CultureCase

After-school arts programmes can increase the educational attainment of 'at-risk' students

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Summary

This paper reports the results of an after-school arts programme in Florida. It attempted to develop the attainment of 'at-risk' African American students. The authors claim that the usual educational experience for children in America is heavily standardised 'one size fits all' approach that does not account for different learning styles and can leave some children at risk of boredom, underachievement and disruptive behavior. The experiment showed that students engaged in the arts programme significantly improved in self-esteem and academic achievement.

The Health, Education, in the Arts, Refining Talented Students (HEARTS) programme

HEARTS used the principles of 'whole brain' development, meaning it gave equal attention to developing logical, critical thinking (right brain hemisphere) elements as well as spatial and sensory (left brain) elements. The students could either do art (making art in a variety of media and styles), drama (performance and/or production), dance (of all styles) and music (again in a variety of styles). The classes were delivered through a mixture of lectures, practical activities and tuition. The students also received mentoring and coaching with non-academic matters and took a role in shaping the programme themselves.

A sample of potential HEARTS students were selected for testing

66 students aged 11-14 years old participated in the experiment. Half of them took the programme and half did not. The group was broadly an equal mix of boys and girls and selected to be representative of the target community for the HEART programme. The students in both groups took tests to measure their academic achievement (as measured by Grade Point Average and maths and spelling tests), self-esteem, risk of violence, and attitude toward school. The research found significant improvements in the programme group compared to the comparison group in the Grade Point Average, spelling and self-esteem measures.

Keywords

USA **experiment** **self-esteem** **school** **behaviour** **at risk** **children**

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