

Arts-based activities could help toddlers' development

July 4 2013



Researchers have linked child happiness to interactive and arts-related activities.

(Medical Xpress)—Parents taking part in interactive and arts-related activities with their two and three-year-olds could help promote their happiness and development of everyday skills, a study by researchers at The Open University and Oxford University suggests.

The researchers found that child happiness, as reported by their parents,

was linked to how frequently the children were engaged in activities such as reading, storytelling, shopping, painting and doing arts and crafts.

In contrast, passive activities like looking at [picture books](#) or [watching television](#) brought no discernible benefits. Watching television appeared, in this analysis, to have a [negative impact](#) on child happiness that was statistically significant.

The results also suggested that more active activities may boost the development of a child's motor and social skills. For example, painting or engaging in arts and crafts could promote the development of movement skills, while reading, telling stories and singing had a significant impact on both talking ability and social skills. More passive activities did not appear to contribute to the development of these skills.

The researchers applied [economic models](#) to data drawn from the German Household Survey in the years 2007 to 2010. The data included responses from over 800 German parents about the happiness and wellbeing of their two and three-year-olds, the activities they took part in and their development of talking, movement, and social skills.

Professor Paul Anand of The Open University said: 'We applied standard economic tools to analyse children's wellbeing and development at a very early age. An [economic study](#) of very young children is relatively novel, but if our findings are replicated in other research, they could have significant implications for parenting education. It should allow us to reassess the role of arts in the development of skills and human potential.'

Dr Laurence Roope of the Health Economics Research Centre at Oxford University said: 'Our results suggest that parents may face difficult trade-offs with regard to time spent actively engaging with their children, versus providing for them materially via the labour market.'

'Of course parents can't engage their young children in these activities every hour of the day, but it is encouraging that time spent reading books to them, painting or joining in with a nursery rhyme could help their [development](#). It will be interesting to see whether similar results emerge for slightly older children and using other datasets.'

The researchers are presenting the results of their study, 'An Economic Analysis of Child Development and Happiness', at a conference on the economics of wellbeing at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-Universities conference in Paris today.

Provided by Oxford University

Citation: Arts-based activities could help toddlers' development (2013, July 4) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-07-arts-based-toddlers.html>

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