



Constructivist Teaching by Heart

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"Putting the child at the center of their learning."

Persistence: A "Star" Teacher Quality

Recently, I (Dana) heard about a school that created a checklist for administrators to use when observing classroom instruction. One of the items on this checklist was where the teacher was standing in the front of the room during whole group lectures and if the students were "tracking" the teacher as they moved to these key spots.

This really got me thinking. Does the location of the teacher really improve the quality of teaching? Are we assured that students are learning if they follow the teacher's movements? It didn't appear to be for the purpose of proximity, an engagement strategy where the teacher moves to students who need focus or redirection.

I pictured watching a tennis match as the audience follows the ball back and forth across the net. I was perplexed. What was the goal of this "look for"? The more I considered this practice, the more I pondered how we have attempted to simplify the complex work of teachers and lost sight of the goal in the process.

As I continued to think about this idea, I found myself returning to the work of Dr. Martin Haberman. If you are unfamiliar with Haberman's work, here is a short bio from the Haberman Foundation Website.



"Martin Haberman was an educator who developed interviewing techniques for identifying teachers and administrators who will be successful in working with disadvantaged children. Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Education and founder of The Haberman Educational Foundation, Haberman developed teacher education programs that have prepared more teachers than anyone in the history of teacher education. His philosophy of teacher preparation was summed up perfectly in a 2004 article: "For children in poverty, success in school is a matter of life and death, and they need mature people who have a great deal of knowledge about their subject matter, but who can

also relate to them. It is also necessary to recognize that the most effective teachers learn on the job from mentors, colleagues, and self-reflection.”

Dr. Haberman developed an interview process to identify and select teachers who will succeed and continue to grow throughout their teaching careers. He called these teachers “Star Teachers”.

The first question on the Star Teacher Selection Interview concerns *persistence*. Not the student's persistence, which is also important, but the teacher's persistence. The question



asked teachers to choose a teaching strategy for a specific lesson. A follow-up question asked, “If that strategy did not work for the children, what would you do next? and then, “If that didn’t work, then what would you try?” The idea is that persistent teachers don’t blame students for failing but instead continue to look for ways to help students master the concept, emphasizing the child’s effort.

Development, of course, also plays a key role in the child’s ability to master a concept. Are they ready for what I am teaching? I have written previously about the first-grade teachers who, at the end of an addition math unit, found that half of their students could not add, and were considering moving on to the next unit, subtraction. What Dr. Haberman would tell us, I believe, is that we must persist with addition for the students who are still unable to add, but in a way that is different from how it was taught the first time.

For example, try having the students work with math manipulatives to add groups. If that doesn’t work, have them draw pictures to show how they would combine two groups. Maybe act out an addition problem, or find items in the room that they can combine. Create adding games and games with playing cards. Look for real-life addition problems throughout the day, like how many students sit on two sides of the lunch table. I could go on and on, and I believe this is the persistence Dr. Haberman is talking about. We can’t just say they will learn addition at another time and move on. Or worse, believe the children are incapable of learning to add.

As I revisited Dr. Haberman’s work, I rediscovered my favorite classroom teaching video of a “Star Teacher” titled **Room 26**. (Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rE0jVizkWcQ>) I love great videos of engaging teaching and thoughtful exchanges between teachers and kids. The Star Teacher in Room 26 is Mr. Smith. An incredible fourth-grade teacher, Mr. Smith, has developed an inspiring community of learners, and the bonus is that the video is narrated by



Dr. Haberman, who you can see sitting in Mr. Smith’s classroom while being filmed—a fair warning: some parts pull at your heartstrings.

In the video, you can note where Mr. Smith is in his classroom as he teaches. He is not moving from one prescribed spot to another; rather, he is moving – near students, at the back of the room, and sometimes sitting very casually in a chair. There is so much to learn and talk about in the Room 26 video, but if we focus in on Mr. Smith’s persistence, we’ll notice what he does to encourage his students’ effort and how he never gives up.

Rather than prescribing standing spots, I think the administrative “look for” might have been more effective if it had focused on teacher persistence—an attribute of highly effective teachers.

Persistence is not easy, yet it is a priority for constructivist teachers who meet students where they are to support their next learning steps. Beyond where to stand in the classroom, choosing engaging teaching strategies while getting to know students, and, of course, “working the room” increase student learning.



Reflection Questions for *Persistence: A “Star” Teacher Quality*:



What qualities do teachers need to be persistent with students?



Share some examples of times when you persisted to help a student reach a learning target. What did you do to support the student?



Where can you develop more persistence in your school or classroom?

We want to hear from you! Share your comments about this newsletter topic,

Persistence: A “Star” Teacher Quality [here](#).

(Download newsletter to access links.)



Q & A: Ask Krista & Dana...



Q: Our curriculum calls for teaching place value to second graders at the beginning of the school year. Most days, many of our students end up in tears, and the math lessons become totally unfocused. What should we do?

A: Place value is a challenging abstract concept for many young learners. Teaching it too early can send the wrong message to children. Young learners assume that if the teacher expects me to do this lesson, I should be able to. They are likely to question their abilities when they don't understand it. Early in the school year, a review of core math concepts taught in first grade, such as addition and subtraction, is a better place to begin. You could also consider teaching place value to the children who seem ready for it in a small group, while having the others review the skills they may have forgotten over the summer break. If you can, switch some math units in your curriculum, moving place value to later in the year when they are more ready. If you can't move the unit, then brainstorm with your team on how to make place value concrete for your students.

Teaching with High-Quality Children's Books

It's Fall, Y'all! If you're looking for fall books that are about the change of seasons, rich vocabulary, feelings, and five senses of fall rather than witches, goblins and ghosts, here are some of our favorites!



Thanks for reading! Do you have comments, ideas, or questions for the newsletter? Submit [here](#)!

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