

Important Methodological/Conceptual Challenges in Arts and Child Development Research

- 1) Pressure to show *ancillary* (non arts) benefits of the arts
- 2) *Associations* between arts participation and outcomes vs. *causal effects* of the arts
 - a) Random assignment to arts groups needed for controlled experiment
 - b) Quasi-experimental comparisons of naturally existing groups – Selection problem – need to understand and control selection factors
- 3) The need for good, reliable, and valid *measures* of arts engagement and artistic outcomes and processes.
- 4) *General any arts* vs. experience with *specific art form* (music, dance, drama, visual art)
- 5) *General child outcomes* (academic performance, adjustment) vs. specific outcomes/domains (EF, working memory, emotion knowledge, self-efficacy, reading, social skills)
- 6) Need for *longitudinal studies* getting at bi-directional change over time b/w arts and child skills
- 7) *Qualitative* understanding needed of what is actually going on during artistic experiences, and careful *experimental work* to isolate *mechanisms* of arts effects
- 8) Dealing with and understanding the meaning of *null findings*



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The George Mason Arts Research Center: A Multi-Disciplinary, Multi-Method Approach to Studying Arts Education Outcomes

<https://masonarc.gmu.edu>



PI's and Keystone Studies:



Dr. Thalia Goldstein
Applied Developmental Psychology

*An Experimental, Mechanistic Inquiry
into How Theatre May Lead to Higher
Social Skills*



Dr. Adam Winsler
Applied Developmental Psychology
Human Development and Family Science

*Selection into, and Academic Benefits from,
Arts Courses in Middle and High School Among
Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth in Miami*



Dr. Kim Sheridan
Art Education - Visual and Perf. Arts
Educational Psychology - Education
and Human Development

*Identifying Autonomy-Supportive
Pedagogy in Visual Art Studio
Classes Through a Qualitative Lens*



Activities

- 3 Keystone Studies
- Active website with resources - <https://masonarc.gmu.edu>
- Arts and Child Development Blog
- Biennial Conference for Arts Researchers, Artists, Community Members (Starting Fall 2019)
- Arts Partners:



Winsler et al. - Selection into, and Academic Benefits from, Arts Courses in Middle and High School among Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth in Miami

- Miami School Readiness Project
 - ($n = 31,332$; 61% Latino, 32% Black, 55% ELL, 81% in poverty) from pre-K through 6-8th grades.
- 40% took some kind of arts elective course in middle school
 - Music = 23%, Dance = 7%, Drama = 9%, Visual art = 9%
- Black students, males, students with disabilities, those previously retained, and those not English proficient had *reduced* odds of taking the arts
- Children with stronger social, behavioral, language, cognitive, and motor skills at age 4, and stronger academics in 5th grade were *more* likely to enroll in arts-related courses.
- Students with exposure to an arts elective in middle school subsequently had higher GPAs, math and reading test scores, and decreased odds of school suspension



Winsler et al. - Selection into, and Academic Benefits from, Arts Courses in Middle and High School among Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Youth in Miami

Now following the students through High School to see:

- a) how many students persist in the arts in high school
- b) what factors predict persistence in the arts
- c) whether the same selection effects and positive outcomes for the arts seen for middle school remain true for grades 9-12.

