



THE ROLE OF EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

Childrens' participation in extracurricular activities has been shown to be associated with increased academic performance and social-emotional skills. Further, participation in extracurriculars more closely correlates with career success than grades. An even better indicator of school performance and other child developmental outcomes, however, can perhaps be derived from looking at a child's extracurricular profile or the collection of activities that the child is primarily involved in. This article examines the impact of a child's extracurricular profile on their development including academic, behavioural, and health outcomes from students in British Columbia and New York State.

Extracurricular activities (ECAs) can be defined as organized, often recurrent, activities occurring outside of the classroom (1). For children and families, involvement in ECAs is voluntary, though students' participation in ECAs often correlates to higher levels of academic achievement and transferable skills (1,2). Students who participate in ECAs tend to have better test scores in subjects involving science and math, broadly referred to as STEM subjects, lower drop-out rates, and higher career success (2,3,4). Additionally, students who participate in ECAs tend to have a more optimistic outlook on academics, and report higher levels of self-awareness (2). ECAs provide students with the opportunity to develop social skills such as communication and trust while also providing them with a sense of belonging (2). Such leadership skills often translate to being more likely to take on leadership positions in the workplace, thus earning higher salaries than peers (2). However, the relationship between participation in ECAs and developmental outcomes is nuanced as the type of ECAs that students are primarily involved in, ECA profiles, can provide an even better indicator of academic and behavioural outcomes. (5) This paper examines two studies, one in British Columbia and one in New York State;

looking at the impact of ECA profiles on academic, behavioural and health outcomes (1,5). The focus of both papers is primarily children in middle childhood (age 6-12 years) as this is a key developmental stage between childhood and early adolescence and a time in which many behaviours are shaped (1).

In the first study, following a survey conducted on 27,121 4th grade students in British Columbia, Canada, asking about their involvement in extracurricular activities and wellbeing; four different ECA profiles were identified among students: those who did not engage in ECAs, those who engaged in all ECAs, those who engaged in individual ECAs (ie. educational ECAs, the arts, individual sports, etc), and those who engaged in sports (individual or team) (1). The results showed that students involved in all ECAs or sports reported the highest positive physical and mental health outcomes (1). No significant difference was found regarding wellbeing between those who did not participate in ECAs and those who mainly engaged in individual ECAs (1). Thus, this study shows that there is not always an association between involvement in ECAs and beneficial outcomes. Participation in certain extracurriculars can lead to improved behavioural and health outcomes, thus understanding these links can be helpful for stakeholders to make informed decisions to support a child's development.

Another study, completed in the United States, looked at the effect of six ECA profiles on academic and behavioural outcomes (5). Here, 2,495 middle school students in upstate New York were classified into six ECA profiles: a "no activity" group, a "highly involved group", a sports group, a church group, a school and community clubs group, and a community clubs and sports group (5). Multiple measures were then collected from the profiles such as grade point average (GPA), attendance, and suspension histories (5). Surveys were then used to collect other psychosocial measures (5). It was found that those who were involved in some form of ECA

had a higher GPA on average than those who were not (5).

However, out of the 6 activity profiles, those involved in sports, the church, or a wide variety of activities respectively tended to have the highest GPAs (5). Problematic behaviours such as school suspensions, delinquency, and drug use were higher amongst the community clubs and sports group and the school and community clubs group compared to the other ECA profiles determined, including the uninvolved group(5). Thus, while there are many benefits to participating in ECAs, this study suggests that participation in certain extracurriculars may also lead to undesired behaviours (5).

The two studies were chosen for further examination here due to their relevance to the topic and age of interest, the large sample sizes as well as their exploration of ECA profiles on various outcome measures. The study completed in British Columbia may also be generalizable, given a Canadian context while the second study, despite being conducted in the United States with a smaller sample, also explored the effect of ECAs on problem behaviours (1,5). Overall, it can be stated that while participation in ECAs, for the most part, leads to positive future outcomes, a better indicator of both positive and negative future outcomes can be derived from looking at specific ECA profiles that a student takes part in. Understanding these associations between different ECA profiles and academic achievement and behaviours can allow parents and teachers, and other community members to encourage children to participate in activities which would be in their best interest (5). Additionally, extracurricular-based interventions for delinquent children can be an interesting area for further exploration. In Dutch adults, the use of a restorative method such as assigning offenders community service hours or enrolling them in a rehabilitative program has been shown to reduce recidivism or the recurrence of offence (6). Results from a systematic review looking at the effectiveness of a restorative method in juvenile offenders suggested that a restorative method may have either no additional benefit compared to normal justice procedures or a slight advantage when both the offender and the victim are taken into account (7). However, the systematic review only included four randomized control trials and thus, had insufficient data to provide any strong assertions (6). Further research on the effectiveness of restorative methods, particularly ones which are extracurricular-based (such as community service) would be necessary for greater certainty. In general, it is important to recognize the complexity of this research and be cautious towards assumptions given that outcomes can be greatly variable between children and cultures.

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