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KISSCE - ENGAGEMENT

Evidence in Action

A K20 Center Research Brief

The Educational Value of Field Trips

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Introduction

Greene, Kisida, and Bowen (2014) address a growing concern in American education: the decline of culturally enriching field trips. Historically, such trips were seen as essential to a well-rounded education, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, financial constraints and a heightened focus on standardized testing have led many schools to reduce or eliminate these experiences. The authors argue that this shift may deprive students of critical developmental opportunities and set out to rigorously evaluate the educational impact of field trips to art museums.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study employed a large-scale, randomized controlled trial (RCT) to assess the impact of school field trips to the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Arkansas.

Sample:

The sample included 38,347 students from kindergarten through 12th grade. A total of 525 school groups applied for tours, and matched pairs were created based on grade level and demographics. One group from each pair was randomly assigned to receive a tour (treatment), while the other had its tour deferred (control).

Data Analysis:

Surveys were administered to 10,912 students and 489 teachers. The researchers used statistical models to study patterns and ensure their results weren't influenced by differences in student backgrounds. They also paired students with similar characteristics to ensure fair comparisons. Outcomes measured included art knowledge, critical thinking, historical empathy, tolerance, and interest in art museums.

Results

The study found that even a single, modestly structured museum visit had significant educational benefits:

- **Art Knowledge:** Students retained factual information about artworks at high rates, demonstrating strong recall weeks after the visit.
- **Critical Thinking:** Students who toured the museum showed improved observational and interpretive skills, particularly those from rural and high-poverty schools.
- **Historical Empathy:** Students developed a deeper understanding of historical contexts and perspectives.
- **Tolerance:** Exposure to diverse ideas and artworks increased students' openness to differing viewpoints.
- **Interest in Art Museums:** Students expressed greater interest in future museum visits, and treatment group families were more likely to redeem museum visit coupons.

Application into Practice

To replicate this intervention, schools can:

1. **Partner with Local Museums:** Establish relationships with nearby cultural institutions to arrange free or subsidized tours.
2. **Use Lottery-Based Selection:** If demand exceeds capacity, use a fair and transparent lottery system to select participating classes.
3. **Prepare Students and Teachers:** Provide pre-visit materials and encourage post-visit discussions to reinforce learning.
4. **Focus on Student-Led Inquiry:** Emphasize student-directed discussions during tours to enhance engagement and critical thinking.
5. **Track Outcomes:** Use surveys or reflective writing assignments to assess the impact on students' knowledge, empathy, and interest.

Work Cited

Greene, J. P., Kisida, B., & Bowen, D. H. (2014). The educational value of field trips. *Education Next*, 14 (1), 78-86.