

## Myth: Kids Talk Too Much At School

Do your students talk too much? Some teachers think kids talk TOO much at school, and they spend a portion of their day trying to "manage the noise".

Actually, that's false! It seems we are social before we are born and that some schools artificially suppress our social side. Researchers believe that brains may be hard-wired to be social (autism is an exception, of course). We know newborns come into the world wired to socially interact. But is this a propensity to socially oriented action already present before birth? Twin pregnancies provide a unique opportunity to investigate the social pre-wiring hypothesis.

A new study shows that by the 14th week of gestation twin fetuses do not only display movements directed towards the uterine wall and self-directed movements, but also movements specifically aimed at the co-twin, the proportion of which increases between the 14th and 18th gestational week. These inter-twin responses are not coincidental, the research shows. The intra-pair contact is the result of motor planning rather than the accidental outcome of bumping each other due to spatial proximity. By the 14th week of gestation twin fetuses clearly execute movements specifically aimed at purposeful (vs. random) interacting with the co-twin. This supports a large body of postnatal evidence for a relational bias.

**School behaviors are highly social experiences**, which become encoded through our sense of reward, acceptance, pain, pleasure, coherence, affinity and stress. In fact, poor social conditions, isolation or social "defeat" are correlated with fewer brain cells! Nobody knew this occurred five or ten years ago. But we now know that "prosocial" environments literally enhance neurogenesis (brain cell production). By the way, those new cells support learning, memory and mood regulation.

**In fact, the opposite can hurt the brain!** Social isolation can exacerbate the negative consequences of stress and increase the risk of developing psychopathology. At the moment, there are many mitigating circumstances, so one cannot say that living alone (non-social life) is bad for the brain. But, what we do know is that individual housing precludes the positive influence of short-term running on adult neurogenesis in the hippocampus of rats. Plus, we know that in the presence of additional stress, social isolation suppresses the generation of new neurons. The science tells us that, in the absence of social interaction, a normally beneficial experience (exercise) can exert a potentially deleterious influence on the brain (ouch!). In short, spend a portion of your day around people AND let kids do it too.

Out in the real world, people talk to other people at their jobs, at home and when they're out relaxing. Who ever thought that kids should be quiet, sit in rows and only talk when spoken to? The answer: someone who was training kids for solitary factory jobs.

In today's world, the social factors play a huge role in kid's education. In fact, data from the Education Longitudinal Study finds that a student's perception of social context (teacher support and parent support) predicts students' self-perceptions (perception of control and identification with school), which in turn predict students' academic and behavioral engagement, and that predicts academic achievement. Further, students' academic and behavioral engagement and achievement in 10th grade were associated with decreased likelihood of dropping out of school in 12th grade. In short, when kids feel connected in school, they stay in school and graduate!

## Practical Applications

**Do NOT allow random social groupings for more than 10-20% of the school day.** Use targeted, planned, diverse social groupings with mentoring, teams and buddy systems. Build cooperative groups and teams. Stop suppressing social activity and start incorporating it into your work.

How is the seating in your classroom? If your students spend all of class in isolated rows, I feel sad. This is the year 2012. Allow students more time to interact!

**Students should spend about 50% of every school day interacting with others.** Strengthen partner work. Work to strengthen pro-social conditions. Teacher-to-student relationships matter, as do student-to-student relationships. Use more "turn-tos" in class ("Turn to your neighbor and thank them!").

In short nearly EVERYTHING you do can become social. How do you make this happen? If you give directions for anything, ask students to repeat them to a partner. When students succeed at a task, they give a neighbor a high-five. When students learn something new, they teach a partner. When you want to find out how far along they are, ask students to look on their neighbor's paper and raise their hand if they see half or more completed, etc. Well, you get the point. Every single thing you do can become social--if you want it to be social and if it's appropriate.

Talk to you next month. Or, talk to me right away on my blog at [www.jensenlearning.com/news](http://www.jensenlearning.com/news), or [join me on twitter](#).