

The mastery principles are

- 1. Master teachers start where their students are.**
- 2. Master teachers know where their students are going.**
- 3. Master teachers expect to get their students to their goal.**
- 4. Master teachers support their students along the way.**
- 5. Master teachers use feedback to help them and their students get better.**
- 6. Master teachers focus on quality rather than quantity.**
- 7. Master teachers never work harder than their students.**

Master teachers often have a difficult time explaining the decision-making process that makes them masterful in the classroom. They have practiced these principles for so long that much of what they do has become automatic and seems almost natural. In the same way that learning to drive initially requires a lot of conscious effort and attention but eventually becomes so automatic that we rarely think about it, the disciplined practice of the master teacher principles will at first seem very awkward but will soon become automatic. Once you have practiced these principles to the point where they become automatic, it will take very little effort to maintain them.

You may be surprised that none of these principles seems especially earth shattering. They almost seem to be common teaching sense. Most of us know already that we need to set goals or to assess student progress. We learn it the first day in college. It's Teaching 101.

I would venture that most of us will claim we are already abiding by these principles in our daily practice. We already set high expectations for our students. We already try to get our students to do their own work. After all, what teacher will admit "I don't have high expectations for my students," or "I don't provide my students with the supports they will need to be successful"?

So why is it that so many of us still find teaching so challenging? Why is it that we are still not successful with *all* of our students? If the principles are so effective, and if we are already using the principles in our daily practice, why are we still struggling to reach every student, every day?

Here is the crux of *Never Work Harder Than Your Students and Other Principles of Great Teaching*. We all learned these principles in school, but what separates master teachers from the rest of us is that master teachers learned how to use the principles effectively, and rigorously apply these principles

Help Students Choose to Spend the Currency They Have

Sometimes students do not have the currencies they need to be successful in the classroom. Other times, students have these currencies but refuse to use them.

There are four factors that influence students' choices to spend their currency in your classroom. The first is whether they think it is important to do well on a particular task. The second is how enjoyable they think doing a particular task will be. The third is how well they think a particular task will help them achieve their goals. And the fourth is what they think doing a particular task might cost them. If students have the currencies you are looking for and refuse to spend them, you will need to address one or more of these factors.

At the root of all of these factors is a question of value. Students will not spend their own currencies if they do not believe that what they will get in exchange is valuable. They'll need to believe that what you are teaching is relevant or worth their effort. There are two ways that you can help students value classroom capital. The first way is to create a classroom community where students can have some ownership over the routines and protocols of the classroom. In this way they will become active participants in the classroom economy and will come to value its capital. The second way is to help students connect what they value to classroom capital. Both ways will be discussed in more detail in the next two sections.

Try This

- Have students come up with their own ways of demonstrating mastery. For instance, after a lesson on scatter plots, have students develop their own scatter plots using something that interests them. One student could create a scatter plot of the batting averages of her favorite baseball players, while another student could make a scatter plot of the various characteristics of his favorite bands.
- Allow students frequent opportunities to discuss among themselves what ideas mean and how they can be applied. This helps students express ideas in their own words and relate what they are learning to what they have learned already.

- For each learning goal, decide how you will know when students have achieved that goal and how you will know when students are on the right track. Explain these indicators to students.

Set Goals in Terms of Minimum Performance

A big mistake many of us make is that we set learning targets that represent maximum instead of minimum standards of proficiency. Instead, our learning goals should represent the floor, not the ceiling.

Sounds counterintuitive doesn't it? Shouldn't learning targets be pretty high so that our students have something to shoot for?

Yes, and no. Our learning targets should be rigorous and challenging so that our students can stretch themselves to learn and grow. But, they should not be so rigorous and challenging that few of our students are likely to ever reach them.



Yes, but... this sounds a lot like low expectations to me.

Thinking of the standard as minimum rather than the maximum performance does not mean lowering expectations; it actually ensures that more students will be challenged. If you see the standard as the maximum performance, you set limits on what your students can do. You leave them nowhere else to go. But, if you see the standard as just the beginning, not only does it not seem as daunting, but it also presents a challenge to all of your students by setting the expectation that they will *exceed* the standards.

Thinking about our learning goals this way requires that we re-examine what we mean by mastery. Does mastery mean that students are performing at the level of an expert? Does it mean that students are doing what we would expect for a similar student in that grade level? What exactly do we mean when we say that a student has mastered something, and is that kind of mastery a reasonable expectation?

Often, we will find that our expectations for what students should know and be able to do represent an ideal—an ideal not necessarily required by the

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Support Your Students

True learning is figuring out how to use what you already know in order to go beyond what you already think.

Jerome Bruner

When I first started teaching, I never ate lunch. At least, not during my lunch time. I was too busy working with students (individually and in small groups) reteaching material, tutoring, and otherwise remediating their understanding of something I wished they had understood the first time. Sometimes, I even had a backlog of students waiting for my help and attention. It seemed like a never-ending cycle.

I thought that if I just did a better job explaining things in class, I could cut down on the number of students waiting for me during lunch and after school. So I adjusted how I delivered my lectures, I refined my handouts and worksheets, I even used more wait time when asking questions. But nothing stopped the endless line of students needing my extra help.

I couldn't work any harder than I was already working and there didn't seem to be enough hours in the day to plan my lessons, teach my lessons, grade student work, and individually tutor students on what they didn't get the first time. I was so frustrated that I began to resent my students and begrudged the very help I knew they needed. Especially when, test after test, they did not seem to be improving or improving fast enough. I even began to blame them.

| 7.1 Dividing the Classroom Work | |
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| Your Work | Students' Work |
| Provide the necessary supplies. | Come to class prepared. |
| Provide clear directions and explicitly stated expectations. | Follow directions and ask questions when directions seem unclear. |
| Structure the physical environment to increase the likelihood that students will remain engaged and will learn. | Respect the physical environment and take care of it. |
| Determine learning outcomes and evidence of mastery. | Use learning outcomes to set personal learning goals and demonstrate mastery. |
| Break the curriculum into manageable learning units. | Engage in curriculum units and complete work on time. |
| Decide on timing and pacing and make adjustments as necessary. | Provide feedback on timing and pacing, letting teachers know when things are going too fast or too slowly. |
| Help students relate the content to their own lives. | Look for ways to relate the content to their own lives. |
| Facilitate learning. | Actively make meaning by examining what they are learning, connecting ideas, asking clarifying questions, and problem-solving. |
| Check for understanding and adjust instruction accordingly. | Let the teacher know when they don't get it. |
| Provide support when students don't get it. | Ask for help, try, and persevere. |
| Provide direct instruction in facts, discrete knowledge, skills, and techniques. | Observe, listen, take notes, ask clarifying questions, and practice. |
| Coach students toward better performance. | Listen, reflect, retry, and refine performance. |
| Provide growth-oriented feedback. | Use feedback to improve learning. |
| Create a respectful learning environment. | Respect themselves and other students. |