

Abstract

Previous research has shown that participating in the arts may increase our empathy, helping behavior, and sense of connection to others. This body of research suggests that taking arts education may, over time, lead to the development of a belief system that increasingly prioritizes working towards a healthy and just society. The current study used propensity score methodology to examine the association between taking arts classes in 12th grade and pro-social values, including the perceived importance of correcting inequality and helping others, both at the end of high school and 8 years after high school. The data were from the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002) and consisted of N = 16,197 students in 751 schools who were in 10th grade in 2002. In the first stage of the analysis, the propensity for each student to take arts education was modeled, so that potential differences between students who did and did not elect to take arts education could be balanced in the main analysis. The predictions from this model were incorporated as inverse probability of treatment weights (IPW) into analyses that examined the relationship between arts education and social values. It was hypothesized that a positive relationship between taking arts classes and pro-social values would be observed. After controlling for baseline 10th-grade social values and propensity for students to self-select into arts classes, taking arts classes in 12th grade was a significant predictor of social values both at the end of 12th grade and 8 years after 12th grade. Subsequent subgroup analyses showed that this relationship is not impacted by gender but may be impacted by ethnicity, household income, and previous arts education. A sensitivity analysis showed that the analysis was sensitive to unmeasured confounding. The results have practical implications, particularly at a time that our society is cutting arts education budgets. The arts may be a resource for developing empathetic

individuals with pro-social values, and a reduction in arts education may have subtle, unexplored impacts on the overall health of our society.