

Academic Pressure and Teens in the US and South Korea: Is it worth it?

Grade Level: 9-12 Psychology Courses

Length of Time: 1-2 class periods

Objectives:

- Understand the basics of stress as a psychophysiological reaction
- Evaluate the positive and negative elements of stress
- Discuss the range of potential stressors for teenagers
- Understand the Korean high school system including the use of extensive high stakes tests and
- Compare academic stress in high schools in the United States compared to stress in high schools South Korea

Standards Reference:

APA National Standards for High School Psychology

Content Standard: Stress and coping

- 1.1 Define stress as a psychophysiological reaction.
- 1.2 Identify and explain potential sources of stress.
- 1.3 Explain physiological and psychological consequences for health.

Content Standard: Social and cultural diversity

- 1.2 Identify how cultures change over time and vary within nations as well as internationally.

Teacher Background Information:

- This lesson could be used in either a stress and health or emotions unit (easier to incorporate) or during a unit about sociocultural perspectives in psychology.
- Before beginning this lesson, it would be helpful for the instructor to be familiar with the educational system in South Korea. These videos and articles are from North American teachers who have also taught in Korea.
 - o Differences between North American and South Korean Students from www.eatyourkimchi.com: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=319&v=BrccO4O1zWs>
 - o 10 Facts about Korean Schools - <http://grrrltraveler.com/countries/asia/korea/teaching-english/10-facts-korean-school/>
- For teachers that don't have any background in the academic pressures of the Korean system, this film from Journeyman pictures offers a good overview of the system and the pressures.
 - o Academic Pressure Pushing S. Korean Students to Suicide (25 minutes): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXswlCa7dug>

Lesson Content:

In this lesson, students will learn about the difference between the parts of the stress reaction including identifying common stressors. Students will then evaluate the impact of stress

Procedures:

1. Anticipatory Set: Worksheet

- a. Hand out “Stressed Out!” Worksheet to students (Handout A at end of lesson plan)
- b. “Stressed Out!” worksheet could be filled out individually or in partners/small groups depending on teacher preference.
- c. Once finished with worksheet, elicit responses for each question from the class. It would be helpful to collect information about the scaled score responses, but not necessary if it is too inconvenient.

2. Video Clip

- a. Show the following clip to use to set the stage for comparison with South Korea. The video clip shows an overview of the long hours of Korean schooling along with information about stress levels of Koreans and its connection to suicide rates.
 - i. BBC Clip (3:24) – Is Korean Education the Best in the World?
 1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFpTdEFqXI>

3. Article Reading

- a. Three articles will be used (below). These can be randomly assigned or assigned based on reading ability of each student.
 - i. USA could learn from South Korean schools
 1. By David J. Lynch, USA TODAY Updated 11/24/2008 1:42 PM
 2. <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/story?id=6293334&page=1>
 - ii. An Assault Upon Our Children: South Korea’s Educational System Hurts Students
 1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/02/opinion/sunday/south-koreas-education-system-hurts-students.html>
 - iii. High performance, high pressure in South Korea’s education system
 1. International Consultants for Education and Fairs
 2. <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/01/high-performance-high-pressure-in-south-koreas-education-system/>

4. Group Collaboration

- a. Divide student into groups of three-five students who all read the same article.
 - i. OPTION A:
 1. Have each group come up with the following items (below). They can share this information on giant post it note/butcher paper/white board segments/google slide.
 - a. Two main ideas
 - b. Two interesting facts or ideas
 - c. One visual that would help them explain what they read to others

ii. OPTION B:

1. Have each group fill out Handout B as a group which they can share with the large group in the next step.

5. Large Group Reporting

- a. Have each group share briefly with the large group about their article.
- b. Briefly combine thoughts from groups into common themes. Make sure that (at minimum) the following themes come through:
 - i. The Korean educational system/culture creates test scores that are higher than most countries, including the United States
 - ii. Korean students attend school much longer than US students do each day
 - iii. Korean students have higher levels of stress/suicide rates than US students do

6. Small Group Debrief (or Journal entry)

- a. Have students debrief their thoughts about the school systems, results, and stress levels via the questions on Handout C. If time, have students do this in new heterogeneous groups.
- b. This debrief and wrap up can be done as a group discussion or assigned as a journal reflection.

Enduring Understandings:

- Stress has both helpful and harmful elements
- South Korean education is considered to be of very high quality
- There appears to be a connection between stress levels and suicide rates
- The types of stressors for teenagers can vary cross-culturally

Modifications:

- Differentiation for students – selection of specific articles based on reading ability.
- Differentiation for students – as students of differing ability have varying stress levels, it may be helpful to create homogenous groups based on ability or based on subjective stress levels as measured by the survey in the written portion.
- Technology - If classroom has access to technology to collect data in real time (laptops, clickers, cell phones), collecting the data on the classroom survey electronically would be helpful in that students may be able to see results quickly after the survey is administered via google, etc.
- Some of the elements of the lesson could be streamlined or used as homework
 - Small group debrief could be transformed into a homework assignment.
 - Students could read the article ahead of the class period.

Extensions:

- Deeper exploration of Korea schools
 - Show longer clip about Korean Education (see teacher background information)
 - Discuss other differences between Korean and American schools (see teacher background information for starting resources)

- Connection to other cultures:
 - o Use the example of Finland to problematize the stress/achievement model. How does culture impact achievement and ability?
 - <http://ideas.ted.com/what-the-best-education-systems-are-doing-right/>

Sources

Academic Pressure Pushing S. Korean Students to Suicide [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXswlCa7dug>

Choi, Amy S. (2014) *What the best education systems are doing right*. Retrieved from <http://ideas.ted.com/what-the-best-education-systems-are-doing-right/>

Differences between North American and South Korean Students [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=319&v=BrccO4O1zWs>

International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF). *High performance, high pressure in South Korea's education system*. Retrieved from <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/01/high-performance-high-pressure-in-south-koreas-education-system/>

Is Korean Education the Best in the World? [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFpTdEFqXI>

Koo, Se-Woong (2014). *An Assault Upon Our Children: South Korea's Educational System Hurts Students*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/02/opinion/sunday/south-koreas-education-system-hurts-students.html>

Lynch, David J (2008). *USA could learn from South Korean Schools*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/story?id=6293334&page=1>

Ten Facts about Korean Schools. Retrieved from <http://grrrrtraveler.com/countries/asia/korea/teaching-english/10-facts-korean-school/>

Handout A: Stressing out!

Name _____

High school students often complain of high levels of stress. In this lesson, we'll be exploring our own views of stress and comparing them to stressed high school students elsewhere in the world.

Important Terms:

Stress: the process by which we perceive and respond to certain events, called *stressor*, that we appraise as threatening or challenging.

Stressors: The event that causes the stress reaction

Stress Reaction: the physical and emotional responses to a stressor

Think about it!

What are some typical stressors for you or other high school students?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

What types of stress reactions are typical when you or others encounter these stressors?

Can you think of a time when stress was helpful for you? If so, when?

Handout A: Stressing out!

Opinion Time!

On a typical day at school, I feel bombarded by stressors.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 Completely

I feel like the level of stress I feel is unmanageable and unhealthy.

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 Completely

The academic system at our school causes students to be “stressed out”

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 Completely

The academic expectations placed on students by the school and our community is

Way too low 1 2 3 4 5 6 Way too high

Should teachers be asked to reduce workload of students so they suffer fewer stress reactions?

Definitely not 1 2 3 4 5 6 Definitely Yes

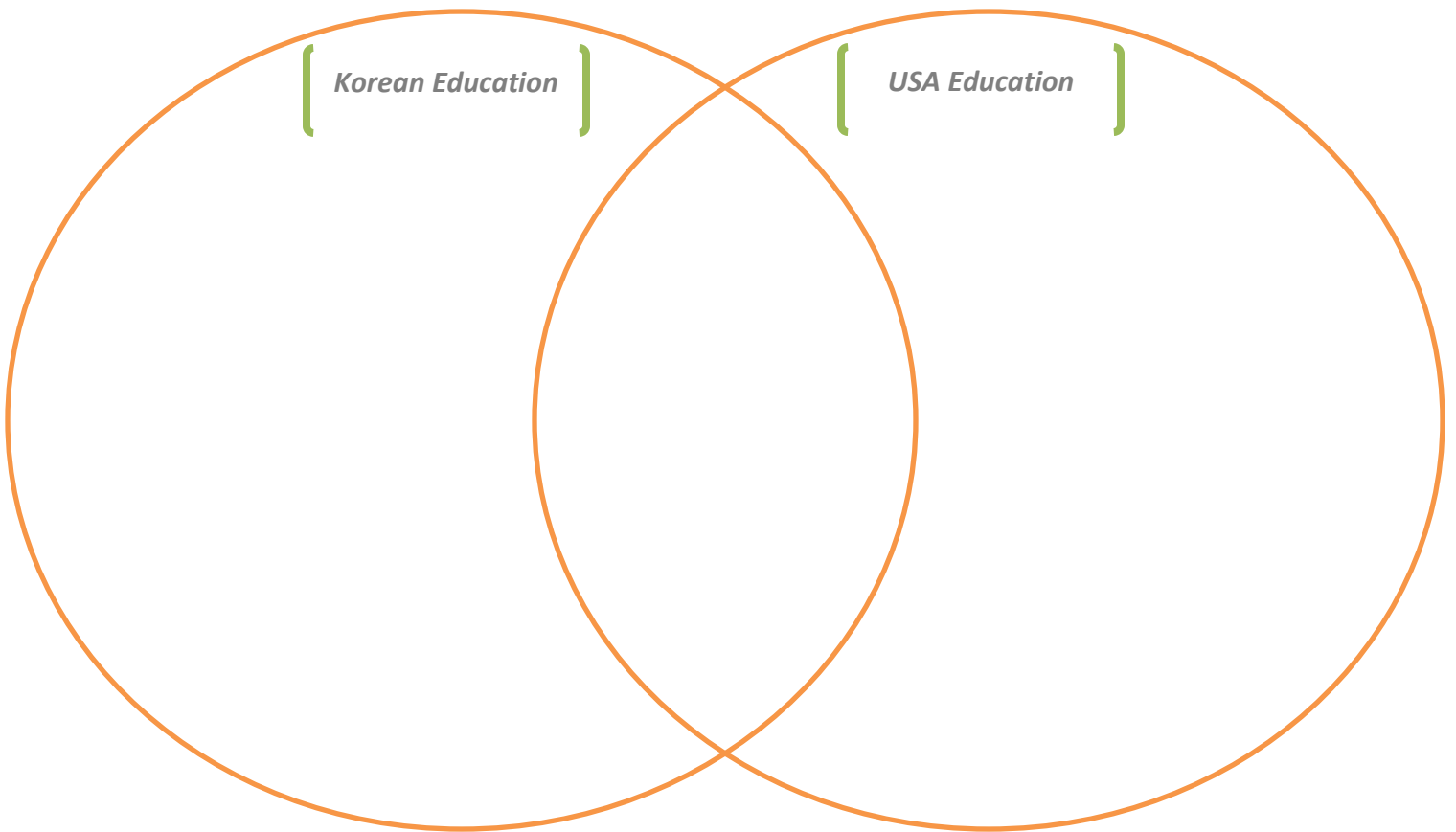
If the US is lagging behind some other countries academically, should we change educational practices so we can improve?

Definitely not 1 2 3 4 5 6 Definitely Yes

Handout B: Cross Cultural views of Academic Pressure Name: _____

Think about it!

From what you know so far from your article and your own experience as a student, fill out the Venn diagram about Korean Education vs. USA Education. Please list any ongoing questions under the diagram.



Ongoing questions about the differences between the educational systems (if any):

Handout C: Reflecting on Cross Cultural Academic Experiences

Your thoughts:

Pick one of the following questions to write about in the space below:

- In your opinion, *To what extent* is the additional stress and time commitment to studying for Korean teens worth it? Why?
- Additional stressors to succeed in Korean education seems to increase achievement in Korean students. Argue why American schools should or should not follow the Korean example in order to increase their middling international tests scores.
- Korean schools and schools in the US have different priorities regarding the purpose of school, but these priorities have the potential of changing. For each country, what do you think an indicator would be that educational policy in the country should shift to a different model?
