CultureCase

Music lessons associated with improved test scores for Science, Maths and English

This research was conducted by **Martin Guhn, Scott D. Emerson**, and **Peter Gouzouasis** at **The University of British Columbia, Canada**

Summary

This study is based on data from more than 110,000 public school students in Canada. It examined the relationships between music education, which included ‘any participation, type of participation, music achievement, and engagement level’ and maths, science, and English exam results. It did this while controlling for other factors that might influence those test scores like prior achievement, cultural background and socio-economic status. The researchers discovered that ‘music participation was related to higher scores' on all the three subjects and 'these relationships were stronger for instrumental music than vocal music’

The more music courses that students took, the higher their exam scores

This was particularly true for instrumental music compared with vocal music. The authors surmise that this is because instrumental music courses make particular demands on a students’ brainpower, time, emotions and attention. They also involve different sorts of activities, with instrumental music requiring the student to learn musical notation. Such are these demands that the paper claims that ‘highly engaged instrumental music students were, on average, academically over one year ahead of their peers’.

The study used a very rich data set, although it does have limitations

The data was able to tell the researchers the specific type of music participation the course entailed ‘i.e. concert band, jazz band, concert choir’ as well as the ‘duration, number, and type of music courses taken’ by each student. However, they could not take account of parental involvement in the children’s education, nor did they know much about the personalities of the children themselves. The study was also not able to include students at private or independent schools.

Keywords

students **music** **Canada** **teenagers**

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