



*“Easy” and “Learning” Don’t Always Go Hand-In-Hand.” - Edutopia*

What is “Productive Struggle?” [Watch](#)

What it  Looks and  Sounds Like<sup>1</sup>

- Communicate to students that not knowing how to solve a problem at the outset is not a failure, but instead an expected part of the process.
- Encourage out-of-the-box thinking.
- Allow students to share their reasoning and support each others’ processes.
- Reinforce that the trial-and-error process could come with feelings of discouragement — and that’s okay!
- [A Middle School Video Example](#).

**A productive struggle must:**

- Challenge a specific weakness, not just overwhelm a student
- Exist in specific activities and assignments, not throughout the entire school day
- Provide space for students to use [metacognitive skills](#)

**It becomes unproductive when:**

- Students are overwhelmed by frustration because they are unclear on or unable to achieve the goal
- Students are left on their own without support
- Missteps along the way are not presented as an option
- Throughout the process, teachers should be aware of providing motivation and constructive feedback without giving away any answers. Even if a strong attempt by a student does not work out, creative problem solving should be praised.

**Classroom Structures that Support Productive Struggle:**

- Call on students who may not have the correct answer.
- Praise students for persevering through a problem.
- Allow time for students to tinker with ideas. Go Slow to Go Fast.
- Provide non-routine problems that can’t be solved with formulas.
- Encourage Growth Mindset.

**Examples<sup>2</sup>**

- [Productive struggle is a process that encourages students to attack a problem in a way that makes sense to them](#)<sup>1</sup>.
- [Examples of productive struggle include](#)<sup>2</sup>:
- Visually drawing out the problem using boxes or shapes
- Breaking the numbers down into friendlier numbers
- Learning from mistakes
- Finding multiple solutions to a problem
- Building conceptual understanding by exploring why and how formulas and procedures work

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<sup>1</sup> [From University of San Diego Professional and Continuing Education.](#)

<sup>2</sup> From <https://www.renaissance.com/edword/productive-struggle/>