

Curiosity doesn't kill the student

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(Medical Xpress) -- Curiosity may have killed the cat, but it's good for the student. That's the conclusion of a new study published in *Perspectives in Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science. The authors show that curiosity is a big part of academic performance. In fact, personality traits like curiosity seem to be as important as intelligence in determining how well students do in school.

Intelligence is important to academic performance, but it's not the whole story. Everyone knows a brilliant kid who failed school, or someone with mediocre smarts who made up for it with hard work. So psychological scientists have started looking at factors other than intelligence that make some students do better than others.

One of those is conscientiousness—basically, the inclination to go to class and do your homework. People who score high on this personality trait tend to do well in school. “It's not a huge surprise if you think of it, that hard work would be a predictor of academic performance,” says Sophie von Stumm of the University of Edinburgh in the UK. She co-wrote the new paper with Benedikt Hell of the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic of Goldsmiths University of London.

von Stumm and her coauthors wondered if [curiosity](#) might be another important factor. “Curiosity is basically a hunger for exploration,” von Stumm says. “If you're intellectually curious, you'll go home, you'll read the books. If you're perceptually curious, you might go traveling to

foreign countries and try different foods.” Both of these, she thought, could help you do better in school.

The researchers performed a meta-analysis, gathering the data from about 200 studies with a total of about 50,000 students. They found that curiosity did, indeed, influence [academic performance](#). In fact, it had quite a large effect, about the same as conscientiousness. When put together, conscientiousness and curiosity had as big an effect on performance as intelligence.

von Stumm wasn’t surprised that curiosity was so important. “I’m a strong believer in the importance of a hungry mind for achievement, so I was just glad to finally have a good piece of evidence,” she says. “Teachers have a great opportunity to inspire curiosity in their students, to make them engaged and independent learners. That is very important.”

Employers may also want to take note: a curious person who likes to read books, travel the world, and go to museums may also enjoy and engage in learning new tasks on the job. “It’s easy to hire someone who has done the job before and hence, knows how to work the role,” von Stumm says. “But it’s far more interesting to identify those people who have the greatest potential for development, i.e. the curious ones.”

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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