CultureCase

Low-income children benefit emotionally from arts-integrated preschool programming

This research was conducted by **Eleanor D. Brown** and **Kacey L. Sax** at **West Chester University of Pennsylvania, USA.**

Summary

This study reports on the effects of a preschool arts enrichment programme on the emotional functioning of low-income children at risk of school problems. Results showed greater expression of positive emotions and increased levels of positive and negative emotion regulation in children attending the arts-enriched programme. Engagement with the arts provides a multitude of learning styles that can benefit the emotional experience of children of all backgrounds, which holds particular importance for disadvantaged students in achieving social-emotional and academic proficiency.

Children participated in daily music, dance and visual arts classes

The study followed 205 children at two preschools over two school years; 174 attended the Kaleidoscope preschool and 31 attended the comparison preschool, which also followed a creative curriculum. Children’s expressed positive emotions (interest, happiness and pride), negative emotions (sadness, anger and fear) and their emotion regulation were evaluated by researchers and teachers through observation. Results were compared, while controlling for differences in age, gender, ethnicity, verbal ability and family income.

Results differed significantly for positive but not for negative emotions

Within Kaleidoscope, a display of positive emotions was higher in the arts rather than the regular classes, but this difference was not found in expressions of negative emotions. Children in Kaleidoscope showed increased positive emotion expression as well as positive and negative emotion regulation (but not negative emotion expression) when compared with those in the comparison preschool. They also displayed greater growth in emotion regulation throughout the school year than their peers. Overall, less growth in emotion regulation was observed in children from lower-income families.

Although the study does not explore how arts exposure might boost emotional functioning and doesn't necessarily apply to older populations, it is the first to indicate that use of the arts can facilitate social-emotional readiness to learn for at-risk children.

This summary is by **Anna Kolliakou, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

children **Pre-school** **emotional** **experiment** **USA**

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Author email	**ebrown@wcupa.edu**

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