Teach Yourself How to Learn: Strategies You Can Use to Ace Any Course at Any Level

Yancy McGuire, Saundra; McGuire, Stephanie
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2018

Book Review

Tags: learning strategies | learning theories | student learning

Reviewed by: Franz Volker Greifenhagen
Date Reviewed: October 1, 2018

The word "magic" appears several times in this book for students on how to succeed in college and university courses. Co-authored by Saundra McGuire, director emerita of the nationally acclaimed Center for Academic Success at Louisiana State University, and her daughter Stephanie McGuire, the volume is laced with stories of seemingly "magical" immediate and dramatic improvement in student performance after the application of the learning strategies described here in ten short chapters.

The metacognitive learning strategies described draw on Bloom's taxonomy and the neuroscience of learning, such as the work of Mark McDaniel (*Make It Stick,* 2014). They include strategies on reading textbooks, taking notes in class, reviewing, doing homework assignments, time management, and studying for and writing tests and exams. A handy little learning strategies inventory in Appendix C allows students to "predict" their grades based on the strategies they use.

More important than these specific learning strategies for this reviewer are the sections of the book devoted to fostering in students a growth mindset that challenges the deterministic view that intelligence is innate ("I'm just not good at math"), and encourages students instead to believe that they can succeed and motivates them emotionally to do the effective work necessary for success. Monitoring self-talk and attributing results to one's actions rather than external factors are powerful mental tools for improvement.

In order to succeed, however, students need more than just a belief that they can do it and a set of effective strategies; they also need to know as specifically as possible what is expected of

them. This is where this book addresses not just students but also instructors. Instructors put obstacles in the way of student success by not clearly articulating their expectations (and by creating unsupportive and discouraging classroom experiences and course structures). The book includes a very helpful section in chapter seven on how students should read a course syllabus. Notably, if a syllabus does not seem to clearly lay out expectations, students are encouraged to meet with the instructor for clarification. In fact, one of the strategies is to make regular use of instructor office hours.

The book promises that if students use these strategies they can "ace" any course. Will students be disappointed? While the results may be magical, the method is not – hard work using effective strategies is required. Even reading the book may be a stretch for some students, although it is short and largely written in a very accessible style. It will also likely profit students in sciences and technology, where memorization is important, more than those in the humanities, such as religion and theology majors. The book does very little to address strategies for successful research and writing of papers, for instance, and the anecdotes of student success are drawn overwhelmingly from the sciences.

However, much can be gained from this book by both students and instructors in all fields. My biggest take-away is the author's insistence, "Now hear this: All students are capable of excelling" (65). This book shows how.

https://wabash.center/resources/book_reviews/teach-yourself-how-to-learn-strategies-you-can-use-to-ace-any-course-at-any-level/