Learning Insights

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Attribution Theory:

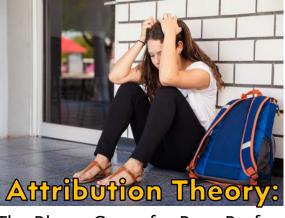## Student Laptops in Your Classes?

An alarming finding has been documented in a study by Patterson and Patterson (2017) that students who use laptops in class perform significantly worse than those students who do not. Further, these researchers found that the worst negative effects of computer use in the classroom were found among males and lower-performing students. Here are some thoughts to consider.

1. **Distractions for self.** It's possible that certain students who are more susceptible to distractions find the computer access during class leads to an easy and more interesting diversion from any given lecture. Those students who have developed self-control do not fall victim to the distractions as easily.

2. **Wasted time.** A University of Michigan study found that roughly 40 minutes of every 100-minute class was spent on non-academic internet activities when computers were available to students in class (Ravissa, Hambrick, & Fenn, 2014), which negatively affected learning.

3. **Influencing others.** Off-task internet activities, also known as cyberslacking, have the potential to distract others who sit beside or behind the offending students. Not only are these students disrupting their own education, they negatively affect the learning of fellow students.

Even though computers are helpful and necessary for many educational pursuits, the research appears to be saying that bringing laptops to class is does not contribute positively to

The Blame Game for Poor Performance

The attribution model for success and failure is most pertinent to the discussion at colleges and universities when looking to improve college students' success. The motivation to persevere in the face of academic challenges is strongly associated with the types of attributions students choose to apply to both outcomes.

Attribution is the area of Psychology in which people rationalize the causes of life events on outside influences or self-generated behaviors, beliefs, intentions, or abilities. Weiner (1979) proposed a simple model in which he defined the components of the causes associated specifically with success and failure. Three components Weiner promoted are 1) Locus of Control, 2) Stability, and 3) Controllability. The table below shows how these ideas are interrelated.

Success breeds success, and students who are consistently successful tend to continue in their studies, believing in their abilities and continued effort. They persist in motivating themselves to achieve academically. In other words, successful students attribute their success to internal sources. However, the students who consistently underperform will often attribute their failure to more external reasons, ones that are typically out of the realm of student control. In the minds of low-performing students, luck and task difficulty play a larger role in the justification of low test scores than ability or effort.

Stability	Attribution (Locus of Control)	
	Internal	External
Stable & Consistent	Ability	Task Difficulty
Unstable & Inconsistent	Effort	Luck

If marginal students are to become more successful, they must honestly analyze the reasons for their failure and find ways to change the factors over which they have control. In studying the chart above, we can speculate that the internal attribution of *effort* is the area in which the student has the most control. Ability and intelligence are malleable, but only to a certain extent. Task difficulty does not change because the rigor of course material is inherent in the subject matter. Luck is essentially random, so we can assume there is no control over chance events or situations. Therefore, a wise student must consider personal effort as a primary reason for failure and changing the amount of effort will have the greatest effect on improving grades.

No student comes to college wanting to fail, so most are willing to take the steps necessary to improve success. The incoming student must believe he or she has the ability to control future academic outcomes and act on that belief. Developing the idea of control in a student's mind is an educational process in its own right. Improving self-awareness and creating a consensus of learning activities and time requirements for studying are good places to start. Helping the students come up with ways to overcome perceived lack of ability, bad luck, and difficult content can empower them to direct their efforts towards success.

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learning and achievement. According to Ravissa, et al, students also tended to underestimate the negative effects of internet use in the classroom on their own learning. Students apparently were not self-aware of how their behaviors affect their level of success.

References

Patterson, R. W., & Patterson, R. M. (2017). Computers and productivity: Evidence from laptop use in the college classroom. *Economics of Education Review, 57,* 66-79. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2017.02.004

Ravissa, S. M., Hambrick, D. Z., & Fenn, K. M., (2014). Non-academic internet use in the classroom is negatively related to classroom learning regardless of intellectual ability. *Computers in Education, 78,* pp. 109-114.

Helping Your Students Become More Self-Aware

Self-awareness in learning is when students can objectively evaluate their actions and emotions to determine how their attitudes, behaviors, and strategies for learning affect their level of academic achievement. Two sides to self-awareness are social awareness (how others perceive them) and personal self-awareness (the under-standing of preferences, habits, work patterns and motivations). Students who can step out of themselves to assess themselves honestly, can learn to understand how their interactions with the world around them affect social interactions and success in the classroom and on the job.

The bad news is that self-awareness is a rare skill. Often, we ignore causes for failures to protect our own egos. It's easy to take a victim mentality to explain difficulties socially, academically, and on the job. Students who are not are not especially self-aware create a world for themselves where they are stuck in negative behaviors and damaging ways of thinking about life experiences, holding them back from growth and maturity.

Fortunately, there's good news! Self-awareness can be improved with a little coaching and self-reflection. Although you may not consider yourself a psychologist, you probably have a good sense of self-awareness, and you can pass your common-sense wisdom on to your students. Here are some easy ways to share awareness-building ideas with your students.

1. Encourage students to envision their ideal self—the best qualities they would like to have. Then, have them use these ideas as guideposts when objectively comparing present attitudes and actions with the ideals and when making decisions. Come up with better ways to handle situations in the past that would align better with their ideal self.

2. Suggest your students ask themselves "what" and not "why." We don't always know why we do things, so we should take cues from the circumstances and situations. What happened? What was I feeling? What could I have done to improve the outcome? What was the breaking point of this situation? The idea of asking "what" promotes a more action-oriented response instead of the depressing act of dwelling on failures and bad decisions.

3. Ask them to think. Students are often not trained to think about their learning or how their behaviors affect their life paths. Metacognition can be learned, and those who practice metacognitive thought are more academically successful than those who do not.

4. Propose the idea of journaling. One of the best ways to get to know yourself is to journal. As Dawson Trotman so famously stated, "Thoughts disentangle themselves when passing through the lips and fingertips." Writing about life experiences on a regular basis allows personal behaviors and motivations to become more easily recognized and modified. Writing out the answers to the "what" questions forces cogent thought and will often reveal to the writer both positives and negatives in the details more so than just transitory thoughts.

5. Recommend they seek guidance and counseling. For more extreme cases, students can make improvements in self-awareness through quality academic or psychological counseling. Some of your students will benefit from an outside third party to help them work through deeper issues with self-awareness.

Way to Succeed Can Help!

We designed Way to Succeed to accompany first-year math and other STEM classes. Our goal is to help your students become aware of and develop academic skills and strategies in a personal way while freeing you to focus on your math or other STEM content. The online program works outside of class, providing personal learning profiles and targeted actions for improvement, short, thought-provoking readings, videos, and short quizzes that that highlight the skills, attitudes, cognitions, and learning strategies in which successful students engage so they can quickly make changes to become better learners.

Pairing Students' Learning Needs
with Mentoring Opportunities

Diversity in Student Learning Needs for College: Students arriving in our classes at the beginning of the school term are as diverse as they have ever been, thanks to the new admissions policies of universities and colleges. Colleges value diversity for the opportunities their students will have to learn from other students and to develop awareness for other cultures and points of view. Additionally, diversity gives underrepresented students increased chances to improve future career prospects and standards of living through a college education.

College classrooms have also seen an increase in academic background diversity. Students coming from inferior high schools, through no fault of their own, arrive with gaps in knowledge, inefficient learning practices, poor study habits, negative attitudes and experiences that put them at a disadvantage when sitting side-by-side with other, better prepared students. This effect has been exacerbated by the recent pandemic and distant learning. High schools around the country varied in their ways of handling school lockdowns and distance learning, leaving some students with substandard outcomes. Yet all students deserve the chance to be successful.

Academics and Mentorship: The question of how professors are to teach such a diverse student body is a common subject of professional development. A recent article on pouted.com entitled "College Professors Helping Students Succeed," listed seven specific things professors can do to improve student academic performance. They are as follows:

1. Set and maintain high expectations
2. Give meaningful feedback
3. Ask students about their career goals
4. Emphasize soft skills
5. Connect classroom with the real world
6. Switch up your instruction
7. Make sure your students feel supported

The items in the list can be divided into two distinct categories; Academic /andragogical and solutions and mentoring solutions. Although there is some overlap, the mentoring side of being a professor includes the ideas of feedback, career goals, soft skills, and support.

Relationships. Professors within the STEM fields often struggle with the time and capacity for the mentoring side of teaching. Most large universities and colleges have large introductory STEM classes (100-300 seats), making personal mentoring difficult. Smaller colleges and community colleges often have smaller class sizes, but student loads for multiple sections for each professor can present complications for getting to know students personally and for guiding them. If these personal mentoring relationships are critical to student success, how can professors accomplish this?

Start with early information, and build on that during the semester. Surveying your students can provide you with a lot of information about college readiness. You might give your students a short quiz on basics so you will be able to prepare for potential areas of difficulty. Find a learning inventory to check on the soft skills and career goals of your students. Way to Succeed® can generate information individually for your students in nine areas of goal-setting, learning attitudes, practices, and organization. Armed with this information, you can reach out to certain students who you perceive to be at-risk and pro-actively coach them to become better learners. Additionally, you can direct them to campus resources to provide comprehensive assistance with the demands of college on an as-needed basis.

Q&A About Way to Succeed

Q: I don't have time to include a program like Way to Succeed® along with what I have to teach in my course. I don't want to add more to my plate.

A: Way to Succeed® is a mini-course aimed at helping students become more successful in STEM classes. We deliberately designed it to be easy for instructors to use. AND IT WORKS!

Ten weekly assignments: You set your due dates around your schedule.

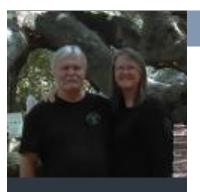**Independent Assignments** completed outside of class.

Nothing to Grade: When students take their quizzes and assessments, their scores are instantly and automatically entered in your Way to Succeed® gradebook.

Scores at your fingertips: Simply log in using your Way to Succeed® username and password to access your students scores by class, section, or by individual student name.

Independent of your STEM text or teaching style: No matter what STEM text you use or what teaching style you prefer, Way to Succeed®, which was designed specifically for Math and other STEM courses, offers students long-lasting strategies that improve learning.

Extra Involvement Optional: Additional optional activities are included with your subscription. You can use these with at-risk students or with the whole class.

Way to Succeed™

Visit our Website

We offer a unique research-supported approach to helping students become more independent and successful in your classes.

Visit Way to Succeed for more information about our product, pricing, and how to order.

Be ready for Spring Semester 2023 classes!

First-year, at-risk, and probationary students typically need more support than most other returning students, especially when these students enroll in online classes. Way to Succeed can help you to assist your students with a personalized, stand-alone success program designed for mathematics and other STEM courses. Way to Succeed helps them develop their own self-regulating and metacognitive skills so they can become more independent and effective learners.

- Students learn how to learn, especially in their math or STEM class
- Our focus is on improving self-regulation, time-management skills, metacognition in your students, and how to access extra help resources
- Nothing to grade
- Personalized learning diagnostics for each student
- Companion eBook for better student accountability
- Research-based process with significant improvement in grades
- Low department and per-student costs
- Compatible with any STEM text or curriculum, online or face-to-face
- Easy-to-access instructor reports
- Quick student set-up for your school or by class

Upcoming Articles in the next issue of *Learning Insights*

1. Helping Your Students Adjust Their Effort in your Class
2. Are Lecture-based Lessons Obsolete?
3. Pedagogy vs. Andragogy for College Instructors

….and more!

Way to Succeed
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