

# An Engaged Community-Academic Partnership to Promote Positive Youth Development

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## Abstract

In this paper, we discuss how we cultivated a sustainable community-academic partnership and describe how our community-based participatory research project, Bembé Drum and Dance, contributed to youth development. Bembé Drum and Dance is an Afro-Latino performing arts program based on the positive youth development theory. Thirteen children ages 9–13 participated in the ensemble. We used a multimethod descriptive design. Data were gathered using surveys, participant observation, and interviews. Increases in the Five Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring) were noted among youth, most notably in competence and confidence. Recognizing that the project belonged to the community and supporting this sense of ownership were imperative to the project's success. Forging and sustaining a community-academic partnership was a challenging and rewarding way to directly exchange knowledge and expertise among youth, adult community members, and academic partners and to contribute to the flourishing of young people.

Community-engaged research provides an inclusive learning environment where knowledge, expertise, power, respect, and responsibility are shared. All who contribute to the research effort become stakeholders in its success, and reap benefits from the research process and its outcomes (Carney et al., 2011; Green et al., 2001). Community-engaged research has the potential to support positive social change (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010), build community capacity, and improve public health (Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions, 2005; Gebbie et al., 2003; Green et al., 2001).

A growing body of knowledge focuses on the positive impact of arts-based interventions on community health and well-being (Clift, 2012). The expanding dialogue between arts and health professionals illuminates how creative arts can effectively encourage and equip people to develop leadership skills and adopt new roles and responsibilities in their communities (Cameron et al., 2013). As individuals gain technical and aesthetic knowledge through arts participation, they also benefit from the promotion of positive social and personal behaviors. On an individual level, the arts can inspire people to try new things, gain creative skills, and feel a sense of optimism about the future. At the community level, the arts bring people together around a common creative task, promoting constructive interactions among

community members and positive feelings about the community. Arts-based projects can be effective because they build on a community's existing strengths, resources, and assets, and they meet individuals where they are (Cameron et al., 2013; Clift, 2012). Arts-based methods are powerful research tools that enhance data collection, data analysis and dissemination of results. Employing arts-based methods encourages participants to express feelings and experiences, draws them into shared discovery and generation of knowledge, and provides a participant-centric way to share research findings with others.

For young people, arts-based programs nurture emotional, social, and academic development (Forrest-Bank et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2013; Mason & Chuang, 2001; Wright et al., 2014). Culturally based arts programs provide a unique outlet through which young people can engage in self-discovery and self-expression, gain self-esteem, and build empathy and a positive sense of identity (Ersing, 2009; Mason & Chuang, 2001). Artistic expression is also a powerful form of communication through which youth can connect with peers and adults (Ersing, 2009). In particular, public artistic productions, such as exhibits or recitals, empower youth to use their voices to share and engage with their communities (Villarruel et al., 2003; Wright et al., 2013).

Drumming, as an arts-based intervention to promote general well-being and mental health, has

been studied among groups of young people and adults. Most of the literature involves populations with specific conditions, such as substance use disorders, anxiety and depression, developmental disabilities, or histories of trauma (Hart, 2017). Several authors, however, have published papers describing drumming- and dance-focused interventions for populations of community-dwelling, healthy children. In one study of 101 youth, a weekly group drumming with counseling activities was used to promote positive social-emotional behavior. After 12 weeks, members of the intervention group had significantly fewer problems with depression, inattention, and anxiety compared to members of the control group (Ho et al., 2011). In a second study, 180 students in 19 primary and secondary schools in Australia participated in a 10-week drumming program designed to promote self-esteem and social competencies and to prevent substance abuse. Outcomes of this intervention included positive changes in participants' self-esteem, mood, group participation, relationships with peers and adults, focus and concentration, and emotional control (Wood et al., 2013). A third study focused on a 4-H group in California that provided an after-school Brazilian drum and dance program for youth. Participants reported improved feelings of belonging, self-esteem, personal discipline, and academic performance, and they engaged in fewer risk behaviors such as teen pregnancy, dropping out of high school, and gang involvement (Conklin-Ginop et al., 2012).

This paper describes our research with an Afro-Latino percussion and dance performance ensemble for youth. Program participants took drum and dance lessons, learned rhythms and songs, and studied music in a cultural context. The purposes of our study were twofold. Its first purpose was to cultivate a sustainable community-academic partnership as a foundation for community-based participatory research (CBPR) projects. Its second purpose was to evaluate the partnership's first CBPR project, Bembé Drum and Dance. We pursued two open-ended research questions: What is necessary to establish a sustainable community-academic partnership? How does participation in a culturally informed, arts-based intervention influence positive youth development?

## Methods

### *Design*

We employed a multimethod design in this descriptive, exploratory study, including

quasi-experimental and observational descriptive components. Informed consent was obtained from parents and assent was obtained from the participating children. Our study protocol was approved by the university's institutional review board.

### *Partnership Formation and Description of Intervention*

In 2015, Drs. Haglund and Belknap received an Innovation Fund Award through Marquette University for a collaborative project with Milwaukee Public Theatre (MPT). Concurrently, MPT received funding for Bembé Drum and Dance, an Afro-Latino percussion-based performing ensemble for Milwaukee's school-age youth. The director of MPT introduced the two researchers and the project directors and encouraged the development of our engaged community-academic partnership. Over the course of this first year, we collaborated on the research study. One researcher attended rehearsals regularly, learned to drum alongside the youth, made meaningful connections with youth and parents, and volunteered at performances.

Bembé Drum and Dance is based on the positive youth development (PYD) theory, an optimistic, strengths-based framework that emphasizes the developmental potential of young people through a focus on their intrinsic positive attributes (Lerner et al., 2005). PYD views youth as assets who are capable of making healthy choices and productively contributing to their families, schools, and communities. Youth are not seen as victims of their circumstances, nor are they considered to be problems that need to be fixed (National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth [NCFY], 2007; Roth et al., 1998). Given opportunities to build positive, supportive relationships with peers and caring adults, youth can become empowered to believe in their own potential for success, develop community-mindedness, and explore their roles as active participants and agents of change in society. Essentially, PYD theory aims to empower youth to thrive (NCFY, 2007). Interventions based on PYD theory aim to promote and sustain existing positive and protective behaviors among youth participants; interventions do not focus on preventing risky or undesired behaviors. In line with the principles of PYD, Bembé Drum and Dance promotes musical performance skills, cultivates assertive collaboration skills, and encourages affirmative cultural empathy and identity exploration.

Bembé Drum and Dance is housed within a K4 through eighth grade community school located in a neighborhood with a high rate of poverty. Children who attend the school join the ensemble at the beginning of the academic year and rehearse after school. The ensemble is led by teaching artists and staff. Teaching artists are also professional musicians and dancers. The curriculum includes Afro-Latino rhythms, songs, percussion instruments, and ethnomusicology. Programming consists of year-round practice and performances, short-term music exploration workshops, and intergenerational music therapy with community elders. Bembé Drum and Dance aims to help students form positive, experiential associations with Afro-Latino musical culture and, in turn, become cultural ambassadors in their communities and the greater city.

### Youth Participants

Thirteen children ages 9–13 ( $M = 10.4 (\pm 1.2)$ ) participated in the ensemble. The majority were in fourth and fifth grades ( $n = 10$ ; 77%), with three (23%) older children in middle school. Nearly half were girls ( $n = 6$ ; 46%) and seven were boys (54%). All of the children in the ensemble reported some Latinx ethnicity. Nearly all of the children ( $n = 12$ ; 92%) reported participating in at least one other after-school activity, with the majority taking part in academic enrichment programs ( $n = 11$ ; 85%) or arts-related activities such as band or choir ( $n = 8$ ; 62%). Five children (38%) reported participating in team sports.

### Data Collection

We collected data via surveys, participant observation, informal interviews, and essays. Children completed a demographic form and surveys that measured their self-confidence, hopefulness, and ethnic identity both at the beginning of the program (pretests) and 6 months later (posttests). We used the Self-Concept–Individual Protective Factors Index to measure changes in participants' self-confidence (Phillips & Springer, 2005). This 12-item survey asked respondents to evaluate a series of items and indicate the degree to which each item matched how they felt about themselves using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (NO!) to 4 (YES!). We used the Children's Hope Scale to measure changes in participants' hopefulness (Snyder et al., 1997). Respondents were asked how often they would say each of six statements about themselves on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*None of the time*) to 6 (*All*

*of the time*). We used the Ethnic Identity–Teen Conflict Survey to measure participants' respect for diversity and ethnic pride (Bosworth & Espelage, 2005). Respondents were asked how often they would say each of four statements on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 4 (*Always*).

We recorded audio of brief, informal interviews with each participant. Interview questions prompted students to describe their experiences and feelings toward Bembé Drum and Dance and what they gained through their participation. Six children completed a short written essay describing the benefits of their participation, the impact of participation on their own identity, and their feelings about people whose families came from other Latin American countries.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using R 3.6.1 (R Core Team, 2019). A Wilcoxon signed-rank test was performed to compare the group's pre- and posttest survey scores. As a nonparametric test, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test does not assume that the outcome variables are continuous, and it has no distributional assumptions. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test tests the null hypothesis of equal-rank scores across time points with less assumptions than a parametric test (such as paired *t*-test), providing a null hypothesis test better suited to small samples and noncontinuous measures (like the ones present in this study). The correlation coefficient (*r*) was presented as the measure of effect size (Cohen, 1992; Tomczak & Tomczak, 2014). The effect size measures the size of the differences between the pretests and the posttests.

Qualitative data was analyzed using a reading guide which outlined the Five Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion) of the PYD framework (Lerner, 2004). One of the researchers and a graduate research assistant separately analyzed the data by using the reading guide to identify passages that exemplified the Five Cs. Any discrepancies were resolved using consensus.

## Results

### Partnership

In response to the first research question, lessons emerged regarding the establishment of a sustainable community-academic partnership. Two key factors helped initiate the partnership: an intermediary who had relationships with the both the community and academic partners introduced the groups to each other, and both partners

brought initial grant funds to the partnership. Both partners acknowledged and understood that the project belonged to the community and that this sense of community ownership was imperative to the project's success. Researchers followed the lead of the community participants rather than expecting that researchers could, should, or would control the project. The program directors, staff, and participants (children and their parents) all became invested in the research, recognizing that their participation would both benefit them personally and benefit the program. Moreover, support from school administrators—particularly the support of the school principal, who not only attended practices and performances but also joined students in performing—helped the children perceive the value and importance of the program, which further sustained their engagement in and commitment to it. Areas for potential friction in the partnership were a lack of trust between partners, due to not have prior experience working together; differences in professional and discipline priorities; and the need to negotiate financial transactions between a university with a large, bureaucratic (slow) financial system and a small, nonprofit community organization.

#### *Participation in the Percussion Ensemble*

Children responded positively to participation in the Bembé Drum and Dance program. In addition to learning technical drumming and musical skills, the children gained other life skills as a result of the program. They frequently spoke about their increased knowledge of both their own and other cultures. When we asked how they might describe the program to friends to convince them to join, six children highlighted the musical skills, cultural and historical knowledge, and socialization opportunities they gained through participation. In order to convince his friends to join, one 11-year-old boy stated, “I would tell

them to come, because it's very fun. You meet new people and get to learn about new cultures. I would also tell them it can help them understand music better.”

#### *Changes in Measured Attributes*

Participants' scores on the self-confidence, hopefulness, and ethnic-identity surveys were computed as the sum of their responses to each question (see Table 1). For all three surveys, high pretest scores within this small sample of children likely inhibited measurement of significant changes from pretest to posttest.

The range of possible scores on the self-confidence survey was 12 to 48, with higher scores indicating higher self-confidence. In this study, the range of self-confidence scores on the pretest was 34 to 42, and the range on the posttest was 28 to 43. The change in self-confidence scores was not significant. The effect size indicated a small effect ( $r = 0.18$ ), showing that the change between the two tests differed by 0.18 standard deviations. Taken together with the nonsignificant changes from pretest to posttest, this small effect size can be attributed to response variability instead of a systematic change and does not provide evidence that participation had an effect on self-confidence.

The range of possible scores on the Hope Survey was 6 to 36, with higher scores indicating higher feelings of hope (Snyder et al., 1997). Among the children within this study, the range of hope scores on the pretest was 26 to 35, and on the posttest the range was 21 to 36. There was no significant difference between the pretest scores and the posttest scores on the Hope Survey, and the effect size was negligible ( $r = 0.09$ ).

The range of possible scores on the ethnic-identity survey was 4 to 20, with higher scores indicating higher respect for diversity and higher self-ethnic pride (Bosworth & Espelage, 2005). Among the children within this study, the

**Table 1.** Changes in Pretest and Posttest Surveys

Name of Survey	Pretest mean (SD)	Posttest mean (SD)	Z-value	p-value	Effect size
Self-confidence	38.32 (2.26)	37.25 (4.29)	$Z = 0.66$	$p = .51$	$r = .18$
Hopefulness	30.1 (3.48)	29.46 (5.32)	$Z = 0.31$	$p = .76$	$r = .09$
Ethnic identity	18.8 (.92)	18.92 (.86)	$Z = -1$	$p = .32$	$r = .28$

range of ethnic-identity scores on the pretest was 17 to 20, and on the posttest the range was 17 to 20. There were no significant differences between the pretest scores and the posttest scores. There was a small effect size ( $r = 0.28$ ), however this effect size was attributed to changes in the scores of two participants; 11 out of 13 participants had no rank change (i.e., changes from pretest to posttest scores were equal to the hypothesized value of 0). This small effect size thus does not provide evidence that participation had an effect on ethnic identity. The children's high scores on the ethnic-identity survey at pretest indicated a strong sense of ethnic identity. When asked how often they would say they were proud to be a member of their racial/cultural group, all but two participants responded *Always*.

Even though the ethnic-identity survey did not detect changes in participants' sense of ethnic identity, the children's free written responses on the demographic form did indicate changes in their sense of ethnic identity. In the pretest surveys, all students but one identified their ethnic/cultural roots, but no students provided any detail about how they felt about their ethnic identity. In contrast, in the posttest surveys, some students expressed pride in their ethnicity/culture with statements such as, "I'm proud, happy of my culture," and "I am proud to be Mexican!" Others provided greater detail about their ethnic/cultural backgrounds. One 9-year-old girl wrote on the pretest that she had mixed heritage: She knew of her Mexican American background but was unsure of the rest of her cultural/ethnic background. On the posttest questionnaire, however, she was able to specify three additional ethnic/cultural groups that were part of her ethnic identity. Our findings suggest that the children did gain greater awareness of and pride in their ethnicity and culture over the course of the study.

Moreover, through interactions with the children and their parents, we became aware of one child's struggle with self-identity. Prior to joining Bembé Drum and Dance, this child had expressed concerns about having more African features compared to the other children at school. After taking part in the program, this child began expressing pride in their African descent and family heritage. In the final interview, this child reported a greater sense of identification with Afro-Latino roots, saying, "It makes me feel like I participate more in my Puerto Rican and African culture. It makes me feel more African and Puerto

Rican." This child also proclaimed, "Now instead of having a birthday party, I want to go to Puerto Rico to see how they dress and what their life is like." This child's response reflected a meaningful increase in positive ethnic and self-identity.

#### *Changes in the Five Cs*

Participation in the ensemble contributed to increases in all Five Cs. The most evidence for change was in competence and confidence.

**Competence.** We defined competence as a positive view of one's abilities in four domains: social, academic, cognitive, and vocational (Lerner, 2004). The children took great pride in the musical skills they gained. They enthusiastically spoke of the rhythms, songs, and drum-playing techniques they learned, and they took advantage of every opportunity to show off their knowledge of the instruments. They took pleasure in sharing the cultural and historical knowledge they gained during their time in the program, specifically recounting things they had learned about African history and cultural traditions. Several children described their ability to apply historical knowledge in the classroom. One 11-year-old boy recounted, "In social studies ... if they ask a question, I'll raise my hand up. Like we were talking about slavery and I knew a lot about it because here in Bembé we learned about it."

Despite their young age, the children easily identified how the skills they learned were helping them in other areas of their lives, both in and out of academic spaces. Patience, discipline, teamwork, and an increased ability to deal with anger and listen to others were among the newly gained or improved skills that they cited. One of the youngest girls in the group, age 9, reported, "Being in Bembé Drum and Dance helped me to listen more in class, do my homework, and pay attention to my family." Another girl explained, "Music is something that can help you learn patience. When I started this, math turned better for me because it helped me get my anger [frustration] out." Three children specifically spoke of how learning the rhythms helped them to gain focus, with one commenting, "Bembé has helped me focus more because we have to focus to our rhythms and it helps me focus on my work." This increased focus was also useful outside of the classroom; one of the older boys in the group mentioned, "Every time I play soccer, I have a beat where the ball is."



Participants also exhibited gains in social competence, evidenced by the children's tendency to refer to one another as a group and to value making decisions as a group. As one 11-year-old girl pointed out, "I feel like it's like a family... If we didn't feel that way we couldn't agree on things, and we'd always have arguments and we wouldn't choose which songs would be best for the performances." In addition, they demonstrated patience with one another in practice sessions, waiting for their turns to drum and not getting angry when group members made mistakes.

The children also vocalized ideas about future careers and demonstrated their intent to exercise leadership skills with comments like "I really want to help other people learn music now that I know how to play it," and "Now I know how to play the drums and sing I could have my own band!" One 10-year-old girl talked about the pressure she felt as performances approached and how her ability to handle that pressure helped her build confidence and courage. She noted, "That will help me a lot during high school." At only 10 years old, this child was able to describe how her newly attained skills would be useful in the future.

**Confidence.** We defined *confidence* as an internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy (Lerner, 2004). This excerpt from observation notes describes visible signs of the children's confidence:

When I [KH] attended the ensemble practices, I observed that the children did not shy away from opportunities to show off their musical skills or perform solos, regardless of their age or gender. In addition, the children described a sense of triumph and accomplishment after performing, reflecting increased self-worth and self-efficacy.

In an interview, one 10-year-old girl explained, "After I drum, I feel like I am just free to do anything! I feel like I can play in front of anybody and not be like nervous or shy." Although at times participants did speak of the pressure to get their songs right, their confidence grew when they overcame these challenges. Two boys spoke to this. One 11-year-old said, "Sometimes we don't get our rhythms right, but then once we get it right, it feels good because we practiced for it and we got it." A 13-year-old said, "There was a lot of weight taken off my shoulders because I practiced a lot and I didn't want to mess up but then once I went through it, it's all good." Receiving positive feedback from audience members also helped group members increase their confidence. One girl recounted, "I feel proud because many people

come up to me and say that I did really good." One child described how his involvement made him feel better about his cultural heritage, proclaiming, "Playing in Bembé makes me feel good that I'm Puerto Rican because it's really fun and interesting."

**Connection.** We defined *connection* as positive, bidirectional bonds with people and institutions (Lerner, 2004). The children demonstrated positive, healthy relationships with the teaching artists and staff, one another, and the community. During practices, the children watched one another to keep each other on track. In addition, they accepted the researchers' presence at their practices and performances without question, interacting with us and including us as members of the group. The children spoke positively about their relationship with the percussion teaching artist saying that he was "funny" and "nice" but also recognizing that he held high expectations for them in terms of learning and practicing drumming. One child described how the instructor became stricter as their performance neared "so we can do better." The children worked hard to receive positive feedback and reinforcement from the teaching artist.

The children also spoke positively of their relationships with their peers and their experience playing as a group. Some liked the fact that they could join friends in Bembé Drum and Dance, while others were pleased that they made new friends through the program. They frequently spoke of their achievements not as individual triumphs but as group successes. For instance, one boy explained, "I think we are all equal. We don't all learn at the same pace, but we all learn at the same time." The children acknowledged that their group worked hard to achieve good performances. After their performances, everyone felt accomplished, proud of the music they played together and pleased with the praise they received from the audiences. One of the youngest participants stated, "I like that we get to drum together as a group. I like when we play together because we sound really good together." An 11-year-old participant eloquently summarized his feeling of connectedness, saying, "It's like a family to me, we feel connected when we play and when we lay our hands on the drum, we feel as one."

### Character

We defined *character* as respect for rules, a sense of right and wrong, and integrity (Lerner, 2004). Overall, the children displayed respect for the teaching artists and staff, researchers and for

each other. Girls and boys appeared to be treated equally. Specifically, two girls described equitable gender roles in the group, proclaiming that people of all ages and genders can be drummers: “There are different people, it doesn’t just have to be one grade or just boys or just girls and it doesn’t matter [their gender].” One 10-year-old boy said that what he enjoyed most about the group was that “people in the group treat me right and they are respectful.” Even when children made mistakes, their peers did not criticize or make fun of them. Exemplifying this attitude, a boy in eighth grade said, “We need to respect the drummers too, even though they messed up, you can still praise them for what they did.”

In addition, the children displayed an understanding of morality when they discussed the African slave trade, recognizing that this was a cruel way to treat human beings. In one young man’s reflection, he explained that “they treated them wrong just because of their skin color...it made me think about how things were back then, how people used to think. It wasn’t really fair to be mistreated because of your skin color or race.” Several children shared this understanding of right and wrong.

**Caring.** We defined *caring* as a sense of sympathy and empathy for others (Lerner, 2004). Several of the children sympathized with the “tough times” that people from other cultures went through during periods of enslavement or depression. They described how people used music to counter challenges in their lives. The girls empathized with African women who were enslaved. One specifically stated, “[Among] African women, there was depression and they got through it by drumming and they made all different songs. If I were going through a depression like that I would like sit down and drum and try to forget about everything and just be in my own world.”

The children also demonstrated caring through their public performances. One young girl spoke of how there was a woman in the audience who appeared sad, but “when we started playing, she got so happy.” The girl explained how the anger she herself was feeling before that concert went away after seeing that woman’s response, and she felt “super excited and happy that [the audience] loved the music and the cultures.” After a different performance at a senior center, the children said, “I felt happiness,” “I felt love,” and “I felt good because [the seniors] were happy and loved that we were there.”

## Discussion

The success of this engaged community-academic partnership is supported by the partners’ deep commitment to the community’s children and families. Support from school administrators, who not only welcomed Bembé Drum and Dance to the school but also provided a secure time and consistent location for the program to take place, was essential to the program’s success. Research has found that administrative support is key to the successful implementation of community-academic partnerships and interventions in school settings within disadvantaged urban communities (Mendelson et al., 2013). Benefits of the community-academic partnership to Bembé Drum and Dance include valuable, consistent, and committed volunteers who dig in and support the existing needs of the program; access to health professionals and health-related research to enhance the curriculum; intergenerational connection between college students and faculty and the participating youth; a meaningful financial investment in the program and community; and the opportunity for youth in Bembé Drum and Dance to educate the university community on Afro-Latino history and culture through a strengths-based model of performance. The continued partnership also allows Bembé Drum and Dance and university students to collaborate on publications and present at conferences, reach new audiences, and make meaningful and valuable connections with other presenters and attendees, who may remain in contact and continue to support the program. The drum and dance performances are a form of dissemination in which the children demonstrate the results of their participation and share their knowledge of music, culture, and connection with their audiences.

This partnership yields many benefits to the university community, including the opportunity to invest in and support a vulnerable community and to make a difference in the lives of children and their families. Researchers gain trust and welcome access to a community that has traditionally been resistant to research participation. Because Bembé involves a year-round commitment, it allows researchers to create a long-term connection with children and community members. The partnership helps to break down “ivory tower” barriers between the university and the community. Finally, the university also gains a valuable opportunity for students to learn and serve.

*Regarding Youth Development*

Bembé Drum and Dance gave children an opportunity to learn drumming and teamwork skills. The children experienced and expressed increased pride in their cultural and ethnic identities. As in other arts-based interventions based on the PYD theory, Bembé staff and artists nurtured the developmental assets inherent in youth participants and helped to forge strong connections among young people, adults, and the community (Ersing, 2009; Forrest-Bank et al., 2016). The children perceived themselves as a cohesive group, and several of them referred to the ensemble as a family. They demonstrated effective teamwork and social skills and spoke of how their academic and cognitive competence improved as a result of participation in the program. Our results included qualitative increases in competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Other researchers found increases in anger management, academic efficacy and social competence, and decreases in depression their studies of adolescents participating in cultural and expressive arts programs (Ersing, 2009; Forrest-Bank et al., 2016).

*Limitations*

Several limitations may have affected our findings. The study's small convenience sample limited statistical significance and generalizability. The participants' pretest scores were generally high, suggesting that a ceiling effect may have prevented a meaningful increase in scores. The use of self-report data and social desirability may have introduced bias to our study findings. As is often the case with arts-based interventions, a convenience sample may have resulted in self-selection bias.

**Conclusion**

Forging and sustaining community-academic partnerships can be challenging. These partnerships, however, provide an avenue through which the methods and results of community-based initiatives can be included in the literature and a way for academics to directly exchange knowledge and expertise with communities. Bembé Drum and Dance is an example of a vibrant, dynamic means of engaging young people, families, and communities to achieve a wide variety of outcomes and ultimately to facilitate human flourishing.

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