

Destination ImagiNation Students Tops in Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Major University Study Concludes

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These kids think outside the classroom

CHERRY HILL, NJ – A comprehensive evaluation by researchers at the University of Virginia provides evidence that students participating in team-based problem solving competitions with Destination ImagiNation (DI) exhibit stronger skills than non-DI students in applying critical and creative thinking to reach innovative solutions to complicated challenges.

“On measures of creative and critical thinking, students who participated in the DI program outperformed comparable control participants across the results of the evaluation,” reports Tracy C. Missett, co-author of the study, along with Dr. Carolyn M. Callahan and Dr. Holly Hertberg-Davis of the University of Virginia’s Curry School of Education.

“We triangulated and looked across a variety of areas, and all of those areas did show statistically significant differences between DI participants and the control participants,” said Ms. Missett. “When you run the scores, you find that these differences were not likely to be just a matter of chance.” Specific instruments measured the participants’ abilities to develop original ideas and be flexible in creative thinking, as well as their ability to evaluate information, make value judgments about the information presented, and come to decisions based on what they know.

Using the Cornell Critical Thinking Test, the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking, and a creative performance task, researchers in late 2010 assessed DI and non-DI middle-school student performance in Virginia, Illinois, Texas and California, where DI has well-developed programs. The independent evaluation and study was conducted at the request of Destination Imagination Inc. (www.idodi.org)

“We asked the University of Virginia to perform this research because school administrators need evidence-based research to support their funding allocations,” said Chuck Cadle, M.Ed., CEO of the non-profit Destination Imagination Inc.

The largest team-based, after-school creative problem solving and critical thinking program for youth in the world, Cherry Hill, NJ-based Destination Imagination Inc. bridges the gap between test-taking proficiencies learned in schools and the requirements for thought-based solutions for success in the real world.

In the 2010-2011 challenge year, the flagship program Destination ImagiNation attracted more than 100,000 youth worldwide to take part in after-school problem solving team challenge experiences. More than 8,000 were judged best in local and regional tournaments to earn a place at the Global Finals competition at the University of Tennessee May 25-28.

Additional Findings and Conclusions

The University of Virginia study assessed the creative and critical thinking capabilities of participants already in DI programs and compared their scores to a control group of non-DI participants. In order to more fully determine whether participation in Destination ImagiNation actually has the effect of increasing abilities in critical thinking, creative problem solving and innovation, additional program impacts would have to be measured through a pre- and post-test experimental design including testing before a student enters DI, as well as after their participation, and then comparing measured outcomes against a set of control students, the researchers concluded.

“The fact that we have a comparison group, and the fact that we looked at students from a variety of angles and they all seemed to triangulate on making a difference, is a positive angle, but it is not a perfect experimental study,” commented Dr. Callahan.

Dr. Callahan said the study team is interested in their findings because there is minimal research on programs like DI and the difference they can make in student achievement, “and this is a first step in gathering that kind of data.”

Dr. Callahan and Ms. Missett defined the study results as “promising,” and recommended more thorough future research to provide more evidence-based conclusions about the effects of DI’s programs.

For more information, please visit http://www.idodi.org/10-11downloads/2011di_program_evaluation_report.pdf

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