CultureCase

Arts education for disadvantaged children improves test scores and behaviour

This research was conducted by **Adam Winsler** and **four others** at **George Mason University** and **the University of California Irvine, USA.**

Summary

This paper charts the early school years of more than 30,000 children from low income backgrounds at 190 schools in Florida, USA. It concentrates on children aged 11 to 13 while also using data from earlier in their childhood. The study found that 40 per cent of the children took some form of elective (i.e. non-compulsory) arts course. The arts courses comprised ‘a combination of dance, drama, music, and/or visual art’. When controlling for other factors that determine the likelihood of being one of those 40 per cent, the children who took the arts electives had higher test scores (including for maths and reading) and decreased odds of school suspension than those who did not opt for the arts courses.

Not all students are equally likely to enrol in elective arts courses

The authors are eager to point out that their sample is more ethnically diverse and generally more disadvantaged than national or local averages. Some students (for example, Black students, males, students with disabilities, and those not proficient in English) had reduced odds of taking an arts class. The same is true for those who demonstrated lower social, behavioural, cognitive and motor skills when they were young children.

The study has major political implications

Although the study has its limitations (nothing is known about the quality of the arts courses or whether the children were artistic out of school) the authors are adamant that it shows ‘we need to protect and enhance the opportunities that students have in public middle schools to participate in the visual and performing arts.’

Keywords

education school behaviour performance USA

Title	Selection into, and academic benefits from, arts-related courses in middle school among low-income, ethnically diverse youth
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