



PRODUCTIVE STRUGGLE COMPARED TO DESTRUCTIVE STRUGGLE IN LEARNING

From: How to Support Struggling Students by Robyn Jackson and Claire Lambert

A destructive struggle:

- o Leads to frustration.
- o Makes learning goals feel hazy and out of reach.
- o Feels fruitless.
- o Leaves students feeling abandoned and on their own.
- o Creates a sense of inadequacy.

A productive struggle:

- Leads to understanding.
- Makes learning goals feel attainable and effort seem worthwhile.
- Yields results.
- Leads students to feelings of empowerment and efficacy.
- Creates a sense of hope.

A destructive struggle needs immediate intervention, which requires that that teacher have a plan to address it. Plus, teachers have to understand why the student is struggling with completing a task or understanding a concept. For example, to understand Newton's Laws of Motion, a student with poor reading or note-taking skills may have difficulty making sense of information from a textbook.

Another student, on the other hand, may have difficulty grasping abstract concepts like force, mass, weight, and acceleration, which would require a different intervention. A third student might fall behind in the same unit simply because he lacks time-management skills.

"In a destructive struggle, kids have run out of strategies; they give up; they put their heads down; they get frustrated or angry," Jackson explains. Sometimes, such students have relied too much on the teacher's help, so when the teacher is not around, they don't know what to do, Jackson says.

In a productive struggle, on the other hand, students grapple with the issues and are able to come up with a solution themselves, developing persistence and resilience in pursuing and attaining the learning goal or understanding, says Jackson. In productive struggles, kids have developed the necessary strategies for working through something difficult. They can also take a teacher's suggestions for help and run with them.

Writing Your Own Definition of Productive Struggle



1. Read the 3 sample definitions below and discuss their similarities and differences with your "shoulder-buddy."

- ✓ Productive Persistence = Tenacity + Good Strategies
(Carnegie Foundation)
- ✓ The effort to make sense of something, to figure something out that is not immediately apparent (Hiebert & Grouws, 2007, p. 287)
- ✓ "Basically, academic rigor is helping kids learn to think for themselves." The four main components: students know how to create their own meaning out of what they learn, they organize information so they create mental models, they integrate individual skills into whole sets of processes, and they apply what they've learned to new or novel situations. (Robyn Jackson quote by Rick Allen in Support Struggling Students with Academic Rigor conversation)

2. Write a definition for Productive Struggle that you would use to explain it to your students' parents.
