Examination anxiety in primary, secondary and 6th form students

Convenor: Dr Dave Putwain, Edge Hill University

Discussant: Dr Carolyn Jackson, Lancaster University
Overview

This symposium consists of three papers addressing the topic of examination-related anxiety at different stages of education from primary pupils to 6th form students. These papers represent the recent work of a team of collaborators from Edge Hill University and the University of Manchester. Examination, or test, anxiety is an important topic for three reasons: First, examination anxiety is an important topic in its own right, representing in its extreme form, an important threat to personal well-being situated in an educational context. Second, examination anxiety may have effects on important educational outcomes: learning and achievement. Thus, it is important to establish exactly what the nature of these effects might be and address questions including: what form they take, under what conditions they manifest or manifest strongly, at what ages or stages of education they are relevant and how they may interact with a range of other personal and contextual factors. Third, examination anxiety is closely bound up with educational policy and in particular school/teacher accountability in a high-stakes testing agenda which has been the subject of keen debate in the UK for some years now. Research findings in this area may help to provide an evidence base to inform this debate, at least in terms of its potential effects on children’s learning and achievement. Given the relevance of these issues to the educational community, the aim of this symposium is to disseminate findings around the three themes listed above to policy makers, researchers in both this and related areas and interested colleagues. The first paper reports findings from a mixed methods study into the examination anxiety experienced by Year 6 pupils taking SATs in their final year of primary school adding evidence to the debate surrounding the implications of giving high stakes testing to children. The second paper reports findings of how examination anxiety and achievement are related in the General Certificate of Secondary Education, highlighting how high levels of examination anxiety combined with catastrophic and other negative responses may be associated with underachievement. The final paper reports findings of how personal and interpersonal influences combine to effect examination anxiety in 6th form students, showing how this may not be a solely individual phenomenon, but one in which teachers and parents may play a significant role.


Paper 2: Symes, W., Putwain, D.W., & Connors, E. (2009) “If I can’t answer this question, I’ll fail the whole exam”: Examination anxiety, GCSE achievement and tendency to draw the worst possible conclusion.