CultureCase

An art museum visit can enhance students' critical thinking skills

This research was conducted by **Brian Kisida, Daniel H. Bowen,** and **JP Greene** at the **University of Arkansas, USA.**

Summary

This study highlights the positive influence school visits to museums can have on the critical thinking skills of grade 3-12 students (aged 8-18). The results suggest that in some instances, disadvantaged students may reap the greatest benefits from arts exposure facilitated by their school since such students receive fewer arts experiences outside of school and, as such, public education plays a critical role in providing those students with access to the arts.

The research comprised a Critical Thinking Assessment

Throughout the study the children were exposed to two works of art. One was a literal representation (Bo Bartlett's *The Box)* and the other was an abstract representation (*Eight Bells Folly: Memorial to Hart* Crane by Marsden Hartley). The children were then asked to analyse the paintings and given five minutes to write an essay on what is going on in the paintings and why they reached their stated conclusions. The students' written responses were then tallied by the number of observations, interpretations, evaluations, associations, instances of problem finding, comparisons, and instances of flexible thinking.

Disadvantaged students benefit most from school visits to museums

When students analysed the representational work of art, critical analysis increased for disadvantaged students. Additionally, female students and students with more experience of cultural activities demonstrated a significant

advantage when asked to critically examine a work of art. It is not entirely clear why the representational image was easier for students to interpret, but one suggestion may be that *The Box* illustration depicts two children in a realistic setting, surrounded by literal representations of objects. Nevertheless, the study highlights that an arts experience can have a significant impact on critical thinking skills and that policymakers should make informed decisions on where and how to concentrate school resources to facilitate access to art.

This summary is by **Shelly-Ann Gajadhar, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

museum **students** **Critical Thinking** **education**

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