

White Board

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Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

Should Effort Count? Students Certainly Think So

IN A RECENT STUDY, a group of 120 undergraduates were asked what percentage of a grade should be based on performance and what percentage on effort. The students said that 61% of the grade should be based on performance and 39% on effort.

The importance of effort in their grade calculations was also demonstrated by how they graded hypothetical scenarios that depicted various levels of effort and performance. These results are consistent with previous findings which also identified faculty views on the contribution of effort in the calculation of grades. In one study (cited in this 2012 research), students thought 38% of the grade ought to be based on effort, whereas faculty thought effort merited just over 17%.

Historically, grades have been thought of as measures of performance. If students cannot demonstrate their mastery via an exam, paper, project or performance, then they have not mastered the material or skill. "Unless you can explain it or do it, you don't understand it," I remember one professor telling us repeatedly.

The problem, of course, is that most of the time it's very difficult for professors to objectively assess effort, and students can make the case for effort with great passion and no small amount of pleading. "I studied hours for this exam." "I have never worked as hard on a paper." But the "I-tried-so-hard" claim cannot be independently verified. And for many of us it's hard to imagine trying that hard and not mastering the material or producing a quality product.

I'm rather mystified by faculty thinking that effort should account for 17% of the grade. I suppose if it's the course grade, and effort is equated with things like regular attendance, completion of the homework, asking and answering questions that, by the end of the course, faculty might have a sense

of who's trying hard and can be rewarded for doing so. But it still doesn't make much sense. How could you be in class, do the homework, regularly participate and not master the material? What about the students who aren't in class, don't do the homework but still perform well, are they docked for not showing effort?

Even if effort could objectively be measured (some of you may have figured ways), that still leaves the question of whether it's a viable dimension of the grade? Should you get credit for trying if you don't succeed or just barely succeed? I always fall back on the brain surgeon analogy when asked if effort counts. If you have a brain tumor, do you want a brain surgeon who tries hard or one who knows how to deal successfully with brain tumors?

The authors of this study also wondered whether students' perceptions of professors' grading fairness and competence were influenced by whether the professor counted effort. Here's what they found. "Findings appear to suggest that students judge professors as unfair when the perceived effort invested in the completion of an assignment does not compensate for actual poor performance . . ." (p. 58) Students also perceived the professor as a less competent grader under these conditions.

If students are coming to these conclusions, regardless whether we're counting effort or not, it certainly is a topic that merits discussing with students. They should know what we are doing and why. They need to be reminded that assessing effort is all but impossible given that professors generally aren't with students when they expend effort and many of us are cynical. We have been conned by students before. If effort counts, we should seek ways to make the assessment of it as objective as possible. Maybe discussion of that topic begins with a definition of effort, or a description of

what it takes to learn something. As authors of the 2011 study found, students estimate they spend just a bit over 14 hours a week studying. Faculty reported they thought students spent a little more than 19 hours studying per week.

References: Tippin, G. K., Lafreniere, K. D. and Page, S. (2012). Student perception of academic grading: Personality, academic orientation, and effort. Active Learning in Higher Education, 13 (1), 51-61.

Zinn, T. E., Magnotti, J. F., Marchuk, K., Schultz, B. S., Luther, A., and Varfolomeeva, V. (2011). Does effort still count? More on what makes the grade? Teaching of Psychology, 38 (1), 10-15. (An article highlighting these findings appears in the November, 2011 issue of The Teaching Professor.)

Maryellen Weimer, PhD; Should Effort Count? Students Certainly Think So; Faculty Focus; April 11, 2012; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-professor-blog/should-effort-count-students-certainly-think-so/>]; April 12, 2012

Summer 1 Term Begins - May 14

WHITE BOARD

2011-12 Publication Dates
First Monday of the Month

September 5	March 5
October 3	April 2
November 7	May 7
December 5	June 4
January 3	July 2
February 6	August 6

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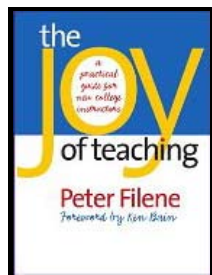
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Summer Reading

The Joy Of Teaching: A Practical Guide for New College Instructors

Peter Filene (Author)

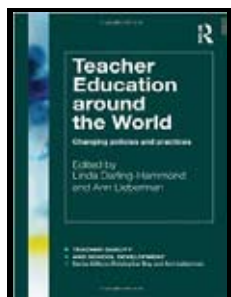


Publisher:
The Univ. of North Carolina Press
(February 16, 2005)
ISBN-10: 0807829420
ISBN-13: 978-0807829424

Gathering concepts and techniques borrowed from outstanding college professors, *The Joy of Teaching* provides helpful guidance for new instructors developing and teaching their first college courses. The book's down-to-earth, accessible style makes it appropriate for teachers in all fields. Instructors in the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences will all welcome its invaluable tips for successful teaching and learning. - (AMAZON)

Teacher Education Around the World: Changing Policies and Practices (Teacher Quality and School Development)

Linda Darling-Hammond (Editor), Ann Lieberman (Editor)

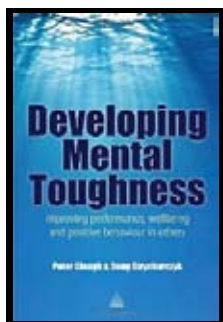


Publisher: Routledge
(April 9, 2012)
ISBN-10: 0415577004
ISBN-13: 978-0415577007

The leading international contributors to this book describe the systemic policies and practices of teacher education in eight high-achieving countries and how they are dealing with teacher quality, equity, and the changing global society. Among the countries that are doing well – Finland, Singapore, the Netherlands, the UK, Hong Kong, Canada, Australia and the USA – there is an interesting diversity of policies and practices that support their changes in education. - (AMAZON)

Developing Mental Toughness: Improving Performance, Wellbeing and Positive Behaviour in Others

Peter Clough (Author), Doug Strycharczyk (Author)



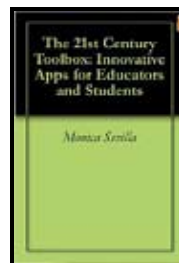
Publisher: Kogan Page;
(March 28, 2012)
ISBN-10: 0749463775
ISBN-13: 978-0749463779

Mental toughness is measured by how effectively individuals respond to stress, pressure and challenge. *Developing Mental Toughness* clearly and effectively explains the concept of mental toughness and traces its development from sports psychology into organizational development, health and education.

This book covers the key skills and techniques required to recognize, use and develop mental toughness in others including evaluation, ROI and improving attention spans. - (AMAZON)

The 21st Century Toolbox: Innovative Apps for Educators and Students

Monica Sevilla (Author)

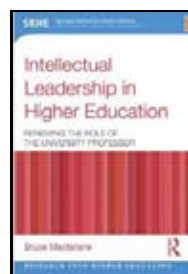


File Size: 100 KB
(April 3, 2012)
Print Length: 88 pages
Sold by: Amazon Digital Services
ASIN: B007RGPR8A

This innovative eBook introduces educators to a new world of apps to help themselves and their students become more productive, organized, and collaborative. Discussed in this guide are the practical uses and integration of popular technology tools such as: Google Apps, social networking apps, blogs & wikis, RSS feeds, You Tube, movies, videos, podcasts, presentation & slideshow apps, note keeping apps, mind mapping apps, flashcard apps, online binder apps, whiteboard & bulletin board apps, virtual tours, and creating mobile learning apps. - (AMAZON)

Intellectual Leadership in Higher Education: Renewing the role of the university professor (Research into Higher Education)

Bruce Macfarlane (Author)



Publisher: Routledge; 1 edition
(April 4, 2012)
ISBN-10: 0415560829
ISBN-13: 978-0415560825

What is 'intellectual leadership' and how might this concept be better understood in the modern university? Drawing on research into the role of full or chair professors, this book argues that it is important to define and reclaim intellectual leadership as a counterweight to the prevailing managerial culture of higher education. It contends that professors have been converted into narrowly defined knowledge entrepreneurs and often feel excluded or marginalised as leaders by their own universities. - (AMAZON)