

A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS WITH MATHS ANXIETY

(AND/OR ANXIETY ABOUT TEACHING MATHS)

Sue Skyrme

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THE MATHS AN~~X~~IETY TRUST

www.mathsanxietytrust.com

“The Maths Anxiety Trust’s ‘Guide for Teachers with Maths Anxiety’ blends relatable experiences of teachers with highly practical guidance and strategies from leading experts. For teachers experiencing maths anxiety or anxiety about teaching maths, I cannot recommend it highly enough”

Sam Sims, CEO National Numeracy



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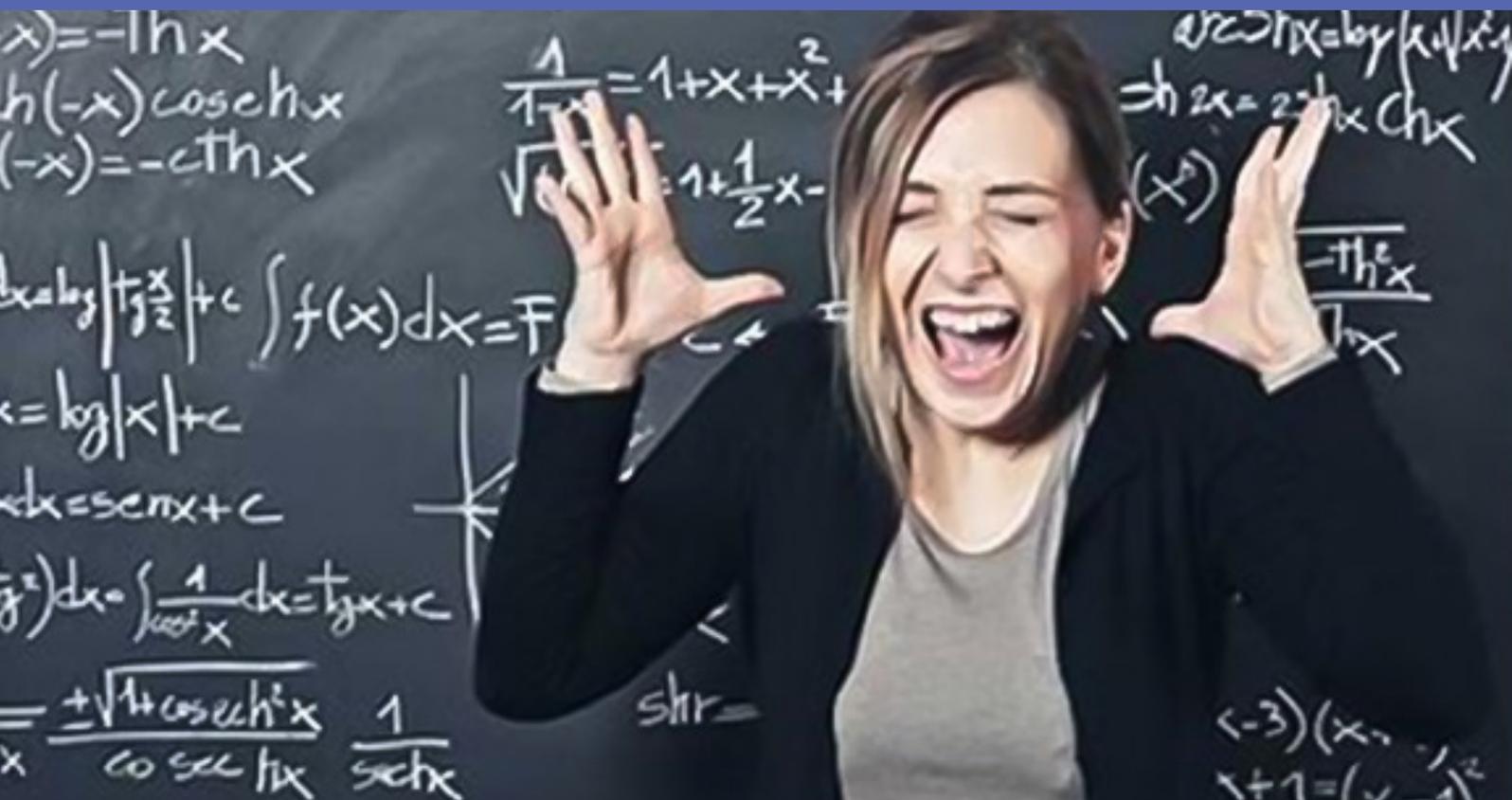
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A feeling of tension and anxiety that interferes with the manipulation of numbers and the solving of mathematical problems in ordinary life and academic situations. Richardson and Suinn (1972)



'Maths anxiety' has been defined as an uncontrollable feeling of tension and anxiety which affects cognition and disables people from being able to manipulate numbers or solve mathematical problems. Research confirms that this is recognisable and measurable and can affect people in everyday life and academic situations. Many people may not have heard of maths anxiety but it is very likely they will know someone who suffers from it. It can be long-standing and can range from a mild feeling of discomfort to a deep-rooted, strong dread of the subject.

Do you:

- feel nervous when teaching maths?
- worry about not being able to answer a question in a maths lesson?
- worry more about teaching maths than other subjects?
- avoid teaching maths when possible?
- and feel anxiety stops you asking for help from colleagues?

“Now, if I am presented with any kind of arithmetic, I am involuntarily gripped with panic and fear. A veil comes down, and my brain stops working. It is exactly the same sensation I would have at school, trying to understand quadratic equations but just not being given the time and attention needed to do so. At the root of my own problems was, I think, the assumption on the part of the teacher that everyone’s brains worked the same way and so the same method should be suitable for everyone. In her binary world, there were “maths brains” and “idiot brains” and naught in between.”

Rhiannon Lucy Cosslett (writing for The Guardian)

Does this sound like you?

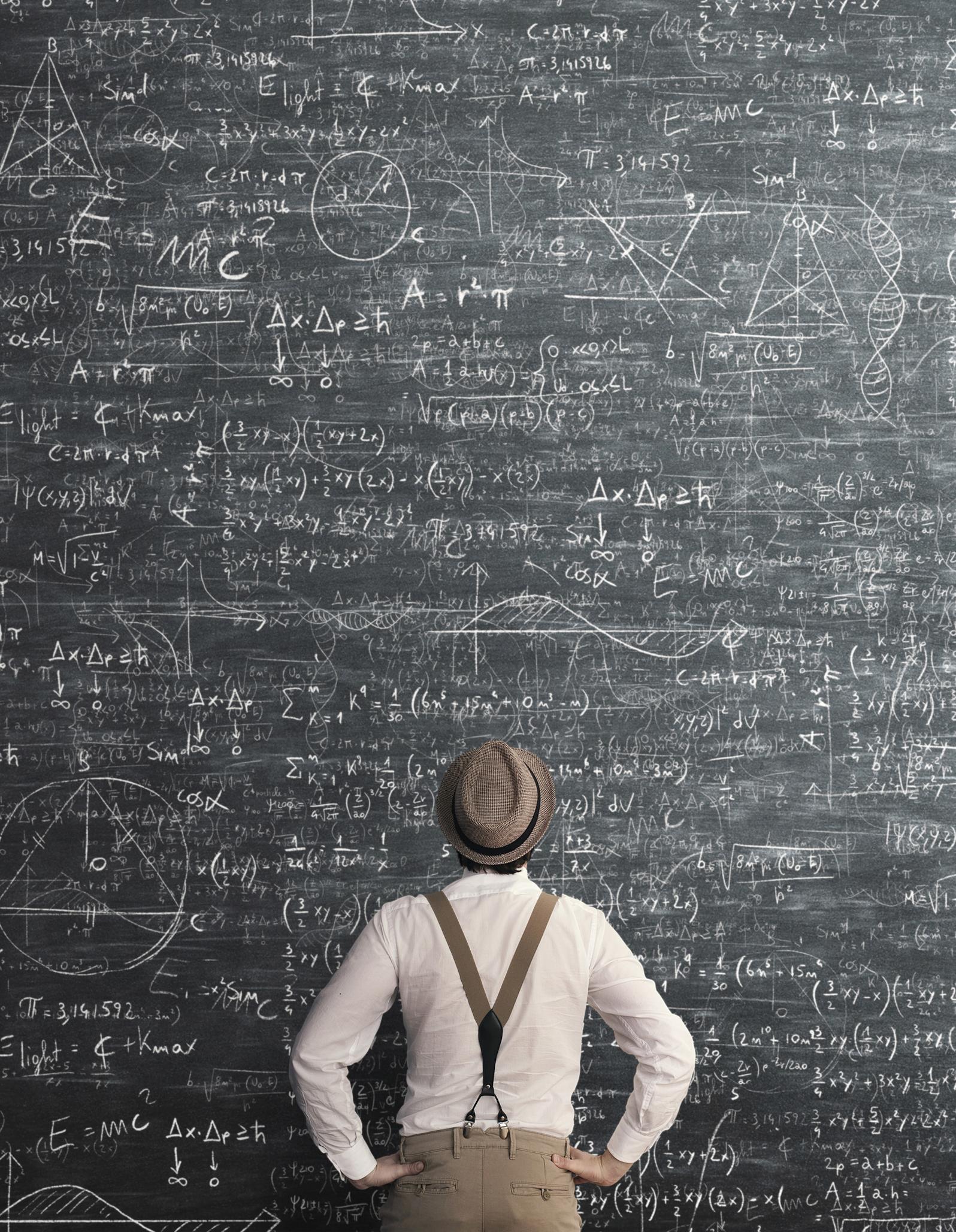
If so, do be reassured that you are not alone! Indeed, some research has shown that many teachers are anxious about maths (and the teaching of maths). In fact, there is evidence to show that students training to teach at primary level are among the most maths anxious. Maths anxiety is common, but there are strategies and self-help which can enable you to manage it in the classroom and beyond. There is also a subtle, but important, distinction between a teacher’s anxiety about maths and anxiety about teaching maths. Most teachers with maths anxiety are extremely empathetic to their learners and often present as highly effective teachers as a result.

Maths anxiety can manifest itself physiologically, cognitively and emotionally. It can be irrational – like, for example, a fear of spiders. Evolution has hard-wired us to be scared of cliff edges, snakes, etc for good reasons, but there is evidence to suggest that maths anxiety is, at least partly, a learned response – usually

from our own experience as learners through poor teaching. Maybe we felt humiliated in the classroom when unable to answer a maths question or work out a calculation. Perhaps it was our weakest examination result. There is no doubt that teaching in the past has not always been the open culture it is today – mistakes were not seen as opportunities for learning but inevitably resulted in some form of punishment or public reprimand. In the not-so-distant past, children were required to stand in the corner wearing a dunce’s hat! Even for those taught more recently, a page of calculations was invariably returned simply with ticks or crosses, and one was left feeling incapable and not understanding why the errors occurred. Whatever the perceived cause of the anxiety, our natural defence mechanism prepares us for a ‘fight or flight’ response; something that is often unhelpful in a busy classroom!

Sometimes maths is perceived to be a discrete classroom subject which has no relevance to our everyday lives. Yet we all successfully use numbers throughout our daily activities and are, therefore, functionally competent mathematicians.

In discussion with trainee teachers, it is often a ‘fear of the fear’ – trainees report not being able to concentrate and listen as they are waiting to be asked a question, or put on the spot, and fear they may not be able to respond. In this constant anxious state, they are unable to process information or learn. For some, training to be a teacher may place them in an educational context that consciously, or perhaps sub-consciously, triggers negative memories and feelings based on their own early maths experiences.



HOW MIGHT IT IMPACT YOUR PLANNING AND TEACHING?

A heightened, and sometimes prolonged, state of anxiety can have a profound impact on how we approach our everyday lives. One impact is often to develop avoidance tactics – “I won’t do that as it involves maths” – even avoiding jobs which are perceived to require good maths skills, or not applying to train as a teacher because a person perceives themselves to be no good at maths.

Sadly, some potentially good teachers have not even reached training as the previously required entrance Skills Tests were so stressful – the timed maths questions reportedly created such pressure that failure was inevitable. Even once qualified, this anxiety can turn fervent teachers into pedestrian teachers. In other curriculum subjects, they may present as full of passion for the subject and inspire their pupils through their own enthusiasm. However, in the maths classroom, the same teacher may unintentionally transfer negative feelings to their pupils via unhelpful verbal and non-verbal language.

If anxious, these teachers will stay within their ‘comfort’ zone – e.g. they often use published materials as scripts – not written for their pupils in their class - but they lack the confidence or subject knowledge to adapt the plans to meet pupil needs. One teacher shared her feelings: “Sometimes the curriculum and school requirements may inadvertently constrain you to maintain pace with the unit, but equally teachers with less confidence in their mathematical ability may have fewer tools, or approaches as a result of their own poor reasoning abilities”. This can have potentially disastrous results for the pupils who may either be struggling with a concept or, alternatively,

may require more challenge in order to make appropriate progress. If children don’t ‘get it’, the anxiety increases with both teacher and pupils becoming frustrated. The teacher may lack any flexibility to try different approaches when a child is struggling and often resorts to the repeating the same instruction or saying it louder!

Perceived confidence in one’s own maths ability is not necessarily an accurate predictor of one’s potential. Research has shown that a higher level of anxiety about teaching maths is related to lower maths self-efficacy. Some very competent and otherwise confident teachers restrict themselves to KS1 as they fear the ‘harder maths’ as children grow older. This approach is obviously flawed in several ways as KS1 pupils still require the teacher to have an appropriate depth of subject knowledge to ensure a sound foundation for later understanding. Maths anxious teachers will also avoid CPD to develop their expertise as they fear public humiliation from colleagues who may expect an existing degree of knowledge and confidence from a practising teacher. The longer this situation prevails, the more the teacher will hide their anxiety and embarrassment, developing further avoidance tactics.

Crucially, if a teacher suffers from maths anxiety, they will often believe that maths is an innate skill – this may affect their attitudes towards pupils’ abilities. If they believe that they are incapable of learning maths, this will colour their view of struggling pupils who they will also believe cannot learn – “they are simply no good at maths!”. Conversely, a pupil who excels at maths is seen as ‘gifted’ and innately more able – anxious teachers will be in awe of these children who are frequently left to work independently. These children will

lack the challenging questions to move their thinking forward.

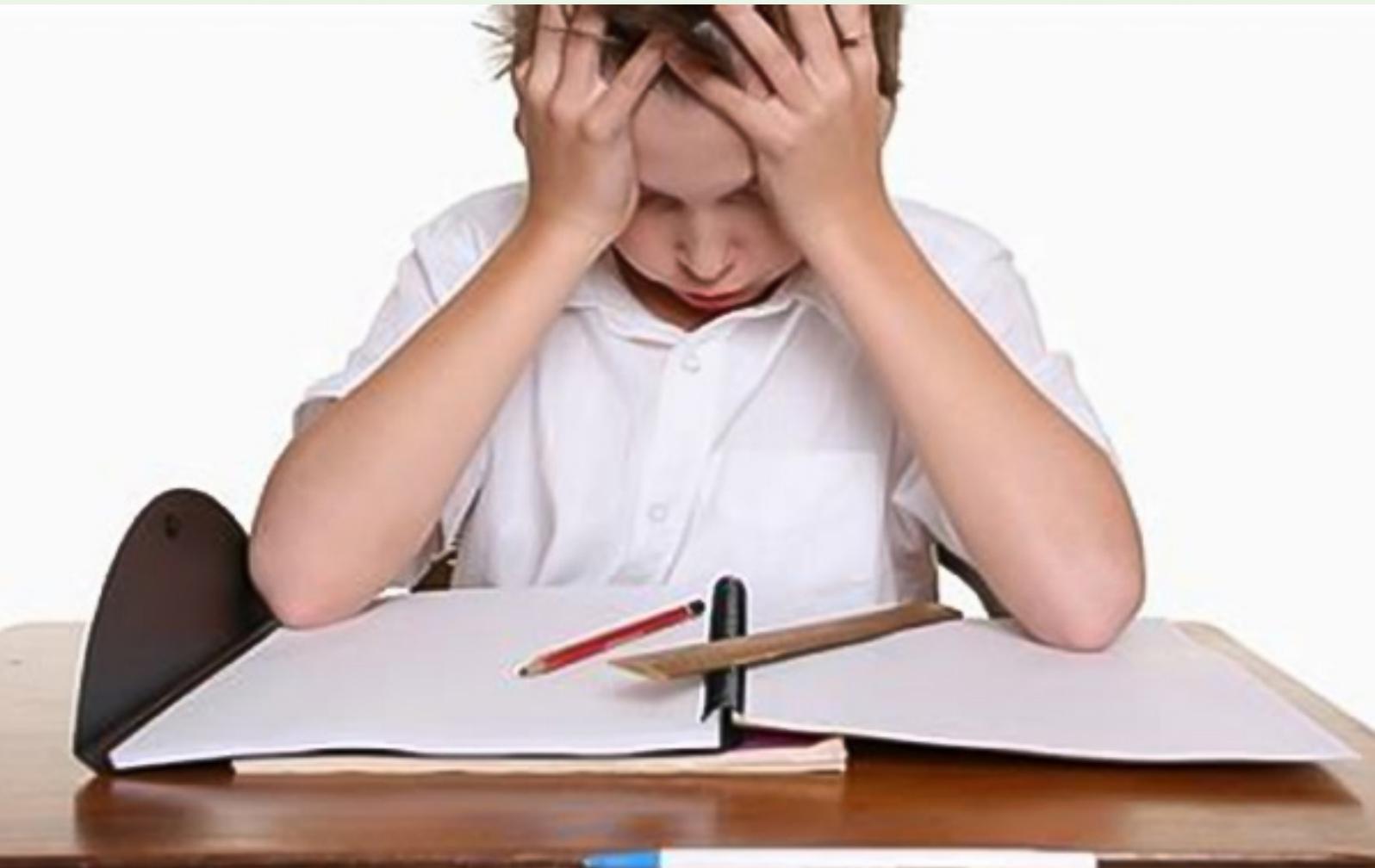
Equally, a lack of in-depth subject knowledge will mean teachers are unable to make coherent cross-curricular links to maximise learning, particularly at secondary school but equally important at primary. Learning opportunities 'in the moment' are missed.

Dr Nathan Lau, at the University of Western Ontario, led research which showed that "the strongest predictor of maths anxiety was how competent students perceived their maths teacher to be: those with less confidence in their teacher tended to feel more anxious". In support of this finding, the greater the confidence reported by teachers the lower the maths anxiety reported by students.

Furthermore, the level of maths anxiety within a classroom was found to predict an individual's maths achievement.

Prof Margaret Brown, OBE the president of the Maths Anxiety Trust, said: "It shows for the first time that maths anxiety is not just an individual phenomenon which affects maths attainment, but it also strongly correlates with other contextual factors like the pupils' confidence in their teacher, teachers' own confidence in their maths, and the amount of homework and parental involvement in completing it."

Finally, if anxious teachers are reluctant to admit pupils do not enjoy their lessons, they are less likely to seek support from colleagues. This becomes a downward spiral as anxiety over pupil engagement and progress exacerbates the existing maths anxiety!



HOW CAN YOUR ANXIETY AFFECT CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS MATHS?

As explored earlier, teachers can inadvertently transfer their own anxiety, or at the very least, lack of enthusiasm to their pupils. Children are very perceptive and may not enjoy the lesson as a result. This feeling can quickly evolve to a complete dislike of the subject. The children themselves may start to develop avoidance tactics such as:

- not starting work
- spending too much time on easy questions
- automatically saying 'I don't know'
- saying the first number they can think of completing the bare minimum
- non-task-based activities, such as sharpening pencils or going to the toilet

Subsequently, this can lead to misbehaviour which is not always linked to the cause. Many pupils suffer from maths anxiety themselves but, as teachers, we do need to ensure it is not us transferring our own feelings. It should be emphasized at this point, that this is not usually a conscious process. The vast majority of teachers are very conscientious and aware of the impact they have on children; it is the unintentional impact we need to raise awareness of and address.

In an anxious teacher's classroom, pupils tend to be given simple, closed tasks – investigative tasks, which could open up new areas of mathematical exploration, could be out of the teacher's comfort zone due to their unpredictability. It is easier to keep tight control over where the learning is going. Planned questioning, for example, ensures the teacher is prepared for specific responses. Open tasks may throw up a whole new line of enquiry for which the teacher does not have the answers – this could be very anxiety inducing for a teacher who is highly maths anxious! However, this is 'playing it safe' and is not providing pupils with sufficient thinking, reasoning and problem-solving opportunities.

In one school taking part in National Numeracy's parental engagement project, 20% of teachers believed maths is an innate skill. They tend not to talk positively about maths; do not make links and point out the maths in everyday life to ensure purposeful learning, and often praise children for their 'cleverness' rather than their effort. Being a maths anxious teacher may limit a growth mindset – it is vital to promote value (pupils need to know the benefits maths will bring); the belief (everyone can improve their numeracy) and persistence (recognise that everyone struggles in order to succeed – that it is part of the learning process).

These are measures of a good practitioner and maths anxiety will adversely impact on a teacher's ability to develop these key skills in children as they will not value maths, believe they can do maths or persist themselves. We all know a teacher's passion, enthusiasm, and ability to inspire in the classroom reflect their own deeply held beliefs around the subject. High maths anxiety can have a hugely negative impact on a teacher's ability to teach as well as they may do in other curriculum areas.



HOW CAN WE OVERCOME THESE ISSUES?

Firstly, we need to be clear – these difficulties are not of your own making! Maths anxiety often develops as a result of negative previous experience, e.g. learning maths in the past. It is not something we wish to suffer from and is presumably something we wish to address – on two levels: to diminish our own anxiety and also, to eradicate the impact it may be having on the pupils in our care. It is important to separate anxiety from ability – many mathematically able pupils and adults still endure anxiety.

Many, many people throughout society suffer from maths anxiety. For teachers, this is considerably debilitating as there is an expectation that we are all competent and confident mathematicians, as we have been

accepted into the profession via academic qualifications. Given the entry requirements, there is often an assumption about the level of expertise trainees have. For a start, they often hold old qualifications as, increasingly, teachers are recruited following a career change. These older qualifications reflect learning and knowledge which is unlikely to have been retained over time (sometimes decades!). They may also have been gained without understanding as teaching and testing methods were so different – it was possible to achieve a grade 'A' at O level by being able to apply methods and formulas accurately in the absence of a deep, conceptual understanding. It could reflect a test of memory and application rather than any knowledge of the calculations and processes involved. Even with more recent qualifications, potential trainees do experience maths anxiety but it is not something they would acknowledge on an application form



in the way that perhaps dyslexia would be, so that appropriate support could be given. The trainee, although possessing a piece of paper stating they are at a certain level in maths, might not have the confidence and may well bluff their way through their ITT (Initial Teacher Training), taking the easiest path through any maths requirements.

Therefore, ITT needs to be addressed. Currently, the majority of ITT maths courses are aimed at developing pedagogy and methodology and assume a level of knowledge. Subject knowledge audits are often at GCSE level and do not give a reliable indication of knowledge, understanding, or confidence.

Maths training for trainee teachers should therefore start at a low entry point to establish levels of confidence and build enthusiasm for the subject. It is vital to acknowledge and address trainees' own anxieties but also how to recognise it in children. Initially, trainees should be supported with simple planning so those who are anxious can focus on one clear learning objective at a time. They should be encouraged to 'walk through' that plan, prior to the lesson, to rehearse and anticipate questions or difficulties that may arise. This should not be a simple proof-reading exercise but an imaginary placing of themselves as learners through the lesson. Ideally, this should be modelled by ITT tutors. Through this detailed exploration, they will feel more confident to address any misconceptions before they arise.

Anxious teachers, who are already in the classroom, may like to consider a personal tutor/supportive colleague who would be able to break down their understanding and reconstruct it. Understanding maths is rather like building a wall; if there are missing bricks lower down, the foundation becomes unstable and will collapse. When tutoring older students

or adults, it is often necessary to revisit primary maths to rebuild the wall firmly. One teacher reported "having somebody there to explain it in lots of different ways (no matter how long it took!), really helped." Being relaxed with a tutor/colleague, in order to feel comfortable making mistakes, which are essential for learning, is also important.

When being taught maths or presented with a maths task, it is important that a person sees the value and purpose in what they are being asked to do. It may help to break down a task into smaller parts. Indeed, breaking down the instructions or question may be a necessary step even before tackling a maths problem. Maths anxiety may impact attentional processes, which means difficulty attending to the requirements set by a teacher or maths activity. As such, working alongside someone who lacks confidence in maths also helps; it removes the fear of making mistakes or saying something perceived to be silly. That said, those who are high in maths confidence should be proactive in supporting those who are less confident. Whether you are a pupil, a trainee teacher, or a qualified teacher, anxiety can sometimes get in the way. If necessary, it is important to feel you are able to stop proceedings to get to grips with what is expected or clarify the maths questions or instructions; instructors or colleagues should lead the way in establishing ground rules and should discourage those who are maths anxious from sitting in silence. Feeling comfortable in the learning situation is crucial

Strategies to support maths anxious pupils will also apply to anxious teachers. If we are able to make children believe that they can solve a calculation in front of them, rather than having to start from a position where they believe that they are bound to fail, surely that is half the battle – it's the same with teachers!

HOW CAN TEACHERS BE SUPPORTED TO IMPROVE THEIR CONFIDENCE WITH MATHS AND PASS ON POSITIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS MATHS?

The good news is that maths anxiety can be tackled and we can develop strategies to build resilience and confidence. The aim is not to become a high-flying mathematician, but to reduce anxiety and begin to enjoy maths as a creative and fun subject which is crucial to our everyday lives. It is important to recognise that a certain level of anxiety can be quite normal. Indeed, it is often associated with motivation to perform well as a maths teacher (rather than being indifferent or apathetic) and this

can lead to better performance. We want to reduce and regulate anxiety, so we are able to operate effectively and comfortably in our maths teaching. Avoid comparisons to other people – consider your anxiety a strength which enables you to empathise and break down teaching for pupils to understand.

There are causes of the anxiety – by developing a growth mindset, these can be addressed. Everyone can learn maths – everyone has an idea or belief about their own potential and erroneous or unhelpful beliefs need to be revised to reduce anxiety. However, home stereotypes around those who naturally ‘can’ or ‘can’t’ remain stubborn. Maths anxiety can be a familial culture passed on before children



M I N D S E T

even reach school. Also, many pre-school practitioners lack formal maths training and may subconsciously reflect negative attitudes. All these aspects are self-perpetuating as these children become educators in adulthood.

According to Carol Dweck, intelligence and ability are not pre-determined and hard work and commitment can lead to success. If, in the past, you have felt humiliated or ashamed regarding maths, this does not define you now.

One study by Jason Moser and his colleagues gave insights into how electrical brain activity reflecting a person's awareness of, and attention to, mistakes may explain why growth-minded individuals' have a greater ability to rebound from mistakes.

"The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives." (Dweck, 2007).

In addition to causes of anxiety, there are symptoms of anxiety, and gaining control of the negative emotional responses is a crucial step. There are two aspects here – a teacher's anxiety about maths generally, and a teacher's anxiety about teaching maths. Moreover, in the specific context of maths teaching, anxiety can be separated into specific forms. In 2019, Hunt and Sari identified what they termed "self-directed maths teaching anxiety" associated with a teacher's anxiety about their own teaching and perceived maths ability. They also reported "pupil/student-directed maths teaching anxiety", which relates to the anxiety/worry that teachers might have about students failing maths assessments or not reaching school/curriculum targets.

Explore ways in which you could begin to improve your confidence in your own ability with numbers. Consider a tutor, as explored above, or an online resource which will build your understanding of functional maths, for example the National Numeracy Challenge. This resource can be engaged with privately, has no time limits, adapts to your level, and identifies your progress <https://nationalnumeracy.org.uk/challenge/>.

Taking the opportunity to observe enthusiastic maths teachers in the classroom will also build your own knowledge and understanding. Keeping a short diary of when you have used maths in everyday life will develop a sense of success and help you identify any specific areas you would like help with. Find someone who might like to play games or puzzles with you to share a sense of fun and enjoyment of numbers.

Be honest with colleagues or the leadership team so that appropriate support and CPD can be implemented. It should not be embarrassing to admit you lack confidence with maths; you will have other strengths! It is more professionally disconcerting to not take action to address the issue as it will – however hard you try to disguise it – have an impact on your pupils' attitudes and progress. Qualified teachers and trainee teachers alike should be given the time and space to discuss maths anxiety regularly and openly. This should take place in a safe, non-judgemental environment.



Firstly, be sure to try and start the maths lesson in a relaxed manner, perhaps with some quiet background music. Practise deep breathing and be aware of what demands are on your time immediately before the lesson so you can mitigate them and feel calm.

Be clear about what the lesson is going to involve and how everyone will succeed – this is obviously good practice and helpful for pupils but will also help settle your mind. Try to use everyday language initially to minimise anxiety around unfamiliar mathematical vocabulary (this can be gradually introduced). Depth is more important than speed so give thinking time for both yourself and pupils. Understandably, some teachers feel under considerable pressure as the content of the maths curriculum is so broad; this translates into an impetus to rush through, causing stress for the teacher and apprehension amongst pupils. There is often pressure to maintain pace, but it should be **appropriate** pace and school/team leaders should avoid observations at times that add unnecessary stress to teachers who are already anxious.

Using a real-life context which is familiar to you will create some security and enable you to be more creative with the maths problems you present. Given that maths is part of everyday life, it is easy to develop a sense of wonder when it is explored and, as maths is all about patterns and problem-solving not just a set of formula, developing exploration and curiosity in your pupils might also develop a sense of enjoyment for you as their enthusiasm will be infective. To make the lesson motivational and fun for all concerned, it is worth investing some time and thought to consider the **suitability** of published plans, editing these accordingly. If you focus on **how** you will develop motivation

and positivity in pupils, it could also have an impact on your own attitudes and feelings.

Strategies to support both the teacher and the pupil are often intertwined, thus tackling maths anxiety in teachers will help address maths anxiety in pupils, and vice-versa. This is a list (by no means exhaustive) of strategies which will help both teachers and pupils deal with maths anxiety in the classroom:

- Seek support from colleagues if you feel anxious about teaching maths. Schools should also be proactive in developing a culture of support to encourage others to come forward to offer and receive support
- Start maths lessons by affirming positive messages about maths and the lesson ahead.
- Always place maths into real life contexts – give a purpose to the learning “we are learning how to....today because it will help us.....”.
- Ensure links are made to prior learning so that the pupil starts from a point of confidence.
- Questions should have a low entry point and a scaffolded approach.
- Give reasonable thinking time - encourage partner talk so ideas can be explored before asking for a response.
- Break down instructions –working memory is impaired when anxious – if necessary, write them on a board.
- When modelling, ensure a visual example is left up for reference.
- Use language that reinforces a growth mindset – “we don’t know it yet!”.
- Build mathematical resilience; be creative with the growth zone model to facilitate a move from the anxiety zone to the growth

and comfort zones – use coloured pens or posters or stickers to support identification of where you and your pupils place yourselves on a given maths topic.

- Foster a sense of exploration and fun rather than 'right' or 'wrong' answers- play and be creative with maths.
- Encourage co-operative learning to facilitate help-seeking behaviour (Lavasani & Khandan, 2011).
- Question whether you are unnecessarily emphasising the speed of calculation (<https://tinyurl.com/Hunt-Chinn-2020>).
- Have a range of concrete apparatus readily accessible for pupils who need them.
- Explore mistakes and misconceptions together.
- Create a buddy system to encourage help-seeking and shared learning.
- Use mini-plenaries to celebrate effort and resilience.
- Chunk up tasks- e.g. cut up an A4 sheet into smaller tasks – and time so that work is not overwhelming, but do have clear

expectations that are communicated to pupils.

- Devise a system whereby pupils can communicate their anxiety without putting their hand up – e.g. a red cube placed on the desk.
- Take time for short breathing exercises or play quiet calming music.
- Use pre-teaching for individuals (or small groups) if particularly anxious – this helps pupils feel prepared and enables the teacher to rehearse new concepts, resources, or vocabulary.
- Ensure the learning journey is clear, visual, and accessible, so all experience success as you travel along together – break down into small steps so success is ensured – create learning that is perceived to be realistically achievable.
- Consider how abstract a task is – how can it be represented visually or use a context which will appeal to you and your pupils?
- Consider alternative and creative ways of recording outcomes and thought processes in ways that work for you and



your pupils, e.g. pictures, diagrams, bullet-points, mind maps, etc.

- Guide pupils' reflections on their progress so each pupil leaves the lesson with a sense of achievement.
- Ensure all adults in the classroom talk positively around maths and avoid statements that may reinforce negative attitudes (even if they are intended as demonstrating empathy or understanding, e.g. "Don't worry, I've never been a maths person either").
- Normalise expressing emotions and worries so that pupils feel comfortable articulating their feelings around maths.
- Challenge any negative self-beliefs concerning your own maths ability and ability to teach maths but involve someone who can support you with this. Adopt a similar approach in the classroom, whereby teachers address negative self-appraisals in pupils and peers support each other.
- Ensure all pupils know you will continue to help them until they do understand and that is OK.
- Ensure all in the class (including the teacher) are confident with each step in

learning before proceeding (bite-size steps are often appropriate).

- End each lesson with positivity and encouragement – either celebrate what has been achieved or reassure the concept will be returned to, but in any event, praise effort and resilience!
- Share your positive approach with parents! Talk about value, belief, and persistence.

Many of these you will already be implementing but they are all worth a re-evaluation of how you communicate. Consider your body language and intonation as well as what you actually say. It is your positive and enthusiastic approach which will develop confidence in pupils and, eventually, this will also become habitual for you. Taking such approaches to supporting your studies will no doubt impact your own teaching and self-beliefs when it comes to maths. That said, it is important that you consider strategies outside of the classroom that relate to your specific anxieties when it comes to maths and maths teaching; this is where the support from others is vital, whether that comes from colleagues, the school leadership team, professional bodies, or teacher training programmes.



OVERCOMING MY MATHS ANXIETY

GILLIAN LYNCH,
ACTING DEPUTY HEAD,
ST AIDAN'S PRIMARY

I always remember enjoying maths at primary school though I wasn't ever in the top group, and in the first few years of secondary school I enjoyed it, but something went wrong after that. It's really obvious when you're set in different classes, and I was in the lower ability class. I don't know whether that knocked my confidence, or it could've been becoming a teenager and losing interest, but I just felt lost in maths lessons. That then grew into maths anxiety – which I didn't know at the time, because I didn't understand what that was, I just thought I hated it. In the last years of secondary school I knew I would need to pass the standard grade (Scottish equivalent to GCSE) to get into university to do primary teaching, but my grades showed that I was nowhere near achieving that. A family friend who had a PhD in maths offered to help, and the one-to-one help she gave me was absolutely vital. I think I was the only person in the class who got an A! That made me realise I can do

maths, but that the classroom environment at the time didn't work for me.

I managed to get what I needed for university and coasted through the primary maths course, but when I started teaching, I remember panicking and having to teach myself every lesson the night before, and not feeling confident. I always dreaded teaching maths lessons, for about two or three years, maybe more. Then, we started to use the Number Talks approach in school, and that helped with the gaps in my own knowledge and increased my confidence as well as the confidence of the learners in the class. Following this, our maths lead in the school got promoted, and the Head Teacher asked me to take on the role. I remember agreeing but then going home and crying, because I was terrified! I thought that if I'm going to lead this in the school, I can't have this fear. That was the kick I needed to do a lot more CPD and research about maths anxiety, not just maths skills.

Since then there's been a total shift. I now absolutely love teaching maths, learning new techniques and methodologies, finding resources and taking part in projects. It's definitely been a journey, and took me a long time to overcome. For me, finding about more



about what maths anxiety actually is made a huge difference. It's something I always talk to parents about now, because I would make the same comments that they make – I remember going into class, and if children rolled their eyes at maths I'd say: "I used to hate it too, but we just need to get it done." Now, to think that a teacher would say that is terrible!

I always talk to the parents about it because a lot of them are my age, and feel as I did. It's what we talked about at each numeracy parental workshop we host for our new families starting the school - language and phrases to avoid. Knowing about it makes you stop and think what it is you're actually worried about. It's not that you hate maths, but that you've got a fear of it, and we'll get through this together. My advice for any teachers who are feeling frustrated or down due to their maths anxiety

is just give it a try and don't give yourself such a hard time. As a profession, we teachers give ourselves a hard time – there's so much pressure on us. Don't be so hard on yourself, learn from mistakes, and celebrate mistakes. I think being open and honest about it as well is good, that's one of the things I've started to do in my teaching. I'm open with the kids, saying "I can't really figure that out, let's work it out together." Sometimes people think, and I certainly used to think, that teachers have to know the answer all the time, but part of the process is working through it together and making mistakes. Having the confidence to make mistakes is what makes it easier for me. I still don't believe I'm the best at maths, but I know what I need to do to get better, and I have.



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