organizations enjoy a powerful entry point to serve entire families and their communities." Destiny provides opportunities for parents and family members to work together on performances, projects, and fundraisers.

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Similar to what youth experience at Destiny, Johnston-Limon finds that parents forge new relationships; address issues of class, race, privilege, and social change; learn about themselves and others; and ultimately alter the way they interact with individuals who are different. In this way, Destiny provides an avenue for residents concerned about young people's health and well-being to reinvent their community in line with the values of interconnectedness, social responsibility, and care. As cities like Oakland struggle to rebuild once vibrant and bustling neighborhoods and commercial hubs, cultural organizations like Destiny can help address disinvestment, build audiences, and become mechanisms for rebuilding a sense of place and connection.

Research supports the idea that youth arts organizations can be effective resources for community development. Studies find, for example, that participation in the arts in the teen years relates to greater community involvement, volunteerism, and political participation in adulthood (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 2009; Heath & Roach, 1999). Studies also find that a high percentage of young people who engage in the arts commit to their local community as adults, contributing to its economic and civic growth and participating in and patronizing the arts (Heath & Roach, 1999; Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011).

Providing in-school and afterschool enrichment programs in 45 public schools in the California East Bay—some supported by funding from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative—Destiny also helps schools strengthen their connection with the communities they serve. Instructors bring to the school programs the community-centered culture in which they are steeped at Destiny. At the end of each semester, Destiny also hosts a community event bringing together students from the different school programs. These events provide an opportunity for students to become visible in their communities and to develop a sense of connection across neighborhoods and schools.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Local and state policymakers should regard community-based youth arts programs as a key tool for responding to 21st century educational and civic challenges. We offer the following recommendations to support such programs and ensure their sustainability and accessibility to large numbers of community youth.

- *Local policymakers can work with state legislators to create and market incentives for artists to live and work in blighted neighborhoods (for example, live/work zoning, tax breaks, special-use districts, and enterprise zones) and strengthen blight ordinances that incentivize the creative use of commercial spaces.*
- *By working with local and regional arts commissions and councils, municipal governments can fund and create programs that foster partnerships between arts organizations, schools, and artists. Such programs can engage youth arts organizations in creating and exhibiting art that then engages the broader community in reusing and revitalizing underutilized urban spaces, including, for example, placing art in vacant storefronts, participating in mural design programs, and supporting other public art projects and events.*
- *Municipalities should invest in the creation of cultural spaces and youth arts organizations as resources for positive youth development and as community “hubs” where youth and their families can contribute to creating thriving communities and serve as meeting places for creative and cultural exchange (e.g., Hub San Francisco, Hub Berkeley¹).*
- *Community leaders should leverage the effective community engagement and youth development strategies that youth arts organizations employ to address issues of public safety and gang and gun violence. Youth arts organizations can serve socio-economically diverse populations, offer a variety of entry points that attract broad audiences providing opportunities to create cross-cultural and intergenerational links, and help break down barriers that create tensions that ultimately lead to violence.*

1. For more information, see <http://bayarea.the-hub.net>.

- *State legislators have an opportunity to bolster funding for arts enrichment programs during the school day and in afterschool and summer learning programs that effectively partner with local arts and youth development organizations that specialize in creative engagement. In Santa Fe, New Mexico, for example, legislators established a set-aside for arts funding in the schools. Similar state and federal initiatives provide critical funding to ensure the next generation has the skill set necessary to thrive in the creative economy and modern workforce.*

For More Information

ArtsEdSearch (www.artsedsearch.org) is the nation's one-stop shop for research and policy related to arts education. The national Arts Education Partnership developed ArtsEdSearch as a resource for policymakers and education leaders to better understand and articulate the role that arts education can play in preparing students to succeed in the changing contexts of the 21st century. ArtsEdSearch currently includes summaries of close to 200 research studies, syntheses of the major findings of these studies, and implications of the collected research for educational policy.

Websites

Destiny Arts Center; www.destinyarts.org

Arts Education Partnership; www.aep-arts.org

ArtsEdSearch; www.artsedsearch.org

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lauren Stevenson is the principal at Junction Box Consulting, where she specializes in research, policy, and program development connecting arts, education, and youth engagement. The former senior associate for research at the national Arts Education Partnership, Stevenson has been a leader in arts and education for over 15 years and is the co-author of two books on the arts and educational change. She holds a PhD in education administration and policy analysis from Stanford University.

Cristy Johnston Limón is the executive director of Destiny Arts Center in Oakland, California. The founding director of a San Francisco community development organization, she piloted San Francisco's Neighborhood Marketplace Initiative, leveraging public policy and funding to create working partnerships between schools, civic organizations, churches, businesses, and property owners to revitalize blighted commercial districts by engaging local artists, residents, and youth. She is formerly a state legislative aide and served on the board of San Francisco's Japanese Community Youth Council. A native of San Francisco of Guatemalan parents, an early music and dance education in her urban community sparked a lifelong interest in civic engagement, community development, youth, and the arts.

Tilly Reclosado grew up in Oakland, and started taking classes at Destiny Arts when she was 5 years old. She has attended several Bay Area public and charter schools and became an active member (dancer, writer, actor, and performer) of the Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company in high school. From student to teacher, Reclosado now serves as an assistant instructor in hip-hop classes at Destiny's main site. She is also now attending San Francisco State University.

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