



Press release

Pupils who get good grades are usually also popular

A University of Tübingen study shows that – contrary to many clichés – high-performing pupils are also well integrated in their classes

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Stereotypes about unpopular swots are persistent – not least because of their often-clichéd depiction in the media. Using data from a large-scale study, a research team from the Hector Research Institute of Education Sciences and Psychology at the University of Tübingen and the Institute for Educational Quality Improvement (IQB) at Berlin’s Humboldt University has now investigated how well high-performing pupils really are socially integrated.

Dr. Claudia Neuendorf, who now researches at the University of Potsdam, headed the project. She found that young people who get good grades are generally also better integrated in their classes than those with poorer grades. High-performing pupils are also asked for help far more often than those that perform worse. This was most obvious among young boys and girls who do well in several subjects. These findings contradict the common cliché that young people who do well at school are subjected to more teasing and tend to be solitary.

For her study, Neuendorf and her team looked at data from the IQB Trends in Student Achievement Study 2018 covering roughly 45,000 school pupils in the ninth grade in Germany. The aim was to link school work and several aspects of social integration such as friendship, acceptance, contact and subjective integration.

For the first three aspects, the pupils were specifically asked who were their friends in class. The answers were then used to calculate sociometric parameters such as how popular someone is, how many classmates ask them for help, who they tend to avoid (“Who don’t you want to sit next to?”) and how many reciprocal friendships each pupil has. Subjective integration was determined using psychometric parameters, i.e. the pupils were asked how well-integrated they themselves felt.

The educational researchers were also interested in what the situation is like for young boys and girls who get good grades in subjects that “belong” to the other gender stereotype. They discovered that young boys who perform well in languages and biology, and girls who do well in mathematics and physics are well-integrated socially.

“The message of our study is that many high-performing children are very well socially integrated, regardless whether their achievements are believed to be gender-conforming or non-conforming,” says Neuendorf. “This finding is hopefully another element in reducing anxiety and prejudices in this context.” The educational researcher emphasizes that stereotypes of all kinds must be dispelled in all areas of society, so that children and young people can realize their potential regardless of their gender. For this to be achieved, teachers, parents, media professionals, but also researchers must work to ensure that stereotypes are not reinforced.

Publication:

Neuendorf, C. & Jansen, M. (2023). Comparing different facets of the social integration of high-achieving students in their classroom: No gender stereotyping, but some non-linear relationships. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 115(4), 609-623. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000778>

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