

Drama can help reduce antisocial behaviour

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This research was conducted by **Michael J. Chandler** at the **University of Rochester, USA** [Now at the **University of British Columbia, Canada**]

Summary

The paper looked at data from a programme in Upstate New York designed to reduce crime and antisocial behavior among boys aged 11-13. The study took 45 antisocial children and set out to test whether drama and film-making might help to address their behaviour.

The experiment separated the children into 'experiment', 'placebo' and 'control' groups

All were put through standardised tests for social egocentrism (the degree to which they can accommodate other people's perspectives – something which is associated with antisocial behavior) prior to the treatment and immediately after the treatment. They also studied police and court records of the children 18 months later.

The children were trained using drama and film-making

Of the 45 antisocial children, 15 were assigned to a control group and no further contact was made with them beyond later testing. The remaining 30 were 'invited to participate in a film workshop that was to meet in a neighbourhood storefront half a day a week for a 10-week period'. Half of these children were also put through a drama training programme designed to address their antisocial behaviour. The other half were put through a sort of 'placebo' programme which still involved film-making but did not involve

anything in which they might be required to take on the roles of other people or seek to understand their perspectives (as they might in drama).

The results showed that drama made a difference

The scores for egocentrism for those participating in the drama and filmmaking training significantly improved compared to both the control group and the placebo group, despite starting on the same level. They also showed reduced offending rates 18 months later. The author ascribes this change specifically to the content of the training that the experimental group received.

Something to keep in mind

The author points out that a reduction in offences noted in police records may be a result of increased ability of the youths to avoid detection, and ponders whether the intervention functioned as a 'school for scoundrels'!

Keywords

USA **drama** **experiment** **film** **antisocial** **control group**

Title	Egocentrism and antisocial behavior: the assessment and training of social perspective-taking skills
Author(s)	Chandler, M. J.
Publication date	1973
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