THE 12
TOUCHSTONES
OF GOOD
TEACHING

A CHECKLIST FOR STAYING FOCUSED EVERY DAY

BRYAN GOODWIN & ELIZABETH ROSS HUBBELL

Hawker Brownlow
EDUCATION

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In-Practice Example: Project-Based Learning

Here's an example of how a teacher can spark student interest by crafting a project-based learning opportunity around standards.

Ms. Ibarra, a middle school teacher, has been working with her students on the following World History standard from McREL's compendium:

Standard 8, Benchmark 2: Understands the major cultural elements of Greek society.

She gives her students a list of major contributions of Greek society and assigns them the task of creating a multimedia presentation that shows how early Greek contributions can be found in their everyday lives.

Mariana, one of Ms. Ibarra's students, is particularly interested in how the architecture of some of her favorite buildings in town is based on classic Greek characteristics. As she begins gathering pictures of City Hall, the library, the original school building, and historic mansions in the downtown area, she realizes that these buildings not only use columns in their design but also borrow classic Greek features, such as rotundas, dentil crown molding, and friezes. Even more surprising, Mariana discovers in her research that some of the mathematical formulas used to create ancient Greek buildings have ties to the Golden Rectangle that she is learning about in her mathematics class. Because Mariana was allowed to choose a specific topic of interest, she finds purpose and excitement in what she is able to learn and teach to others.

Figure 4 ❘ **Kindergarten Claymation Retell Rubric**			
	1	2	3
Retell	• Many mistakes were made in retelling the story. • Important events were left out.	• One mistake was made in telling the story. • One important event was left out.	• The events are told in order. • All important events are included.
Clay Characters	• Important characters were left out. • The clay characters do not represent the story's characters.	• One important character was left out. • The clay characters are sort of like the story's characters.	• All important characters are included. • The clay characters represent the story's characters.

for very young learners, the teacher has opted for a three-tier, rather than four-tier, rubric.

I put performance criteria at the heart of my teacher talk in the classroom.

Another important benefit of clearly articulating performance criteria is that it can change the role of teachers in important and beneficial ways. According to Deci and colleagues (1999), even positive rewards from teachers, such as verbal praise, can backfire and demotivate students when such rewards come across as designed to control student behavior or coerce them into complying with a teacher's wishes (e.g., "You should keep up the good work"). However, if teachers deliver feedback or rewards as factual

I manage behavior outside of my grade book.

Certainly, motivating students and managing behavior are often real (and daily) concerns for teachers. Some teachers may even wonder if someone who advocates for excluding nonacademic factors—such as behavior, effort, and attitude—from consideration in grades has ever set foot in a classroom. We can hear it now: "Let's see you keep these kids under control if they know their behavior won't affect their grades."

As teachers, we might have said the same thing ourselves at one time. However, as Bryan learned early in his career, mixing behavior management with student grading can have some unintended consequences. Frustrated by having a scant bag of tricks for managing classroom behavior, he concocted a complex scheme for assigning point values to various student infractions (e.g., tardiness, talking out of turn, disrespectful behavior) and docking individual students' grades accordingly. Yes, feel free to cringe at this point; it was a deeply flawed system. The logistics alone were unwieldy. The constant need to tally bad behavior in the grade book often felt more disruptive than the behavior itself.

On a deeper, psychological level, this grade-based behavior management system was probably even more counterproductive since it likely created the very system of explicit external punishments that actually tend to diminish intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999). Deci found that when young children are rewarded for drawing pictures, they become less likely to spend their free time drawing. Rewarding students for doing what we hope they find innately enjoyable (whether it's drawing pictures or engaging in productive classroom conversation) may send the message that such activities are not actually enjoyable; thus, we must bribe kids into doing them. In other words, instead of developing students' intrinsic motivation to be respectful classroom participants, a points-off-for-bad-behavior system may only serve to push the buttons of their natural rebellious instincts and dare them to defy their teachers.
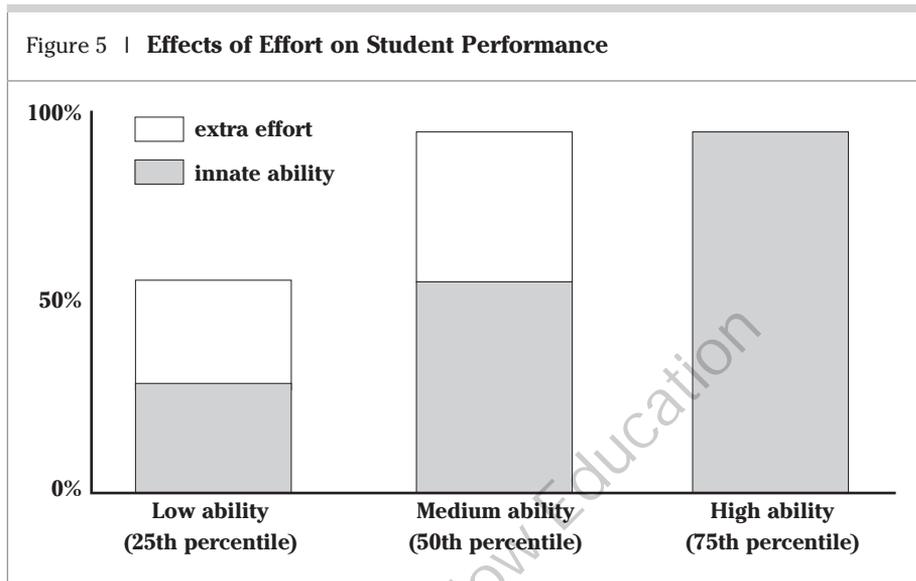
Tools You Can Use:
Multiple-Choice Items That Assess Critical Thinking

- The Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence at Penn State University provides guidelines for designing multiple-choice questions to assess higher-order thinking skills (www.schreyer institute.psu.edu/MultipleChoiceItems)
- The Teaching Effectiveness Program at the University of Oregon provides techniques for writing multiple-choice questions that require students to demonstrate critical-thinking skills (http://tep.uoregon.edu/resources/assessment/multiplechoice questions/sometechniques.html)

analysis. Basically, it's a trade-off. Multiple-choice tests may be easier to grade, but to do them right, they require greater upfront investment of time to adequately measure knowledge.

Final Thoughts: Killing with Kindness?

When it comes to assessment, we recall the well-worn maxim among assessment experts: "What you measure is what you get" (Hummel & Huitt, 1994). How teachers assess student learning is critical to their ability to set high expectations for student learning. If teachers only assess and ask students to demonstrate recognition and recall skills through simple, fill-in-the-blank, matching-item, or multiple-choice tests, then that's what they'll get—lower-level thinking. On the other hand, if they call upon students to engage in analysis and creative thinking both in the classroom and in their graded assignments and assessments, then students will be more likely to develop higher-order thinking skills.

Figure 5 | Effects of Effort on Student Performance

extra effort		
innate ability		

Low ability (25th percentile) · Medium ability (50th percentile) · High ability (75th percentile)

extra effort can offset aptitude when it comes to performance. With all this in mind, what does it take to encourage students to put forth extra effort?

In practice, it would appear that teachers often go about student motivation all wrong. A common approach to motivation, as espoused by behavioral psychologists and economists, is to reward students for desired behaviors, lavishing them with prizes or vouchers for school supplies when they read books or do well in school. Doling out rewards can, in fact, alter behavior, but not always in the manner we might hope. Case in point: Ronald Fryer Jr., a researcher at Harvard University, offered 18,000 students in four cities a total of $6.3 million in rewards to show up to school, behave better, or get better grades. In New York City, where he paid students for good test scores, he found no effects. "As zero as zero gets," he told *Time* magazine (Ripley, 2010, np).

Fryer (2010) speculated that the rewards may have failed to improve performance because students didn't actually know how to do better. Many hoped to raise their grades by "reading the test questions more carefully"

ITEM 8

I create an oasis of safety and respect in my classroom

A few years ago, Kristian Simsarian entered a St. Louis emergency room with a foot injury. Unbeknownst to the hospital staff, Simsarian had faked his injury. He also held a hidden camera. His firm, IDEO, had been hired by the hospital's administration to help doctors, nurses, and other medical staff members actually see what it's like to be a patient admitted to their hospital. After a confusing check-in experience, Simsarian endured long periods of waiting—often with little explanation about what he was waiting for or why. Eventually, an unidentified staff member wheeled him down a long, anonymous corridor to the emergency room where Simsarian wound up lying on his back, his eyes (and camera) fixed on the ceiling. Later, as they watched the footage, the hospital staff better understood the anxiety, confusion, and lack of control that people in their care experience (Brown, 2009).

Imagine, for a moment, if a similar experiment were conducted in your school. What would cameras hidden in student backpacks reveal about

brains—like all brains—need opportunities to process what they're learn-
ing. Accordingly, teachers in schools such as Aspire Port City Academy
plan lessons and activities in 15-minute increments. "The short increments
of time . . . ensure that students are able to focus on the lesson and remain
on task for the entire class period" (National Center on Time & Learning,
2011, p. 17). In other words, these minute-by-minute lesson plans do not
attempt to cram learning into every minute of the day; rather, they provide
opportunities to process learning and connect with teachers and peers.

We recognize, of course, that some educators may resist this idea of
minute-by-minute lesson planning. They may argue, perhaps, that attempt-
ing to predict what will happen each minute of the day amounts to fruitless
overplanning; after all, no one can ever fully anticipate what will happen in
the classroom. Teachable moments bubble up unexpectedly, or students
have unanticipated difficulties mastering content. Thus, obsessing about
time may only frustrate both teachers and students.

The point here, however, is not that teachers should mindlessly bar-
rel through every lesson and unit with an eye on the clock and no regard
for student learning needs. This is, in fact, not what teachers at the high-
performing schools referenced earlier do. To the contrary, they constantly
use data to assess student learning, and when they determine students
need more time to master content, they structure student schedules
accordingly and provide more class time or create opportunities for small
group instruction or individual tutoring sessions.

I establish routines and procedures to reduce time lost to nonacademic activities.

Another way to make better use of time is to establish classroom pro-
cedures and routines that minimize time lost to nonacademic activities. For
example, at the Aspire Port City Academy, where 82 percent of students
are in poverty—yet 67 percent score proficient or higher in language arts,