

Teacher support is key to self-esteem for Chinese and US youth

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As children go back to school this fall, a new cross-cultural study finds that for both Chinese and American middle schoolers, students who feel supported by their teachers tend to have higher self-esteem, and those who don't feel supported by fellow students are more likely to be depressed.

The study, which explores commonalities between Chinese and U.S. students as well as the ways in which they differ, appears in the September/October 2009 issue of [Child Development](#). It was conducted by researchers at Southeast University (in Nanjing, China), New York University, the Educational Testing Service, Harvard University, the University of Western Ontario, and Nanjing Brain Hospital.

The researchers looked at almost 1,500 urban middle school students in China and the United States. They considered students' perceptions of three aspects of school climate: teacher support, student support, and opportunities for autonomy in the classroom. And they looked at the ties between these three aspects and students' self-esteem, symptoms of [depression](#), and grades.

The study found that students in China got more support from teachers and other students and more opportunities for autonomy than students in the United States. For both Chinese and American middle schoolers, students who felt supported by their teachers were more likely to have higher self-esteem, while students who didn't feel supported by their fellow [students](#) were more likely to be depressed. And although [middle](#)

[school](#) youths had more opportunities for autonomy in the classroom in China, increased opportunity for autonomy translated into lower grade point averages for children in both countries.

"Our results underscore the importance of examining the cultural context in studies of adolescent adjustment," according to Yueming Jia, a research scientist of psychology at Southeast University, who led the study. "Practical implications that can be drawn from the study include paying more attention to the ways in which the context influences children's adjustment, as well as emphasizing the impact of social and emotional support from teachers and peers on adolescents' academic and emotional adjustment."

More information: *Child Development*, Vol. 80, Issue 5, The Influence of Student Perceptions of [School](#) Climate on Socio-Emotional and Academic Adjustment: A Comparison of Chinese and U.S. Adolescents by Jia, Y (Southeast University), Way, N (New York University), Ling, G (Educational Testing Service), Yoshikawa, H (Harvard University), Chen, X (University of Western Ontario), Hughes, D (New York University), Ke, X (Nanjing Brain Hospital), and Lu, Z (Southeast University).

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