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REPORT ROUNDUP

Somber Students Found to Outperform Cheerful Students

"A Hidden Cost of Happiness in Children"

Most teachers yearn for happy, excited children in their classrooms, perhaps assuming they will be easier to teach than more-somber pupils.

But a **new study** suggests that a positive mood is not always a plus for performance. The study in the June issue of the journal *Developmental Science* found that children who feel happy don't do as well on tasks that require precision as their peers who are sad or have neutral feelings.

"For any task that requires attention to detail, where children really have to focus on specific tasks and information, they would benefit from a negative or neutral mood in the classroom," said Simone Schnall, a lecturer in psychology at the University of Plymouth, in England. "For those situations, you do not want them overly excited or overly distracted."

Ms. Schnall is the lead author of the study with a colleague at the university, Christina Rowe, and Vikram K. Jaswal, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Virginia.

Assignments that require creative solutions, and those that require students to take a broader view of a topic or be flexible in their thinking, are completed more successfully by students who are feeling happy, the study found.

The findings are consistent with similar studies of adults that found "particular moods trigger unique styles of information processing," according to the report. Happiness, for example, inspires a "top-down style of information processing, and sadness, a bottom-up style," the report says.

The researchers conducted two experiments. The first involved children ages 10 and 11, who were asked to complete a test that required them to find shapes hidden in an image or picture as classical music played in the background.

Students who listened to a piece by Mozart that induced happy feelings did not perform the task as quickly as others who heard a melancholy piece by Mahler.

A second experiment, with 6- and 7-year-olds, had similar results: Children exposed to animated movie clips that induced sad or neutral feelings outperformed those who watched more upbeat films.

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