

# Overconfidence Among Teenage Students Can Stunt Crucial Reading Skills

July 29 2009, by Charles Anzalone

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Too much confidence among teenage students can be harmful. In a study that reinforces the danger of indiscriminately bolstering a child's self esteem -- whether the child earns that distinction or not -- the results show a clear connection between overconfident students and low reading comprehension, and suggest recommendations for parents and teachers.

"While some self-confidence is helpful, overconfident 15-year-olds are often below-average readers in all 34 countries we studied," says Ming Ming Chiu, the lead author of the study and a professor in the Department of Learning and Instruction in the University at Buffalo's Graduate School of Education. "In contrast, under-confident 15-year-olds are more likely to be above-average readers in all 34 countries."

The difference lies in a student's ability to accurately assess and evaluate his or her own reading level, according to Chiu. Those who can accurately gauge their strengths and weaknesses are usually in a better position to identify realistic goals and achieve them.

"If an overconfident student chooses a book that is too hard -- such as 'The Lord of the Rings' rather than 'Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone' -- he or she might stop reading after a few pages and let it sit on a bookshelf," says Chiu. "In contrast, a more self-aware student is more likely to finish an easier book and continue reading more books."

The research was the first large-scale international study of almost

160,000 students' overconfidence and reading levels (including nearly 4,000 U.S. [students](#)). It was co-written by Robert Klassen, associate professor in the University of Alberta's Department of [Educational Psychology](#), and was published in the July edition of the professional educators' journal Learning and Individual Differences. The educators used data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA).

In their study, Chiu and Klassen also found interesting cultural differences relevant to student achievement; countries that stressed individualism, such as the U.S. and Switzerland, tended to produce students whose overconfidence worked against their ability to assess their strengths and weaknesses accurately. In contrast, so-called collectivist countries that favored group interests (e.g., South Korea and Japan) had greater reading comprehension.

"As students in more collectivistic countries were more aware of peers' reading skills," says Chiu, "they assessed their own reading ability more accurately and were less likely to be overconfident."

Reading has long been considered essential to student learning. "Strong reading skills open doors to learning -- whether through books, Web pages or other media," says Chiu. The two researchers recommend [parents](#) and [teachers](#) help their children and students become suitably confident and strong readers by doing the following:

- **Cultivate the Idea of the Self-test.** Have students ask themselves, "How can I apply the ideas I've learned in today's class to my daily life?" This self-test gives students feedback on how well they understand the ideas and thereby helps develop a suitable level of self-confidence.
- **Review Past Performance.** Reflecting on past performance on homework, tests and writing assignments anchors their confidence to a

suitable level and prevents overconfidence.

- Peer Evaluation. Using classmates as a ruler to evaluate one's own strengths and weaknesses can reduce overconfidence (for example by asking, "Do I understand the books as well as my classmates?").
- Identify Achievable Goals. Encourage children to choose goals that they can successfully accomplish. Healthy confidence and self-assessment can help children set more realistic and achievable goals to ignite a virtuous cycle of high motivation and high achievement.

Provided by University at Buffalo ([news](#) : [web](#))

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