Charassein 2017- Year in Review

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

2017 was a great year for Charassein! We got exciting projects started, like the campus visits project, and we continue to make progress with other innovative projects, like our collaborative project in Spain “Educar para Ser” and Jay Greene’s work on art and theater visits. We finally started to see our efforts reflected in recently accepted articles in high impact academic journals and we disseminated our work with multiple new working papers and presentations in conferences. We got together for our very first Charassein workshop last summer and had a great time re-connecting, connecting with researchers from other departments at the University of Arkansas and exchanging ideas about the future of research on the measurement and development of character skills.

Below you have a brief summary of all this work we have done during this past year.

I want to wish you all a happy holiday season and let’s keep working hard and succeeding in the New Year!

Warm regards,

Gema Zamarro

Associate Professor & 21st Century Endowed Chair in Teacher Quality
Director of Charassein: The Character Assessment Initiative

Charassein Research Progress in 2017

During 2017 we have circulated 5 new working papers, presented our research in multiple sessions in APPAM (3 presentations), AEFP (5 presentations) and other relevant conferences and we got the following Charassein papers accepted for publication:


- Personality as a Predictor of Unit Nonresponse in Panel Data: An Analysis of an Internet-Based Survey, Albert Cheng, Gema Zamarro & Bart Orriens, Sociological Methods and Research (Impact Factor-3.604)


Ongoing projects

An Evaluation of the Educational Impact of College Campus Visits: A Randomized Experiment

This project studies the degree to which visits to a college campus during middle school could reduce barriers to college access, specifically for disadvantaged
students. This study is motivated by the belief that a lack of familiarity with college experiences poses a non-trivial barrier to entry that is often overlooked by previous interventions aimed at improving college access. In particular, we are studying the extent to which campus experiences impact college behaviors, attitudes, academic outcomes, and college attendance; thereby allowing us to determine if this relatively inexpensive and easy to implement intervention can have meaningful impacts on college access.

What Do Students Learn from Seeing Live Theater?

In partnership with TheatreSquared and the Department of Theatre at the University of Arkansas, this project aims to use experimental research designs to identify what students learn from seeing live theater performances. In particular, we are focusing on how live theater affects students’ tolerance, empathy, and content knowledge of the dramatic works. To date we have offered school groups free tickets by lottery to see Hamlet, Twelfth Night, A Christmas Carol, Around the World in 80 Days, and Peter and the Starcatcher. By comparing outcomes for lottery winners to lottery losers we are able to identify with confidence the causal effects of seeing these live theater performances. For some of these performances we have also randomly assigned students to see a film version of the same story rather than see the live theater performance. We are interested in whether live performances has certain benefits that cannot be conveyed as effectively by recorded performances. Initial results suggest that seeing live theater significantly increases student tolerance, empathy, and content knowledge. Those results have
been published in Education Next. New results from additional plays are in the process of being submitted for publication.

**College Readiness and Student Success: The Role of Non-Cognitive Skills**

This project explores the validity of alternative measures of non-cognitive skills such as perseverance, grit and conscientiousness, and study their role in mediating the relationship between students’ college readiness levels and students’ success. We also study how college expectations during freshman year relate to non-cognitive skills and college success. Results from this research project would be useful in identifying those groups that appear more vulnerable and struggle to graduate college, and inform the design of potential interventions to help these students.

**Non-Cognitive Skills, Student Performance and Welfare: A Randomized Intervention in Spanish Schools**

In collaboration with the University of Murcia in Spain, the main goal of this project is to develop and implement a new curriculum aimed to stimulate the development of non-cognitive skills of elementary education students aged 4 to 12 years old. To do so, the project brings together a multidisciplinary group of researchers including: education, economics, psychology, neuro-psychology, speech therapy, pediatrics, among others.

Character strengths and skills such as conscientiousness, grit or self-control have been found to be a fundamental determinant of education, labor and even health outcomes from childhood all the way until adulthood. Although, we know of the relevance of such character strengths and skills, less is known about their origin and development and to what extent they can be shaped by the school environment. In this respect, this project aims to contribute to the literature answering the following research questions: 1) to what extend these character strengths and skills can be encouraged to be successfully taught in the school
environment? 2) Would new teacher practices oriented to teach these important character strengths have an impact on student academic outcomes? 3) What is the role of parents in the success of these practices?

For more information visit the project’s web page: [http://habilidadesnocognitivas.com/](http://habilidadesnocognitivas.com/)

**New Faces and Goodbyes**

Lina M. Anaya, Doctoral Academy Fellow, joined our team this year and she is already doing great work with one working paper out on the [Gender Gaps in STEM college education](http://www.gendergapsinsmestem.edu/). Jonathan Mills (Research Associate), Elise Swanson (Distinguished Doctoral Fellow) and Katherine Kopotic (Distinguished Doctoral Fellow) officially became Charassein research fellows as we continue to work together on our college campus visits project. Finally, Charassein research fellow Kaitlin Anderson graduated with her PhD degree last summer and left us to take an exciting postdoctoral fellowship at the newly created Education Policy Innovation Collaborative at Michigan State University.