

Zest, Grit & Sweat: Strategies to Develop Critical Learners

2016 Teaching Professor Conference

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What makes a course or instruction zesty?

What are the characteristics of gritty learners?

What misperceptions do students often have about the sweat of learning?

BIG Questions Assignment

This assignment gets students thinking about and revealing questions and issues of importance to them.

Typical homework assignments ask students to ANSWER questions.

This assignment is different.

I'd like you to ASK questions.

What are you curious about? What problems or issues are important to you? What topics matter to you? What questions do you wish you could answer?

Think carefully about this assignment. While there are no wrong questions, some questions are better than others. Generally, yes-no and other closed-answer questions aren't going to be as interesting to consider as issues and questions with many possibilities.

The questions you raise will help to shape the direction of our work this term. So please, take a little time to think about questions... Even if you think the issue has nothing to do with this course, it might. So if you are puzzled by something, please include it.

I look forward to exploring meaningful questions with you!

Self-Efficacy Questions for Student Reflection / Discussion

Below you will find sets of questions designed to help you stimulate and lead student discussions about self-regulated learning beliefs. In some cases, your students may feel more comfortable reflecting individually in writing, or sharing in small groups if the class is large.

Absences

- If you miss class how will you get the notes you missed?
- Is the person who will share their notes with you, able to explain their notes clearly? As clearly as the teacher?

Note-taking during lectures

- What strategies do you use to stay focused if a lecture becomes boring?
- When a course covers a lot of material, what strategies do you use to condense your notes to the essentials?

Affect

- If you are in a bad mood, or feeling restless, can you motivate yourself to finish your work? How?
- If you fall behind, or if assignments are taking longer than you anticipated, how do you respond?

Dealing with difficulties/poor results

- If you didn't do well on an exam because the questions caught you off guard, what will you do differently to better predict questions for next time?
- When you have done poorly on a test, have you been able to go back to your notes to find the relevant information?

Adapted from: Kitsantas, A. & Zimmerman, B. J. 2009. College students' homework and academic achievement: The mediating role of self-regulatory beliefs. *Metacognition and Learning*, 4(2): 97-110.

Contract Grading

Some assignments are required of all students, with students choosing the course weight. In other areas, students may choose what to do and how much it will count. Depending on the course and the maturity/experience level of the students involved, sometimes a range of min/max weights are specified relative to the learning value of the activity/topic. Less flexibility is recommended in lower-level, required courses.

Potential Areas of Negotiation

- Participation in class discussions
- Informed, reflective writing assignments / Learning Journal
- Course project(s): their number, type, and course weight
- Mix between individual and team/group work

Classroom Activities

- Role plays
- Simulations
- Case studies
- Storytelling
- Discussions in large and small groups
- Group projects
- Student presentations (planned or spontaneous)

Assignment choices

- Journals
- Reflective writing
- Research papers
- Case analysis
- Projects (individual and team-based)

Assignment Features

- Collaboration & independent work
- Introspection/Reflection on in- and out-of-class experiences
- Application of course theories
- Critical thinking
- Open-minded investigation
- Connections to content, self, and peers

Derived from Hiller, T.B. & Hietapelto, A.B. 2001. Contract Grading: Encouraging commitment to the learning process through voice in the evaluation process. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 25(6): 660-684.

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