

Using an after-school arts programme to help 'at-risk' children

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This research was conducted by **Michael J. Mason and Susan Chuang** at the **University of Rochester, USA [Now at Virginia Commonwealth University, USA]**

Summary

This paper reports the findings from an intervention that sought to prevent anti-social and delinquent behavior amongst children from low-income families in Rochester, New York. They found that children in the after-school programme showed increased 'self-esteem, social skills, and in leadership competencies' when compared to a group of children who did not participate in the project.

The programme (Kuumba Kids) was led by African American artists

It was designed to have no attributes of school formality (such as homework) and aimed to promote positive behaviours, to promote positive African American role models, to show that art can help the community, and to locate the programmes in permanent sites.

The participants were recruited through local press and leaflets

The research was based on a sample of 51 people (33 children and 18 parents), split evenly between the Kuumba Kids and a comparison group. 98 per cent of the participants were African American and 96 per cent were deemed to be in poverty. The programme consisted of 16 weekly art sessions (each two hours in length).

The children were tested using a standardised measure of behaviour before and after the programme

The researchers identified five measures that they wanted to test for: self-reliance, self-esteem, negative attitude toward school, interpersonal relations, and sense of inadequacy. Parents and teachers were also surveyed for their opinion of the children's development of social skills, leadership, adaptability, attention, and social withdrawal.

Something to keep in mind

The authors are careful not to draw too many conclusions from this research, partly due to the small sample size and the fact that children weren't randomly assigned to the Kuumba Kids or comparison group, but also because it's unclear what the 'active ingredient' in the programme was that created the social and self-development benefits identified by the study.

Keywords

USA **children** **self-esteem** **behaviour** **at risk**

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