

The Dead in the Classroom

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The problem of when a person stops learning has received considerable attention. Many argue that people learn throughout their lives. Others assert that learning stops at an early age, and that any "learning" after that point is simply reapplying previous knowledge to fit a new situation. Many college professors believe that for most people learning stops sometime before a student's freshman year, giving further support to this second school of thought.

For my study I sided with the first school of thought. To an early morning freshman economics class of thirty live students, fifteen dead students were added and the effects were observed. After a full semester of careful study, the following observations were considered noteworthy. (See Table 1 for RIP¹ Coefficients.)

Attendance

On average, dead students are less likely to skip class than living students, especially on nice, warm days. Dead students had perfect attendance, were always in class early, and never left early (in fact they often stayed after and never complained when lectures ran long), unlike their living companions who had less than perfect attendance, were often tardy, and at times would leave early.

Behavior

On average, dead students were less disruptive than living students. Dead students are less likely to interrupt the instructor, be disrespectful, make noise, and ask irrelevant questions than their living counterparts.

Class Participation

There was no discernible difference between living and dead students' performances in class discussions, responses to questions from the instructor, or when called to the chalkboard to solve a problem.

Exam Performance

This seemed to be the weakest point of the dead students. On average their scores were 30 to 40 points below the class mean. The effect this had on the grade curve was substantial, as it pushed the grades of all of the living students up to a B+ or better.

Table 1.
Measures of "Relative Individual Participation"

Mean Student RIP Coefficients¹

Category	Living	Dead
Attendance	0.56	1.00
Behavior	0.40	1.00
Participation	0.12	0.13
Exam Scores	0.45	0.09

Conclusion

It is the author's opinion that dead students definitely have a place in the classroom. Their perfect attendance and exemplary behavior clearly illustrate their desire to learn. In three of the areas described they were at least the equal of, if not superior to, their living peers. While their performance on exams was poorer than that of living students, this can not be taken as unwillingness to learn. The lower test scores could be due to low self-esteem, or to a misunderstanding, on the students' part, of general exam procedures. It is the author's opinion that in the near future "Outcome-Based Education" assessment may hold the key to overcoming this obstacle and give a better indication of the true learning ability of all students, vivacious or otherwise.

Note

1. RIP coefficients for Attendance and Exam scores are based on a straight percentage basis from performance in those respective categories. For Participation and Behavior this was based on both quantitative and qualitative measures of performance in these areas. Values of 1.00 equal a 100% or perfect performance, while 0.00 is 0%, or worst possible performance.