

Can Japanese junior high students be spared fake math phobias?

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Abstract: Via questionnaires, Uchida & Mori (2013) found “fake math phobias” among roughly one-fifth of a Japanese 7th grade sample who claimed they disliked math although they performed positively on an implicit association test. They should be rescued before they develop genuine math phobias. This study explores one possible way to do this. We examined 204 other 7th graders and found that 38 of them had fake math phobias. We divided them randomly into target and control groups, matching their math achievement scores pairwise, and informing only the target students of their implicit positive attitudes toward math. No such information was provided to the control students. One year later, 15 of the 16 target students showed improved math achievement while only 8 of the 18 control students did. The simple practice of informing students that their math phobias were fake seems to have prevented them from developing real math phobias.