



WE ARE ALL MUSIC

FOUNDATION

Research Committee Report

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Subject: Case Study: Social and Emotional Learning in the Age of Covid

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Abstract

This paper examines how two organizations, Hello Insight and Guitars Over Guns, have teamed up to measure the impact of Guitars Over Guns' music mentoring programs on its participants and specifically through the lens of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and the Theory of Change. Both of these important concepts are described in the body of this document.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has had huge impacts on not only the young people whom Guitars Over Guns targets with its music mentoring, it has also impacted the way we measure the benefits that come from these programs. In addition to disruptions to time series data, many of the baseline conditions for Social and Emotional Learning have been completely altered in a world with deliberately high levels of personal isolation.

This paper highlights data collected on behalf of Guitars Over Guns for the period from January 4, 2021 to June 18, 2021. This paper will examine the metrics within the much larger Hello Insight study on Social and Emotional Learning that we feel have relevancy in this environment, and more importantly, demonstrate an improvement in the SEL skills of those participating in the survey, and how these improvements help prepare young people for the lives they have ahead of them.

Introduction

When the new decade began, few could have anticipated the huge disruptions and personal tragedies brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the terrible loss experienced by too many families to count, young people were severely impacted by cancelled in-person teaching and the varyingly successful attempts by schools and families to adapt to an online world if they were lucky, and significant isolation from friends, peers and mentors for those who were not.

Music, arts and sports programs for youth have all suffered over the past two years, and yet there are striking examples of where organizations rose to the challenge posed by the pandemic and all the ways we have had to adapt to it. These organizations have helped their constituencies thrive in an otherwise difficult world. We highlight how one of WAAM's Power of Music Grantees, Guitars Over Guns, has attempted to measure the ways they have improved the lives of the young people participating in its music mentoring program. By working with the research firm Hello Insight, Guitars Over Guns has been able to collect data in a highly automated way that is highly tailored to evaluating progress on metrics that are directly tied to improvements in Social and Emotional Learning.

Guitars Over Guns

Guitars Over Guns' mission statement is to "offer students from our most vulnerable communities a powerful combination of music education and mentorship with professional musicians to help them overcome hardship, find their voice and reach their potential as tomorrow's leaders". Based in Miami, the organization was founded in 2008 and has so far served over 5,000 students in Miami and Chicago. The organization is extremely focused on data as well as scientifically and statistically reliable inputs that allow them to measure the positive impact they have had on their students. Of the thousands who have participated so far, over 94% are reported to have improved their grades, while over 90% reported being more active in school *as a result of their participation*.¹

To help Guitars Over Guns measure how they are meeting their foundational goals, the organization has teamed up with Hello Insight, a research boutique dedicated to scientifically measuring the impact on individuals (specifically young people) from various forms of Positive Youth Development. Positive Youth Development is "an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths."²

Hello Insight

Since its inception, Hello Insight has collected data on over 125,000 young people across 1,500 non-profit organizations working with youths in both Spanish and English. Many of these non-profits specifically target at risk young people and those who could potentially benefit from programs such as Guitars Over Guns. We reviewed the approach used by Hello Insight and found it compelling from both a statistical as well as a methodological perspective. We believe the metrics it uses to measure the impact for the young people targeted by Guitars Over Guns are compelling and offer real insight into how these kids' prospects for the future are being improved.

Summary of the Survey Participants

- 1) Just over 1/3 of Guitars Over Guns' current student body participated in Hello Insight's Survey (40 out of 105).
- 2) Minority populations are significantly overrepresented (95%).
- 3) Largest age group is 12–13-year-olds, which constitutes 72% of the participants; overall age range is from 9 to 18.

¹ <https://www.guitaroverguns.org/about/>

² From Youth.gov

- 4) Females are overrepresented (58%) while 32% of the participants identify as boys or young men.³

We believe that the sample biases toward girls and young women, pre-teens, and minorities do not affect the representativeness of the data for the target population at large. Moreover, since Guitars Over Guns' mission is to focus on at-risk young people, the data do show quite clearly that this cohort does indeed benefit from participating in Guitars Over Guns' programs.

Summary of Participant Capacities Examined by Hello Insight ^{4 5}

- 1) **Academic Self-Efficacy** – “Self-efficacy is a personal belief in one’s capability to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances.”⁶ Academic Self-Efficacy is an indication of how well students are navigating their educational environment, which is particularly relevant during this age of Covid, when normal educational routines were severely disrupted.
- 2) **Positive Identity** – which measures how people perceive themselves and at the same time how a person “addresses issues dealing with who that person is.”⁷ A positive self-image has been shown to have very direct links to how adolescents transition to adulthood.
- 3) **Social Skills** – “a set of learned abilities that enable an individual to interact competently and appropriately in a given social context. The most commonly identified social skills in Western cultures include assertiveness, coping, communication and friendship-making skills, interpersonal problem solving, and the ability to regulate one’s cognitions, feelings, and behavior.”⁸
- 4) **Contribution** – is the degree to which students interact with their environments and help to provide the group with a richer experience than had they not participated. This, too, has been closely linked to an easier transition to adulthood.
- 5) **Self-Management** – the taking responsibility for one’s own behavior and well-being. It is sometimes viewed as one of the social skills described above.

³ Totals do not add to 100% due to blank or other responses

⁴ Consistent with CASEL definitions of SEL

⁵ More information can be found at Hello Insight’s website: <https://helloinsight.org/what-we-measure>

⁶ “Academic Self-Efficacy: From Educational Theory to Instructional Practice”, by Anthony R. Artino, Jr.

⁷ “Positive Identity as a Positive Youth Development Construct: A Conceptual Review”, by Tsang, Hui and Law

⁸ American Psychological Association

Summary of Participant Experiences Evaluated by Hello Insight ⁹

In order to measure the Participant Capacities listed above, Hello Insight specifically focused on how students performed the following:

- 1) **Challenge Growth** - experience with an adult who encourages them to take risks and perform beyond their own expectations.
- 2) **Expand Interests** - experience with an adult who supports them to try new things, broaden their horizons, learn about other people's cultures and perspectives, and explore their own identities.
- 3) **Promote Peer Bonds** - experience with an adult who helps them work with peers in teams and groups, creating a safe space to learn with and from one another, exploring similarities and differences, and developing deep bonds and relationships.
- 4) **Engage Authentically** - experience with an adult who takes the time to get to know them by listening and understanding who they are — their cultural and lived experiences, their interests, and their passions.
- 5) **Manage Goals** - experience with an adult who assists them to set and manage goals that are important to them and that build upon their passions and interests.
- 6) **Share Power** - experience with an adult who ensures that their voices and opinions matter.

More on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social and Emotional Learning is a framework that focuses on developing skills outside of the core “reading, writing and arithmetic” curriculum that is designed to help students develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making and relationship skills. SEL goes by other names, has been around in various forms for a while now, and is practiced in varying degrees in many countries throughout the world. In the United States, SEL has been endorsed and promoted by a variety of groups, most notably CASEL (www.casel.org), which has focused attention on the science and research that underpins this teaching philosophy.

Significant research has been conducted on the efficacy of programs that focus on SEL, and **the body of knowledge so far clearly shows a positive impact between improving the Capacities**

⁹ From Hello Insight.

and Experiences (including those measured by Hello Insight) and future outcomes relating to success later in life, including graduation rates, overall health and wellness, risky behavior avoidance, future income potential and other measures of personal, individual success. And investments in SEL programs have also been shown to improve the metrics that are most closely associated with SEL success.

A meta study conducted by Joseph Durlak, Roger Weissberg, Allison Dymnicki, Rebecca Taylor and Kriston Schellinger entitled "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions"¹⁰ analyzed "programs involving 270,034 kindergarten through high school students. Compared to controls, SEL participants demonstrated significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance that reflected an 11-percentile-point gain in achievement. School teaching staff successfully conducted SEL programs. The use of 4 recommended practices for developing skills and the presence of implementation problems moderated program outcomes. The findings add to the growing empirical evidence regarding the positive impact of SEL programs. Policy makers, educators, and the public can contribute to healthy development of children by supporting the incorporation of evidence-based SEL programming into standard educational practice".¹¹

The Theory of Change

Hello Insight has postulated that "The Theory of Change" and Social and Emotional Learning are closely linked. Hello Insight's website states that **"If we ensure that all young people have caring adults (social capital) and quality programs that provide research-based PYD (positive youth development) experiences, they will develop SEL (short-term outcomes) proven to promote thriving in young people, including academic success, college readiness, career and workforce readiness, civic engagement, as well as health and well-being (long-term outcomes). As the data in HI SEL grows, this theory is constantly tested and retested, so that our community continues to learn about what works, for whom, and in what context."**

Metrics Linking Guitars Over Guns to Broader SEL-Improving Capacities and Experiences

The following summarize the Hello Insight report for Guitars Over Guns.

For **Core SEL**, 58% of participants showed improvement in this umbrella category. Core SEL is further broken down into the follow sub-categories:

¹⁰ <https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01564.x>

¹¹ Ibid.

Contribution, which measures a “young person’s desire to engage with and contribute to family, community, and society,” saw 38% of participants reporting improvement relative to the beginning of the measurement period.

Self-Management, which measures “the ability of a young person to regulate their emotions and behavior, take positive risks, and persist through life’s challenges,” saw 52% of participants reporting improvement.

Positive Identity, which measures a “young person's internal sense of who they are and confidence to explore the multiple facets of their identities,” saw **71%** of participants reporting improvement.

Academic Self-Efficacy, which measures a “young person's motivation and perceived mastery over their own learning, school performance, and potential to attain academic success,” saw a notable **76%** of participants reporting improvement.

Finally, **Social Skills**, which measures a “the ability of a young person to take others’ perspectives into account, and to develop a sense of caring and empathy,” saw 57% of participants reporting improvement.

Only one of the sub-categories, “contribution to family, community and society” was below 50%. In more normal times, we would expect this statistic to be above 50%, as well.

Hello Insight uses a “pre and post” data collection methodology which surveys students at the beginning of the measurement periods (for most metrics) and then again at the end. The one metric it will not measure on a “pre” basis is a self-assessment of skills, which tends to be distorted because “the student doesn’t know what he or she doesn’t know” at the outset of the program. Because these pre and post data occurred during the pandemic, some metrics are obviously distorted relative to their behavior in more “normal” times. In addition, Guitars Over Guns significantly changed its model over this time-period from largely in-person mentoring to remote, online instruction instead. These are significant changes in the environment in which Guitars Over Guns operates. **But despite these changes, it is clear that a significant portion of students being mentored by Guitars Over Guns was better off as a result of their participation.**

As we continue to see more data being collected and comparable time series data being generated, we can measure how these statistics evolve over time. Future research by WAAM will focus not only on snapshots like the one described in this paper, but also on baseline comparative data to show concretely how students, like those participating in Guitars Over Guns courses, are made better off than they otherwise would be had they never participated to begin with. With the development of tools and techniques like those pioneered by Hello Insight, we stand at the precipice of much better understanding of the types of music programs that materially and positively impact our youth.

Summary

Despite the many challenges that the Pandemic has created for not only the operations but also the measurement of success for these operations, it is notable that the statistics that both Guitars Over Guns and Hello Insight feel have relevancy have improved as much as they did. Particularly striking is the improvement of self-reported Positive Identity and Academic Self-Efficacy. In an environment where many young people were exposed to significant stresses and emotional challenges, as well as the difficulty many had in adapting to online studying, we feel this is particularly indicative of why Guitars Over Guns is such a great partner for WAAM. Moreover, Guitars Over Guns has been able to significantly expand its reach with the move to online mentoring, with a highly leverageable organization and infrastructure that can continue to grow well into the future. Future papers from WAAM will focus in greater detail on Social and Emotional Learning, and ways our Power of Music grantees are helping to improve the lives of our youth and futures generations.