CultureCase

Intensive visual arts education improves children's creativity and self-efficacy

This research was conducted by **James S. Catterall** and **Kylie A. Peppler** at the **University of California, Los Angeles, USA**

Summary

The study looked at 179 students aged nine and 10 in Los Angeles and St Louis, USA who received ‘sustained, arts-rich instructional experiences’ led by two visual arts institutions in the cities over a period of five months. In both instances the schools were in highly deprived neighbourhoods. The results showed that the children who participated in the programme showed a significant growth in scores for creativity and self-efficacy (the sense that they have confidence in their ability to overcome problems and achieve goals) when compared with the comparison group.

The richness of the arts organisations contrasted with the children’s environment

The paper’s authors remark that the institutions leading the activity were not only rich in materials and skilled and caring people, but they stood out in contrast to their more deprived surroundings. The instruction that the children received was exceptionally intensive, mutually supportive and stretching. 103 children participated in the programme and a comparison group of 76 students from the same schools were selected as a control group. The researchers gave the children participating in the programme questionnaires that were completed before and after the 5 months of activity (and the contrast group took the same surveys at the same time).

Arts education makes for a different learning experience

The authors situate the paper within a wider framework of theories about how children learn: educational settings that are visual, social and involve experimentation bring about a particular set of learning experiences that may lead to a more profound and effective way of acquiring knowledge and skills.

And that type of learning experience may make the difference

The authors try to tease out what elements of the programme generated the improved scores for creativity and self-esteem. They suggest that in the programme settings children were more engaged than normal in their tasks, there were more positive interactions with other children and adults, and that teachers established rapport differently than they would in a normal classroom setting.

Keywords

self-efficacy **drawing** **creativity** **painting** **children** **USA** **experiment** **deprived**

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