

Teaching For Success

Spectrum

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ALL NEW

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Hubble Image, Orion Nebula; courtesy NASA and STScI 2006

Talk about success: Launched April 24, 1994, the Hubble Space Telescope transmits more than 120 gigabytes of new data back to Earth every week, creating images that add immeasurably to our understanding and appreciation of the universe. <http://hubblesite.org/>

Success is the Only Option

—David Borges, DC
South Lake Tahoe, CA

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Reaching the Next Level

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Success is about making decisions: small everyday decisions and the big life-changing moments when you make major changes in the road you travel.



One type of decision—the choice of whether to embrace the status quo or move to the next level—is paramount to the teaching-for-success path. At the same time, the rhythms of life include a time of holding on to the familiar. Living for a time in accustomed patterns can occasionally act as a restorative fallow period. Constant change that exceeds one's ability to assimilate and react is physically, emotionally, and spiritually wearing.

But there does come a time when something inside urges the creative, developing individual on to new adventures. It's time for a go/no-go decision. Will the comfort zone be left behind for a determined effort to reach a new level? This becomes the burning question of the hour. What is your choice for this term? Will you aim for the next level in teaching and learning, advance

in another profession, or upgrade your personal life? Once a decision is made to advance, the question becomes: How do I know when I have achieved the result I desire? To be certain, you need a detailed plan that specifically defines the action steps necessary to achieve the desired changes.

Of course, this sounds all too easy and simple; accomplishing personal change is never easy. Why is it so difficult? Self-limiting beliefs are the biggest culprit. Each of us has created a set of beliefs about who we are and how we function. The best indication of this can be seen by observing students. They will tell you: I'm not a math person; I can't understand science; I'm a people person; I've always been a C student; I'm not graduate school material.

These self-imposed labels and sets of beliefs themselves determine the outcome of many of our efforts. What are your beliefs about yourself? Are they limiting or enhancing your progress in developing your next-level skills and attitudes? You're more likely to reach the next level when you honestly believe you can do so and have the right to do so. Imagination comes before reality in personal development. ✨

The Leadership Option

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When you step in front of a class or log in as the instructor in an online course, you have the opportunity to exercise good leadership and add this critical success factor to your montage of teaching and learning skills.

We have all heard that leadership is about vision, being able to imagine and describe a picture of a better situation, a superlative condition created by those who buy into the vision and enthusiastically support it. This, however, is only a surface look at leadership.

Good leadership in reality is based on mastering a broad range of personal and interpersonal skills. First, good leaders know themselves to their core. They know what they want to achieve and how to most likely achieve it. Their self-confidence shows through and attracts others to the work they are doing. It's usually a pleasure to work, interact, and learn from self-confident individuals.

The Confidence Factor

In times past I operated from the premise that self-confidence is an inherited trait; you either have it or you don't. Today I know self-confidence is decisional. It arises from a resolution to trust, listen, and respect yourself. It arises from resolve to work for the goals you want because you want them and they are consistent with your most cherished values. If you don't have high self-confidence, you can develop it over time.

Sure, it's a bit scary at first to be more assertive and to take charge of situations. And it takes constant mindful effort to gauge how you are feeling and interacting with others on a day-to-day basis.

How can you check your self-confidence level? Ask those who know you best. Would they describe you as confident? If not, what is it that leads them to a not-so-confident assessment? Ask your students to rate how they perceive your confidence level. A quick measurement can be done anonymously on a 3 x 5 index card printed with this question and a response scale from 1 to 5. A rating of 1 represents a confidence level low enough that it makes the student feel uneasy and doubtful about your self-assurance. Three might be a normal or average level of confidence, while 5 indicates an unusually high level, and very reassuring for students.

Cross-check this information with your own self-confidence self-assessment. Where on the scale do you place yourself? If you're not sure, use your self-awareness skills and monitor your self-talk for a day or two, especially when you are in the classroom and interacting with students.

For example, ascertain if student questions and challenges to your statements and directions make you feel uncomfortable and cause you to doubt your instructional abilities. Enjoyment is one of my best indicators of self-confidence. If I'm enjoying a situation, chances are I'm

feeling very confident. And conversely, when I feel confident, I'm enjoying everything to a much greater extent. A high confidence level is an essential foundation for being an effective instructor and leader.

A Passion for Getting Things Done

Leaders also possess a strong passion for getting things done. This passion represents another vital leadership factor. Passions need to be nurtured and expressed.

When teaching, this means becoming very involved with all aspects of a course. Don't just automatically follow a teaching scenario painted by a textbook author.

Ask the intriguing question: Why do your students need to learn this chapter? Why do they need to complete these problems or assignments? Each learning module must be as concise, interest-grabbing, and as motivating to the learner as possible.

The biggest barrier to learning in every class is time. The instructional leader constantly battles time issues. How much time must be devoted to the introduction of new material, processing, review, and assessment?

I have a passion for not wasting students' time and energy while they are learning. I know they have busy, jam-packed lives, and part of my job is to see that each course I teach is evaluated for maximum effectiveness.

Desire to Achieve

Achievement means working for positive change. It means using diagnostic thinking skills to make something better. If you can identify several things that need to be improved in your course, and you can make the decision to tackle the problem, you are displaying excellent leadership characteristics.

This always-make-it-better attitude is very compelling. As they witness your struggles to become a better instructor, your students see a terrific example of good leadership in action. They may well catch the improvement desire too. What do students have to improve? Well, their learning ability, of course. Everyone can become a faster, better, and deeper learner.

How about offering one learning or study skill improvement tip a week to your class? This could be a quick one-minute sharing among students. After all, the difference between A and B students often comes down to the study skills and strategies they have developed. Finally, as a leader, challenge the "I'll never use this" excuse for not learning. Nearing age 60, I can honestly say that nothing I've learned has turned out to be useless. Everything is connected, and learning in one subject will facilitate a better understanding of another subject, though it may not be apparent until many years later. It takes an instructor embracing the leadership option to make this point. ✨

The Self-Assessment Option for Improving Teaching

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Assessment is a common component designed into the everyday operations of a college. Students are all too aware of the various types of assessment they are subjected to throughout their college education.

Faculty are also the focus of assessments, which evaluate their teaching abilities and their roles in fulfilling various duties for the college. Administrators, courses, academic programs are not free from the scrutiny of assessment, either. They must all be assessed for effectiveness and continuity with the college's mission and goals.

What Is Good Assessment?

A well-conducted assessment evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the parameters being evaluated. Theodore J. Marchese, senior consultant at Academic Search Consultation Service, explained assessment as “a process in which rich, usable, credible feedback from an act—of teaching or curriculum—comes to be reflected upon by an academic community, and then is acted on by that community—a department or college—within its commitment



Brian R. Shmaefsky “... Assessment ... is a community effort or nothing, driven by a faculty's own commitment to reflect, judge, and improve.”

Assessment should not be used as a punitive instrument used for passing judgment on a person or program. It should be approached as a tool for reflection that points toward strategies for positive change.

Implementation

Most of the assessments carried out on people within a college are conducted in an external manner. This means that the person being assessed is evaluated by somebody else, the person doing the assessment.

Students are almost exclusively assessed this way. They are evaluated in various ways by the college and by the faculty. It is common for faculty to be assessed periodically by administrators, peers, or students. External assessment is very valuable if done properly.

However, very often the person being evaluated is placed in a passive situation where he or she feels no control over the assessment process.

Feedback from the person being assessed is usually relegated to the end of the evaluation. This leaves the person in a position where they are likely to debate observations they feel are inaccurate or unfounded.

to get smarter and better at what it does.

... Assessment ... is a community effort or nothing, driven

by a faculty's own

commitment to reflect, judge, and improve.”

Assessment Success Factors

Self-assessment is an evaluation method that allows people to learn more about themselves than the traditional external evaluation.

A properly done self-assessment gives the person being evaluated ownership of the process and the capability of making changes before problems arise. An effective self-assessment instrument is self-directed and has interpretive support. Self-direction means that the assessment is designed so the person being assessed carries out the assessment and can review the results without an external assessor.

The assessment should be performed at the discretion of the person doing the self-assessment. This permits the assessment to be carried out at a time when the person being assessed feels a need for assessment and is receptive to making changes based on the assessment.

Interpretive support means the assessment instrument provides feedback that leads to specific intervention strategies that can be carried out by the person being assessed.

Self-assessments do not require intervention by an external evaluator. However, an external evaluator should be available to assist with any concerns that cannot be resolved by the person being assessed.

It must be remembered that the self-assessment is a formative tool for improving classroom instruction before any problems arise and become a matter of concern on traditional assessments. Many studies show that through a



Assessment helps us keep our bearings and grow our skills.

[Red Dog Painting Series by Penny Shrawder reddogit.com]

self-assessment, faculty do implement positive changes when a review is conducted with a traditional summative assessment.

A good self-assessment instrument must be designed as a proactive mechanism for changing specific behaviors related to effectiveness. In addition, an effectual self-assessment should evaluate known indicators of effective teaching.

The self-assessment instrument should be developed collaboratively by a team composed of administrators, counselors, and faculty.

Consider including the following evaluative information focused on instructional success factors:

- Course context and goals
- Instructional content
- Pedagogical practices
- Use of instructional technology and resources
- Instructional preferences
- Learning environment
- Limitations and barriers to instruction
- Attitudes and perceptions of teaching

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Are You Quality Conscious?

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Everywhere we turn we see successful businesses and organizations embracing quality. This trend permeates the health field, industry, and education. And though not yet widespread in education, we can look forward to a time when strategic plans to improve quality are cleared of academic jargon, understood and accepted by all, and implemented on a day-to-day basis.

Fortunately, many faculty members—those who are the best instructors—are already quality-conscious. They know what works in certain classes and are always looking for ways to make their objectives come to life.

Creativity Wanted and Needed

Quality instructors, particularly in higher education, face constant challenges that cause them to tap into creative teaching methods in order for students to attend class, accomplish assignments, and achieve the goals of the course.

These ideas might include increasing (or decreasing) use of PowerPoint or overhead presentations, bringing in guest speakers, or letting students write questions for a test or two. Another way might be to re-evaluate required textbooks, acknowledging the lower

reading levels of our students. Texts that are more visual or make use of online tutoring or even providing them more understandable summaries when possible might have more impact on your students' learning.

Fascinating Survey Results

I have been conducting surveys recently, in hope of producing a "Quality Improvement Calendar" for my institution, focusing on "365 ways I can improve quality in my district." So far, my responses clearly show students feeling—and telling their teachers—that there is much room for improvement in quality, particularly helpful service, in the student services area.

These are services that touch the lives of students everyday. Front-line services like registration, admissions, the business office, and financial aid are areas students often highlight as needing improvement. This is not to say that everyone in student services is interpersonally challenged, or that every faculty member is a joy to work around.

Students often see professionals in student services only when they have a problem, need to pay or find money, or want to resolve scheduling issues. Communication in this area thus generally begins with frustration or confusion—challenging obstacles for anyone to overcome. Regardless of anyone's opinion as to which department in your institution seems to need the most help in terms of quality improvement, one thing is clear across



Each of us could participate more positively and contribute fresher ideas to committees when we first contemplate the objectives of the meeting.

departments and offices: Each one of us could help our workplace become better. Each of us can make "good" into "better," and even into "great." In order to do this, however, we must first, in a manner of speaking, loosen our ties, sit up straight, and take a deep cleansing breath to clear our heads.

We should step away from the table of traditions and practices that have seemed to work for the last five or ten years. Ask yourself: Who has benefited most from those same old practices, lesson plans, or strategies? Chances are, the one gaining the most is you, in terms of time and comfort level. But do they work for today's college students?

Do you present your information in fresh, lively ways? Or do you just regurgitate it via rote memory, from your opening to your closing remark, which

equals exactly 60 or 90 minutes? Could your students learn as much—and perhaps remember more—through activities, a video presentation, a field trip, or a brand new lecture interspersed with current, relevant examples?

It's an Attitude and an Altitude

Each of us could also participate more positively and contribute fresher ideas to committees when we first contemplate the objectives of the meeting prior to taking an obligatory seat at the table.

No matter how long you have worked in your field or at your institution, your experience means little if you don't continuously hone your skills, if you don't keep up to date with recent pedagogy or social issues in your community of learners. One idea that would not involve

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Are You Quality Conscious?

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travel budgets or continuing your formal education could be to sit in on a similar section taught by a new instructor or adjunct. You will be able to observe what does and does not work for that teacher and note when you have tuned out and quit listening and why. This could help you to empathize with your students as well.

Practical Steps

Even if your institution does not care about applying for a Malcolm Baldrige National Quality award, it could still pretend to walk the talk and try to make your work world a better place for those who shape it and those who enter it for just a few short years. Read about practices that have won awards. Recognize how simple some of those practices would be to implement at your own college.

Notice how much of quality deals with daily attitudes—and sometimes even acting. Another idea? Take a few acting lessons from your theatre department, or do some self-study. Take five minutes before you leave for work and dredge up your passion for your position. And before each class or meeting, take another few moments to “get into character”—that of the valuable resource, the respected colleague, and the knowledgeable mentor. You will be

surprised at how this will improve your self-awareness and your attitude.

What’s the Answer?

The answer to improving quality at your institution is not philosophical, scientific, or complicated. It doesn’t have to do with transferring everything to distance learning or hybrid e-learning. Improving quality is individually driven. It is voluntarily shared and universally beneficial.

Share the Passion

According to the American Society for Quality, “The best advocates for quality... are those individuals who have a passion for quality. “Share your passion about what you do with senior leaders in your companies and organizations, with community groups and your local chambers of commerce, even with coworkers, family and friends.”

In other words, share your passion. Let people know that you like what you do and believe it to be valuable. Tell your students this and let them know they chose well when they registered for your course.

If you still don’t know where to start, or are skeptical that this movement is too touchy-feely and has no place in the academy, survey your own colleagues, as



Improving quality is individually driven, voluntarily shared, and universally beneficial.

I am doing. Ideas flow freely among those who are truly embracing quality.

You will never hear from the others, those who continue to sequester themselves inside their own little bubble and think, “Everything is fine as it has always been.”

They are like that coat of paint that looked fresh five (or 15) years ago, but when styles changed and the paint faded, it was time for a new coat, maybe even a different color.

The American Society for Quality and your own Continuous Quality Improvement Network staff agree, “Quality is there for you 24/7. Acknowledge it... champion it... make the good great.” People in charge notice good listeners. Good listeners notice everything—and tend to become people in charge.

About the Author

Kay Roof-Steffen, MA, is a frequent contributor to TFS Spectrum on topics relating to higher education for adult students and communication issues.

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Please e-mail your idea as an attached MS Word.doc or .rtf formatted text document and send to jack@teachingforsuccess.com; we will acknowledge receipt of each contest submission via return email. **Submissions should be no longer than 800 words.**

Luscious Learning: How to Make Learning Stick in the Brain Not in the Hand

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I am an adult basic education instructor at Anne Arundel Community College. I have found that food is a great motivator in learning. M&M's are not only delicious, they are also a great teaching tool.

One package of M&M's can be used for reading, writing, computer, and math activities.

Reading

A pack of M&M's can be used for a life-skill activity to teach students how to read and comprehend food labels. Students can learn about serving size, calories, fat content, ingredients, and warnings contained on the package.

They can also compare and contrast Plain M&M's and Peanut M&M's.

Communications

Using the M&M's web address (<http://www.mms.com>), students can learn to navigate through the site to locate their country on the map, find recipes, read

about the history of M&M's, and find out about different M&M projects. All this provides fun while helping students to learn how to log on and use a computer and the Internet.

Writing

Students can use e-mail (located in the "Contact Us" page of the website) to write a letter telling the company what color M&M they feel should be added to the already existing color or to request coupons for the product.

Students can also write a paragraph describing why they like peanut or plain M&M's.

Math

With a little creative thinking, students can use an pack of M&M's for many math activities, including:

- Estimation (Before opening the pack of M&M's, have students estimate how many M&M's are in the package)
- Probability (the chance of picking a certain color M&M from the pack)
- Fractions (What fraction of the bag of M&M's are blue and use the M/M's to physically demonstrate the concept of reducing fractions)
- Double or Half Recipes (use the recipes on the M&M website to do this)
- Ratios (What is the ratio of green M&M's to blue M&M's) Percent (Change the probability

into percent) Graphs (Use M&M's to create line, bar, or circle graphs.

- Students can create the graphs by hand or using a web site: <http://nces.ed.gov/nceskids/graphing/> Once the activity or activities are complete, I always allow the students to eat their M&M's as a treat for a job well done.

Inimitable Quotes

Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.

—Albert Einstein

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.

—Albert Einstein

The master in the art of living makes little distinction between his work and his play, his labor and his leisure, his mind and his body, his education and his recreation, his love and his religion.

He hardly knows which is which; he simply pursues his vision of excellence in whatever he does, leaving others to decide whether he is working or playing. To him he is always doing both.

—Buddha

Self-Assessment Option

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Attitudes and Perceptions of Students

The self-assessment instrument should have questions that investigate the instructor's participation in the content area and pedagogical professional development. Effective teaching requires conveying accurate information in a way that enhances learning. A self-assessment instrument should have a checklist of the various teaching strategies known to enhance content retention, critical thinking, and lifelong learning in students.

Quantification allows you to add or increase the use of a particular effective teaching method. An ideal self-assessment program will encourage you to evaluate your teaching at your discretion.

Perform a self-assessment at least each semester before the traditional assessment is conducted.

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A Simple System Drastically Improves Learning

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Many students simply do not know how to take notes in class! These students miss a golden opportunity to improve their study skills and exam results.

Either they do not know how or do not care to take notes while the instructor is lecturing. Sometimes students do not take notes because they feel there is too much to write or they do not know what is most important. Additionally, students do not always understand the hierarchy of an outline.

When an instructor prepares lecture notes, the lecture is based upon chapters in the textbook or from other sources. The instructor may use outline form, paragraphs, or bullet points to develop the lecture notes. Interactive note-taking is an approach that benefits the student.

To employ interactive note-taking, provide an outline of the lecture notes to the students with fill-in blanks in certain areas that the students can complete during lecture.

Interactive note-taking encourages the student to listen and even ask questions. You may think this is a lot of work, and initially setting up the



outline for the students will take a little time. However, once done, the notes can be saved and used over and over again and will provide a valuable tool to the students.

You can easily update the notes with new information whenever necessary. Interactive note-taking can be used in any class, either for lecture or lab.

You can decide if notes will be presented in outline form, paragraphs, or bullet points. You can have printed note sheets for the students to use in class or the document can be downloaded with fill-in-the-blank sections.

If the document is downloaded, the notes can be filled in during lecture and saved. The students can then email the saved document to themselves as an attachment and use it later for study purposes.

Not only will this help students be more conscious about note-taking and study skills, it will also help the instructor, who can feel more assured that he/she has provided key points to the students. This is how it works. Suppose the students are taking a

history class. You could provide an outline similar to the one below:

Early U. S. Presidents

I. The first president of the United States was _____

A. He held office from _____ to _____.

B. Personal Information:

(1) Born _____

(2) Died _____

(3) Wife's name _____

C. His state of residence was _____

II. The second president of the United States was _____

A. He held office from _____ to _____

B. Personal Information:

(1) Born _____

(2) Died _____

(3) Wife's name _____

C. From what State was he elected? _____

Process

As you lecture, your students can fill in the names of the presidents, as well as other information provided in the outline. Again, you can make the outline as detailed as necessary. You will find that students will also compare answers with other students when the class is over in order to be sure the outline is filled

in correctly. Another example is from a computer class. Suppose you are lecturing on hardware and software. Your interactive notes may be easily formatted in bullet form. For example:

Basic Computer Function and Components

What is the difference between software and hardware?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

List several hardware components:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Site methods of backing up data:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Remember, as you present urge your students fill in the appropriate blanks. You decide how detailed to make the notes. The results of interactive note-taking will help you organize and time your presentations and your students will have a ready set of notes to review and study. This learning system provides means to improve in-class learning and boost exam results. Try it, and see if your students are more alert and engaged during presentations and small group discussions. ✨

The Optimization and Idealization Option

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TFS Publisher

What if this were the last class you would ever teach? What would you want it to be like? What outcomes would be most important for you to achieve?

When answering this or a similar time-limit question, you tend to think in terms of optimization and idealization: both powerful success principles.

We are often most creative when faced with a deadline. By suggesting that you ask this question of yourself, I'm not trying to be morbid, but I'm simply asking you to realize at the start of each new course that due to some change either planned or unexpected this could be the only time you will ever teach a particular course.

In addition, if you have taught for awhile you know that no two classes are ever exactly the same. You can use the same textbook, the same lesson plans, tests, and class calendar, yet there will be significant differences in the way each class proceeds and the eventual outcomes.

My point is that each class is truly important, special and unique and once it's over it is over, never to be repeated.

Given that the above is true, what can you do this term to produce the optimum or ideal results for each class? The answers tend to converge on the Critical Success

Factors of good teaching. Over the past 18 years I have developed a working list of Teaching Success Factors. They are:

- *Leadership*
- *Classroom or online course management*
- *Instructional design*
- *Communication*
- *Evaluation and assessment.*

Each of these factors contribute to the overall success of each class and can be optimized. This issue contains several leadership tips that can be used to optimize your leadership skills. But here is one more to add to your leadership notebook.

Teachers who lead know how to enjoy a task and to have fun while exploring a new topic. A leader's passion, enthusiasm, and positive energy rub off on followers. As a leader your students will find themselves becoming more energized and able to focus their learning energies more effectively.

Perhaps as a student you have experienced the outstanding teacher-leader who has radiated such a liking for a subject that even though the learning of it is rigorous you ended up learning more than you ever thought you would. You now feel a strong interest in this subject and this interest has lasted for many years.

You can optimize your leadership by expressing your commitment, interest, and assurance of the value of what you are teaching everyday of every class.

Simple acts can add to your leadership effectiveness. Do you arrive at class a bit early to greet students and to answer brief questions students may have? Do you offer simple words of encouragement a struggling student? Do you praise the group for the achievement you observe and their acts of dedication to learning?

Classroom management is also about identifying, eliminating, or mitigating barriers to learning that are impeding your students' progress.

Do you have positive discipline policies in place that promote fairness and maintain a positive learning environment? Do you return papers, tests, and quizzes rapidly with evaluation comments and improvement suggestions? Do you keep course housekeeping activities to a minimum so that taking roll, distributing handouts, collecting papers, and administering tests are done efficiently?

Good classroom managers realize the value of each minute of each class and use the time available to optimize learning.

Is your Instructional Design ideal? It is if it addresses the six mandatory steps of good learning:

- *Prepare*—identify session learning goals and prepare students to learn by helping them refocus on your class and subject by referring to previous class content and major questions or problems to be

addressed in the current class.

- *Input*—provide multisensory input learning experiences and activities.
- *Explore*—students explore content with all their intelligences and learning styles.
- *Retain*—help students retain content by employing accelerated learning principles, active study techniques, and frequent reviews.
- *Reconfirm*—check learning with the use of valid tests and performance checks.
- *Reflect*—take stock of your teaching effectiveness and then identify improvements to be made immediately.

Communication is optimized when the mode is determined by the content and learner needs.

Learners of course thrive on visuals but also on stories. Stories are age-old and very effective in communicating abstract ideas and concepts that are easily recallable.

Lastly, assessment is a rich area for optimization work. Add up the class hours spent on testing and you'll find a significant chunk of time is spent there.

Therefore, the more concise and effective an assessment instrument the more time is conserved for new material exploration. Idealize and optimize every teaching step, and you'll teach for success. ✨

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