MATH: MATH ANXIETY TRULY HAPPENS?

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“I don’t know how to do it. I feared Math subject in the first place, anyways.” That was the murmuring voice of my particular pupil which still lingers on my ear as she would say the same old line whenever I introduce a new lesson in our Math class. I often ask myself, is it just an alibi or is it for real?

Math anxiety is a feeling of pressure, nervousness or fear that impedes with Math performance (Ashcraft, 2002). This could explain the feelings of a pupils as they avoid being called to situations in which they should perform mathematical operations. Thus, this avoidance gives them the escape. It makes them less competent, wouldn’t want to be exposed in math practices, leaving them less confident, more anxious and mathematically unprepared.

But does this really happens? Is it really such feeling hinders the pupils to do well or is it only in the mind that and a cliché alibi after all?

According to studies, an individual with Math anxiety does not necessarily lack the ability in mathematics. It’s just that they cannot show and let out their full potential because it is hindered by the symptoms of their anxiety (Willingham, 2014). It could be manifested in a variety of ways, may it be physically, psychologically or behaviorally. The strong negative correlation between high math anxiety and low achievement is often due to the working memory.

Math anxiety is not about being bad at Math. It is all about being preoccupied of anxious thoughts, compromising the individual’s ability to perform. It is all in the mind
then. How about refocusing our pupil’s mind to the reverse side? Making them feel that Math is an interesting and enjoyable subject after all.

According to Cruikshank and Sheffield (1992), teachers must follow the seven important measures that is deviated away from the traditional mathematical classroom. These seven measures includes:

- Feeling of mutual interest. Teachers should they themselves show the interest to the subject. The feeling would then be replicated to the learners, promoting positive disposition.

- Being imaginative and inventive in making activities in mathematics enjoyable but be careful in using competitions as it triggers pressure.

- Showing the use and application of mathematics in careers and everyday life.

- Adaptation of instruction to pupils’ interests. It could be the latest played games or whatever that could caught their attention that should be employed to the strategy or approach.

- Establishment of short-term and attainable goals only. This could avoid the pressure of having timed deadlines, building pupils’ confidence towards solving math problems.

- Providing successful activities that could reduce anxiety and would create a space that will encourage individual’s strengths to be shown. This could be through the use cooperative learning by engaging pupils in pairs or larger groups where all of the students uphold an equal role.

- Using meaningful methods that caters a variety of learning styles so that math makes sense.
Not only teachers but also parents could do something to make the child’s Math experience meaningful and stress-free. Learning at home is vital in helping all children become and remain motivated. Their mathematical confidence and self-esteem is more directly related to their parent’s discernments and outlooks. Here are some parental tips:

- Encouraging their children's interest in mathematics and avoiding high expectations but rather simply checking on their children's progress.

- Getting involved in their children’s education by knowing their children's teachers, establishing partnerships with them through the parent-teacher association and visiting the school as frequently as possible.

- Becoming aware of any mathematics anxiety they may have, be careful not to pass along their fears to their children but rather discussing with them advices on how to keep it under control.

With these, I hope there will come a time that I would rather hear a different quoted line, “I know how to do it. I never feared Math subject in the first place anyways”, from a much tougher and confident Math pupil.

Reference: