CultureCase

Prolonged arts education reduces stress in children from low-income households

This research was conducted by **Eleanor D. Brown, Mallory L. Garnett,** and **Kate E. Anderson** at **West Chester University and Jean-Philippe Laurenceau** at the **University of Delaware, USA.**

Summary

Children growing up in deprived households are known to experience higher levels of physiological stress, which in turn results in a range of adverse cognitive, physical and emotional health outcomes. The researchers in this study wanted to investigate whether an immersive arts programme could help mitigate some of these stress effects for children growing up in poverty. They found that specialist arts education promoted the children's emotional self-regulation, thereby reducing the chronic stress effects of poverty.

Physiological stress decreased after arts classes but not standard classroom sessions

This study followed more than 300 four year-olds attending a specialised Head Start preschool programme in Philadelphia that incorporated an arts enrichment programme. The children attended music, dance and visual arts classes in fully equipped arts studios led by certified arts teachers, in addition to standard "homeroom" education sessions. Cortisol (a stress hormone) levels were lower directly after the arts classes than after the homeroom sessions when measured at the middle and end of the school year, with no differences seen at the beginning of the year.

Arts-based learning may reduce the negative impact of poverty

The benefits were not seen on initial exposure to the intervention, suggesting that impact is dependent on extended exposure and/or skill acquisition by the children. The researchers suggest that future studies could investigate the mechanism by which this effect occurs.

This summary is by **Vicky MacBean, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

USA **experiment** **stress** **wellbeing** **children**

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Author email	**ebrown@wcupa.edu**

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