Relax Before the Quiz. Laugh!

I give quizzes about once every two weeks in my class, usually finding many students frantically studying their notes in the hallway or at their desk a few minutes before hand. This seems to increase their anxiety level, which could lead to underperformance on the quiz (Chapell et al., 2005). On the other hand, some research suggests that cognitive/relaxation techniques can be effective in improving academic performance for test-anxious students (Dendato & Diener, 1986).

I wanted to see if having students practice anxiety reducing activities prior to the quiz would improve quiz performance. To test this, I randomly assigned two of my five sections to the treatment group and the other three to the control group. All sections took the same quiz and were instructed in the same way.

For the treatment group, at the beginning of class, I had students stand up, stretch their arms and legs, bend over to touch their toes, twist their torsos, and other activities to reduce tension. I also practiced with them spontaneous laughing similar to laughing clubs (Kataria, n.d.), where we first start with a chuckle, and grow the laughter until it became a full belly laugh. The whole process lasted about 3-5 minutes. I then gave them the quiz (all sections had the same amount of time for the quiz). The control group was just administered the quiz at the beginning of class.

Results showed that the treatment group had slightly higher quiz grades than the control group (72.91 vs. 70.78 out of 90 points). However, after adjusting for the standard deviation within groups (18.05 and 18.79, respectively), the difference between groups was much smaller than the difference within groups, suggesting the results were not statistically different.

Based on the research, however, I believe this is worth another try. However, the lesson I learned was that I need to prep students for the experience before we do it. I basically surprised the treatment group with this, and many students seemed confused as to what was going on, and perhaps countered the full benefit. Next time, I’m going to show them resources on the benefits of stress reduction and laugher before tests, and see if the improves results.

References

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