
Lower stress through writing

By Kevin Lewis

January 30, 2011

When it comes to boosting student achievement, the hot debate these days seems to revolve around the book "Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother" by Amy Chua. Yet, while she prefers ultra-strict parenting, there are less overbearing strategies that get results, too. Researchers at the University of Chicago have shown that expressive writing before a test can boost scores. College students were given a math test in both low-pressure and high-pressure situations. Before taking the high-pressure test, some of the students were asked to write for 10 minutes expressing their feelings about the test. The students who wrote about their feelings did better on the high-pressure test than those who did not. The researchers also conducted an experiment with ninth-grade students' first final exam of their high-school careers. Before the exam, some students were asked to write for 10 minutes expressing their feelings about the exam, while the other students were asked to write for 10 minutes speculating on a topic that would not be covered on the exam. For low-anxiety students, it didn't matter what they wrote about, but high-anxiety students averaged a B+ if they wrote about their feelings, compared to a B- otherwise.

Ramirez, G. & Beilock, S., "Writing About Testing Worries Boosts Exam Performance in the Classroom," Science (January 14, 2011).

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