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# John Hattie: 10 myths about student achievement

Posted by [Rosie Neill](#) on 12 January, 2015



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## John Hattie: His 10 myths about student achievement

John Hattie's 15 year meta-analysis of over  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a billion students worldwide has enabled him to **identify what really aids student achievement**. In an interview with Sarah Montague for BBC Radio 4, he dispels some popular myths about what does and doesn't matter in your school.

## Factors affecting student achievement – Hattie's take:

- 1. Class Size** – Reducing class size does enhance student achievement but only by a marginal amount. Our preoccupation with class size is an enigma; what's really important is that the **teacher learns to be an expert in their own class**, no matter what size it is.
- 2. Types of Schools** – Academies, grammars and state schools don't actually differ too much inside, what's more important is **good leadership within your school**; look at who has control over how teachers are chosen and how they progress after being selected.
- 3. Uniform** – Conversations about school uniform are distracting; it doesn't matter if uniform is compulsory or not as it makes no difference whatsoever to student achievement. Your school

should decide whether you want to enforce a uniform or not but waste no further time debating it.

**4. Homework** – Homework has been found to have no effect on the progress of primary school children. To get it right without getting rid of it, children at primary level should be given **less projects and more activities** that reinforce what they learnt in the lesson that day instead. Whilst homework does make more of a difference to secondary schoolchildren, too much emphasis is placed on it; 5-10 minutes of practising what was taught that day at school has the same effect as 1-2 hours does.



**5. Extra-Curricular Activities** – These are powerful in terms of helping children learn. The best predictor of health, wealth and happiness in adult life is not academic achievement at school but the number of years schooled; extra-curricular activities can be a fun and inviting way to **get children to enjoy school** and want to spend more time there learning.

**6. Home Environment** – Does TV have a negative effect on a child's progress? Not directly, suggests John. The problem with a child watching too much television is that it stops them from spending that time learning in more productive ways, such as by reading or developing their communication and relationship skills.

**7. A Child's Birthday** – John has found that where a child's birthday falls in the school year has an effect on their progress initially, as there is a big difference in the ability of a child who is 5 years 1 month and one who is 5 years 11 months. However, no difference is found after 2-3 years of schooling. What has a more dramatic effect on a child's academic achievements, he claims, is whether a child makes a friend in their first month at school.

**8. Streaming and Teacher Talk** – John insists that whether your school is streamed or not, what must be recognised is that **children learn better from their peers** than from the teacher or a book. If a child is struggling to grasp a new concept, they are more likely to understand it if another student explains it correctly.

We teach children to be passive and listen in the classroom, whilst a great teacher does the opposite: letting their students be active both in what they know and what they don't. Effective learning is about exploring ideas, making mistakes and adapting to them; not just sitting and listening to explanations from the teacher.

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**9. Testing** – John has no problem with testing per se, but he does advocate that tests at the end of the year aren't beneficial as by then both the teacher and the student have moved on from that particular topic. If tests are to be used, they should be done to **practice and reinforce what has recently been taught**.



**10. Student Expectation** – John Hattie claims that telling a child ‘do your best’ is the worst thing a teacher or parent can do. [A successful teacher](#) establishes a student’s expectations of their abilities but then dispels those expectations by telling them they can do better. What a student achieved yesterday should never be okay tomorrow.

## How can we improve the UK education system?

When asked what the UK [education system](#) needs to learn, John answered that we need to get rid of the mentality that if a student doesn't succeed, it's because they were incapable, and replace it with, if a student doesn't achieve, it's because they didn't put in the effort or weren't properly supported.

What John wants to make clear is that a student’s ability to achieve academically primarily comes down to **teacher expertise**. How teachers think and make daily decisions and judgements is the most important thing within a school. To learn more about this attitude, have a read of [‘6 Traits of Successful Teachers’](#) and [‘25 Things Successful Teachers Do Differently’](#).



John [finishes the interview](#) with a clear message: schools need to stop thinking about things that don't really matter and instead **talk about teacher expertise, passion, diagnosis and practice**. This then, might help us to reach his goal for the UK: to make all our teachers more like our top 20-30%.

**What do you think about John’s responses to these school issues?**

**Do any of his findings surprise you, and why?**

**Laura Elzinga**

12/21/2015, 1:19:24 PM

When I listened to John Hattie speak in The Educators series on BBC4, he said class size didn't matter, that a teacher would be teaching the same with 18 students as they would with 25 so it didn't matter how many students were in their class. As a teacher with 34 ten and eleven year old students, I'd have to say that you do reach a point where class size does begin to matter. I'm not sure exactly where that point is, but I know that I'm pretty close to it.

Reply to *Laura Elzinga*

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**sinead crossan**

3/4/2016, 11:10:12 AM

Really enjoyed reading the 'myths'. My thoughts on some of the comments have altered since leaving mainstream to work in a special school setting. In MS i could manage 33 pupils- mixed ability with 1 teaching assistant. In current setting the 15 pupils with 1 TA is tough as each child is at a different level meaning I am planning a lot more to ensure pupils are accessing right materials and making progress. exhausted but getting there!

Reply to *sinead crossan*

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