

NEVER WORK harder THAN your students & OTHER PRINCIPLES OF GREAT TEACHING

2nd Edition

Preface to the Second Edition	vii
Introduction	1
1. Start Where Your Students Are	27
2. Know Where Your Students Are Going	54
3. Expect to Get Your Students There	79
4. Support Your Students	107
5. Use Effective Feedback	130
6. Focus on Quality, Not Quantity	158
7. Never Work Harder Than Your Students	180
8. Taking Control over Your Own Practice	205
9. Putting It All Together	220

Appendix

Tool 1: The Master Teacher Trajectory	234
Tool 2: Developing an Action Plan.	236
Tool 3: Sample Action Plan Evidence	249
Tool 4: Reflection Sheet	252
Tool 5: Master Teacher Observation Form	256
Tool 6: Using the Mastery Principles to Solve Instructional Challenges.	257
Tool 7: Classroom Problems by Principle	261
Tool 8: Guidelines for Forming a Study Group.	264
Tool 9: Developing a Student Intervention Cycle.	266
Acknowledgments	268
References	270
Index	272
About the Author	278

INTRODUCTION

As to methods, there may be a million and then some, but principles are few. The man who grasps principles can successfully select his own methods. The man who tries methods, ignoring principles, is sure to have trouble.

Harrington Emerson

I am going to say something scandalous: Just because we went to school for teaching doesn't mean that we come out of school as master teachers. Even if you were a good student in school, it does not mean that you will be a good teacher. The tasks you were asked to do in school are fundamentally different from the day-to-day tasks you are asked to do as a teacher. In fact, most teachers will tell you that although their education courses and their student teaching gave them a good theoretical background, what they really learned about teaching, they learned on the job.

But teaching for many years is not enough to make you a master teacher, either. There are some teachers who have been teaching for more than 20 years and still think and behave like novices; other teachers have become master teachers after only a few years of experience. And the sad truth is that some of us never become master teachers, no matter how many years we've been teaching.

Experience alone does not make you a master teacher any more than practicing scales twice a day makes you a concert pianist. Mastery teaching is not about the time you put in. It's what you do with your time that counts.

You see, mastery teaching requires specific, intentional practice.

That's good news because it means—and this book is built on this very premise—that *anyone can become a master teacher with the right kind of practice.*

This book will help you get that kind of practice. And the more you practice the principles of this book, the more you will begin to think and act like a master teacher. I call this process *developing a master teacher mindset.*

What Is the Master Teacher Mindset?

The master teacher mindset is really a disposition toward teaching. It is a way of thinking about instruction, about students, about learning, and about teaching in general that makes teaching fluid, efficient, and effective.

Many of us think that in order to be a good teacher, we need to have all the answers. We focus our time and energy accumulating strategies and skills, hoping that if we have a big enough bag of tricks, we will be prepared to face whatever happens in the classroom. The master teacher mindset means knowing that having all the answers isn't nearly as important as knowing what questions to ask. It means knowing that if you ask the right question, the question itself will lead you to the information that you need to examine to find the answer. Good questions reveal what information is relevant, when information is sufficient, and how that information should be used appropriately.

The master teacher mindset also means knowing how to ask students the right questions, the kind of questions that lead to deeper thinking, increased motivation, and more student ownership over their work. Master teachers spend more time refining their inquiry skills and their own curiosity than they do collecting strategies and skills.

Most of us experience a problem and quickly rush to find a solution. Developing a master teacher mindset means knowing that defining the problem correctly makes it more likely that you will find the appropriate solution. Master teachers spend more time thinking about why the problem is occurring than they do trying to find solutions. They examine the problem from all sides. The master teacher mindset means being willing to own your own contribution to the problem but, at the same time, being reluctant to cast blame on others because you know that casting blame is

not nearly as useful as looking for causes. Master teachers are willing to confront the brutal facts of their reality and account for those facts when developing a solution.

The master teacher mindset means not trying to teach like anyone else. Instead, you teach in ways that fit your own style. At the same time, you look for ways to make your teaching style relevant to your students' needs. Master teachers understand that there isn't just one way to teach and that effective teaching can be accomplished in a myriad of ways. They find ways that work for them *and* their students.

At the end of the day, most of us are so exhausted, we just want to go home, wade through the stack of papers we need to grade, plan for the next day, and go to bed. We rarely take the time to meaningfully reflect on our teaching. But with a master teacher mindset, you understand that meaningful reflection is critical to honing and refining your teaching craft. Master teachers take the time to reflect on their teaching in order to expose unwarranted or harmful assumptions they may hold, reveal fallacies in their thinking, illuminate problems, and determine directions for new growth. They see reflection as a necessary part of their day.

Ultimately, master teachers don't just magically develop the master teacher mindset. Teaching requires a vast body of knowledge. We have to know pedagogy, but also must be experts in our subject area or areas. This huge body of knowledge can be an overwhelming hodgepodge of largely disconnected facts, unless we have a system for organizing the information. Master teachers learn how to organize their teaching knowledge into meaningful patterns and, from these patterns, develop a set of key instructional principles. Their entire instructional practice is governed by this small set of core principles, and they rigorously select strategies and teaching approaches based on these principles rather than become enamored with every new strategy or technique that comes in vogue.

I call these principles the *mastery principles*, and the rest of this book is devoted to helping you learn to apply them to your own teaching practice. Here they 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 they rigorously apply these principles to their teaching. In fact, these principles have become such an integral part of their teaching that master teachers no longer have to consciously think about them. Applying these principles has become a natural response to students' needs.

Wouldn't it be marvelous if good teaching became that natural to all of us? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we no longer had to struggle through every teaching challenge? Wouldn't it be fantastic if we got to the point where we were faced with a teaching challenge and could quickly and automatically figure out how to address it effectively? Wouldn't it be great, in short, if we all thought like master teachers?

Many of us have been looking for a way to do just that for years. So we go back to school and get more degrees, or attend professional development workshops to gain new strategies, or spend our summers taking classes in the latest instructional approach, or read books that promise us "the secret" to improving our teaching.

But the master teacher mindset is not simply a response to good training. We don't go through school and come out automatically thinking like a master teacher. The master teacher mindset develops as a result of systematically taking all that we know about teaching, organizing it into a few governing principles, and rigorously applying these principles to our teaching until they become our spontaneous response to students in the classroom. The more we practice these principles, the more we begin to think like master teachers.

How to Use This Book

If you are a teacher, this book will help you figure out where you are on your journey to becoming a master teacher and how to move from one stage to the next. For staff developers and instructional leaders, this book will help you learn how to support teachers on their journey to becoming master teachers by helping you diagnose where they are on that journey and showing you how to help them reach that next step.

At the end of this introduction is a self-assessment to help you diagnose where you are on your journey toward becoming a master teacher. Take the assessment and give yourself two scores: an overall score to assess where you are on the master teacher trajectory, and an individual score for each principle. You can use your overall score to focus your reading of the chapters and figure out how you can move to the next level. You can use your scores for individual principles to help you choose which chapters to read first and on which principles you need to spend the majority of your energy.

Chapters 1 through 7 outline each of the principles in more detail and explain how you can begin to practice the principle in your own classroom. Each chapter begins with a vignette that illustrates what most of us were taught about teaching and the challenge that such thinking often presents for teachers. Then you will be introduced to a principle and the research that explains why the principle is important. The next section, “Practicing the Principle,” gives you concrete advice about how you can integrate the principle into your own practice and provides practical examples of how the principle plays out in the classroom. These strategies are grouped under the heading “Try This.”

Because I know that you may be hesitant about trying some of the ideas in this book, each chapter also includes text boxes (“Yes, but . . .”) with content that acknowledges these feelings, recognizes common objections, and provides suggestions for overcoming your resistance. The intent is to help you resolve some of the practical challenges that could otherwise get in the way of your being able to implement the principle.

The principle-focused chapters end with a “Getting Started” section, which summarizes the main steps to applying the principle. You can use these steps to help you focus your thinking on the most important points of the chapter and as a reminder of the ways you can begin to apply the principle in your own classroom and work. This section also provides concrete steps you can take to move from where you are (as determined by your overall score on the self-assessment) to the next level in the mastery trajectory.

Chapter 8 is new to this edition. Because so many teachers have told me over the years how they long to be master teachers but feel stymied by their district policies or by administrators who don’t support their efforts, I wanted to give you a few tools to help you take charge over your own practice and leverage your evaluation system to your advantage. That way, you’ll be able to chart your own course toward mastery and secure the support you need to do so.

Chapter 9 will take you step by step through the process of moving toward becoming a master teacher by systematically applying the master teacher principles to your practice. It helps you develop a viable action plan that you can immediately put into place, discusses the challenges you may face, and provides resources for getting support as you improve

your teaching. It can also serve as a great reminder three to six months down the road to help you analyze your progress, tweak your plan, and stay the course.

I've also included several tools in the Appendix to help you begin practicing what you learn in this book right away. Many of these tools can be adapted to your own purposes. And throughout the book, I also reference resources available on my website (www.mindstepsinc.com) that can help you extend your thinking.

The pathway to becoming a master teacher is by no means linear; there is more than one route to expertise. You may develop expertise in one area and still be at the novice level in another area. Thus, although I think it's best to read each chapter in order, you can figure out on what principle you received the lowest score, flip right to the chapter where that principle is covered, and discover ideas and strategies that will help address your immediate needs. Later, you can move through the rest of the book at a more leisurely pace and see how all of the principles connect.

However you choose to use this book, I hope it will inspire you to take a close look at your teaching, to challenge some of your assumptions about both teaching and the way that students learn, and to adjust your instruction or your instructional leadership so that your students can learn more effectively. Developing a master teacher mindset will change the way you feel about students, about learning, and about teaching in general. Your values will evolve. Your interest in your subject and in teaching will be revived. Your identity as a teacher will expand. In the process, you will rekindle your sense that what you do truly makes a difference in the lives of your students. And most of all, I hope that by reading this book, you will discover for yourself the gift that good teaching really is.

The Mastery Self-Assessment

Mastery cannot be measured by the number of years you've been teaching. It is measured by how well you apply the mastery principles to your teaching. Thus, the first step to moving toward mastery is to assess how well you are currently applying the mastery principles to your own practice by taking the quiz on the following pages. Answer each question as honestly as

you can; think not about what you would like to do, but about what you are currently doing in your own practice. There are no right or wrong answers.

Use the scoring sheet on page 22 to keep track of your answers. Next to each number, write your answer to that question in the box provided. When you are finished answering the questions, use the scoring sheet to give yourself two scores. First, calculate an overall score. Then, give yourself an average score for each mastery principle. Your overall score will be between 49 and 196. Your average score for each principle will be between 1 and 4.

1. Which of the following statements is most true for you?

- a. I tend to look at my class as a whole and think of my students in terms of their group characteristics.
- b. I see my class as a group of groups and cluster certain students together.
- c. I see each of my students as individuals.
- d. I pay attention to the individual needs of my students but also notice how those needs and individual characteristics interact in the entire group.

2. When faced with a new curriculum,

- a. I use the lesson plans included in the curriculum guide.
- b. I figure out how I will cover all of the material in each unit and start creating lesson plans.
- c. I look at the assessment at the end of each unit and back-map my plans from there.
- d. I use the assessment to figure out what the “need-to-knows” are and determine how well students need to know each objective. Then I plan the assessments and learning activities based on each objective.

3. When a student does poorly on a test,

- a. I think the student did not study hard enough.
- b. I think it was a poorly designed test, and I will need to make a better one next time.