

**Equity in the
New Environment:**
*Blended, Virtual, and
the Unknown*

WEBINAR

By Douglas Reeves



Dr. Reeves is the author of more than 40 books and more than 100 articles on leadership and education. He has twice been named to the Harvard University Distinguished Authors Series and was named the Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. His career of work in professional learning led to the Contribution to the Field Award from the National Staff Development Council, now Learning Forward.

Doug has worked in 50 states and more than 40 countries. His volunteer activities include [FinishTheDissertation.org](https://www.finishthedissertation.org), providing free and non-commercial support for doctoral students, and *The SNAFU Review*, publishing the essays, poetry, stories, and artwork of disabled veterans. Doug lives with his family in downtown Boston. He Tweets @DouglasReeves, blogs at [CreativeLeadership.net](https://www.creativeleadership.net), and can be reached at 1.781.710.9633.



Achieving Equity in the New Environment: Blended, Virtual, and the Unknown

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Learning Protocols

- Stop any time with questions and challenges
- Represent the people who are not in the room
- Use Chat room or Text: 1.781.710.9633 with comments and questions



Getting Used to Polling

- Capture faculty and student engagement
- Immediate survey responses – no need to wait for e-mail surveys
- Form comparison for beginning to middle and end of year
- Empathize with technology challenges



Resources

- *Achieving Equity and Excellence* (2020, Solution Tree Press)
- *Challenging Conversations About Race* (2020, Solution Tree Press)
- Research and videos from EquityandExcellenceInstitute.org
- Case studies from AllThingsPLC.info



Support from Creative Leadership

- Individual and team support
- No bureaucracy – go directly to Doug – 781 710 9633
- Specific expertise – leadership, instruction, special education, assessment, curriculum (Power Standards)



Overview

- Equity: From Attitudes to Practices
- Recognizing the Barriers to Equity
- Challenges in Virtual and Blended Environment
- The Trust Imperative
- Resilience – students, staff, and leaders



Equity: From Attitudes to Practices



- Nationally, students of color account for 8.8% of AP exam takers and 4.3% of students earning a 3 or higher.
- Newark is dramatically better. Why?
- Please use the chat function to reply.

The K-12 Shared Responsibility for Equity



- What must leaders do at your level to improve opportunities for college credit for every high school student?
- Please use the chat function to reply

What are the barriers to transforming positive attitudes about equity into practice?



Leadership Challenges in a Virtual or Blended Environment



- Classroom Observations
- Multi-channel communication
- Digging into the “why” of disengagement

Engagement Challenges



- How do you know students are engaged?
- What do we do if they are not engaged?
- What are the technical issues involved in student engagement?
- What do we do when online systems do not work?

Feedback and Grading in a Virtual Environment



- Lessons from March – June of 2020: Use the latest and best evidence, not the average
- Evidence of practice does not require weighting in the gradebook
- Beware the consequences of pass/fail systems or “Everybody gets an A”

The Trust Imperative



- Greater learning
- More resilience
- Better collaboration
- Deeper communication

When you are in a trusting environment, you feel . . .



Stress and Anxiety



Sources of student stress and anxiety



Sources of teacher and staff stress and anxiety



Sources of administrator stress and anxiety



Consequences of Stress and Anxiety



- Physical consequences
- Psychological consequences
- Professional consequences

- *What are other consequences of stress and anxiety? Please use the Chat function.*

The Trust Imperative



- Which hospital would you rather go to – the one with a low error rate or a high error rate?

Psychological Safety – Learning from Mistakes



- Careless mistakes
- Experimental mistakes – deliberate test of hypotheses
- Learning mistakes – analyze the root cause and experiment with solutions

Careless Mistakes

- Failure to observe classrooms
- Failure to provide immediate and accurate feedback to students
- Failure to provide multi-channel communication with parents and community



Experimental Mistakes

- Try a new technology that doesn't work
- Try a new student engagement technique that doesn't work
- Try a new faculty support technique that doesn't work



Learning Mistakes

- Quick and public acknowledgment
- Analyze root causes – insufficient practice or ineffective practice?
- Clear and persistent alternatives



Modeling Resilience



- The “modulus of resilience” – neither too rigid nor too bendable
- Please use the chat function to share your best examples of resilience you have observed or experienced

Organizational Resilience



- Learning and innovation requires risk
- Risk requires error
- Therefore, learning requires the toleration of error, and the celebration of learning mistakes

We say that we value innovation, risk, and error, but . . .



Fearless Classrooms



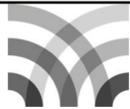
- Equity sticks – no fear in participation, even without knowing the answer
- Peer and teacher relationships reflect confidence and never fear
- Zero tolerance for sarcasm – by students and adults

Fearless Practice



- Authentic practice with real-time feedback
- Practice with a coach, not alone
- Practice with immediate improvement
- *Traditional homework never meets the standards of fearless practice*

Fearless Dialogue



- Never: *“Anybody got any questions?”*
- Always: Meaningful checks for understanding

Fearless Leadership



- Consistent modeling of learning mistakes
- Start the year with *“My three biggest bloopers of the past six months.”*
- Confront threats to the emotional safety of students and colleagues

Fearless Change



- The old model:
 - 1) Attitudes and beliefs – must get buy-in before change
 - 2) Tentative changes in practice
 - 3) Evidence of success

The New Model of Change Leadership



- 1) Practices
- 2) Evidence of impact – *“Science Fair”*
- 3) Attitudes and beliefs – buy-in is after evidence, not before

Focused Leadership



- Practices, not programs
- Implementation and impact
- The Rule of Six
- The “Not to Do” List

Examples from Leaders of Not to Do Lists



- Announcements in meetings
- Question marks for agenda items – meetings are for inquiry and deliberation, not presentations
- Delete sound alerts for incoming e-mail and text – 3-hour response time is fine
- Use “SaneBox” or other programs to limit e-mail – including “Black Hole”
- Observations without feedback
- Homework without impact
- Psychotherapy without a license

What’s on your “Not to Do” List?



The Progress Principle (Amabile)

- Positive emotions
- Good will toward coworkers
- Higher personal and job satisfaction
- Sense of personal ownership of ideas
- Civility
- Communication



Practical Implications of Progress Principle in Virtual and Blended Environments

- From unit tests to mini-assessments
- From teacher evaluation to peer reviews
- Three-Column Rubrics
- Weekly goals – daily for students at home
- Universal assessment of Power Standards



Summary

- Equity: From Attitudes to Practices
- Recognizing the Barriers to Equity
- Challenges in Virtual and Blended Environment
- The Trust Imperative
- Resilience – students, staff, and leaders





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Classroom Visits in a Virtual Environment

By Douglas Reeves *

August 10, 2020

Classroom observations can be a key strategy for improved teaching and learning, provided that they are conducted in a manner that gives teachers constructive and immediately applicable feedback as well as a chance to engage in a substantive conversation about their work in the classroom. The challenges of effective observation were hard enough in the world of live instruction and are even more difficult in the virtual and blended learning environments most schools are facing in the fall of 2020. This article considers how to apply the best practices in classroom observation in any environment – live, blended, and virtual.

Protocols for classroom visits range from hyper-specific, with checklists and automated reporting, to vague wandering about with little clear feedback to teachers. Teachers report that it is especially frustrating to have observers walk through their classroom and leave without providing any sort of communication directly with the teacher. They loathe the post-it note with a “Good Job!” accompanied by a smiley face, an empty gesture devoid of specific feedback. The only thing worse, they tell me, is the silence that follows many walk-throughs, rounds, or other observations that fail to give specific feedback to the teacher who was observed. In many schools in the spring of 2020, there were no observations at all of virtual classes.

Kim Marshall, the editor of the Marshall Memo and author of *Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation* (Jossey-Bass, 2013) and *The Best of the Marshall Memo* (2020), has coached principals in the US and internationally on effective observation techniques. He notes that it is essential for the faculty to understand that role of the principal and other observers is just that – observation. They are not lurking mysteriously in the shadows, either in on-line classes or the classroom, but are engaged in a thoughtful and transparent practice designed to improve teaching and learning.

Ideally, Marshall says, classroom visits should be short, random, and unannounced. The observer doesn't have a checklist, but rather needs to get a sense of what is going on. Is there a clear learning objective? Is there evidence of interaction among students and clear checks for understanding? In the virtual and blended environment, this means that the principal must have access to every class. In order to avoid disruption when the principal observes a virtual class, it is essential that the principal is listed as a “co-teacher” or has a similar technical credential that will allow the principal to walk in without asking permission and engage in chats with individual students. When the principal does not have access to a virtual class, Marshall notes, it is the equivalent of the door being locked and chewing gum placed in the keyhole. We would never tolerate that in a live classroom, and we should not allow it in a virtual environment.

Some districts have established protocols in which student cameras are turned off, a practice that Marshall vigorously challenges. In a regular classroom observation, the principal is not merely looking at the presentation by the teacher, but at the engagement by the students. Too often teachers receive the message that observers are watching a performance by the instructor rather than evidence of learning by students. Marshall says that one of the most powerful questions to ask a student during any observation – live or virtual – is “Tell me something you learned today that you didn’t know before.”

In the virtual and blended environment, Marshall notes that student engagement can be illusory if the only evidence of that is the submission of homework. While 100% student engagement may seem elusive in a virtual environment, it is a vital objective for every school. Therefore, teachers must master the details of breakout sessions, response software, and tenacious follow up. Marshall suggests that when students are not engaged, schools must have a clear and consistent effort to find out what is preventing engagement, and that may include enlisting the aid of school psychologists, social workers, and other students. The absence of engagement may be due to many causes, including indifference by the student. But before we come to that conclusion, we should consider that students at home might be caring for siblings, dealing with limited bandwidth while parents and other students are all using the same connection, or any number of distractions that inhibit their active participation in class. When teachers punish disengagement with failing grades and zeros for missing work, we fail to get to the root cause of disengagement and further disadvantage students who are learning from home.

The effectiveness of observation ultimately depends upon the conversation afterwards, Marshall concludes. Whether this is done by interactive video or telephone, it’s especially important that this is in the form of one to one communication between the principal and teacher. E-mail and automated electronic forms based on checklists that are often used after observations are ineffective because they lack any human interaction or emotional connection with the teacher. Moreover, only in a live conversation do the teachers have the opportunity to explain their perceptions of what was happening in the classroom.

In my conversations with hundreds of administrators during the shut-down, it is clear that they are overwhelmed concerns about safety, technology, and communication with students, staff, and parents. There doesn’t seem to be much time for classroom observations any more. But quality teaching is more important now more than ever, and it is not possible to pursue the goal of educational equity without a focus on effective instruction.

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Don't Forget the "L" in SEL
By Douglas Reeves*
August 2, 2020

In the fall of 2020, schools are opening in a season of continuing trauma for students, families, and staff members. The deaths and illnesses of family, friends, and colleagues are perpetual reminders of how fragile life is and how the emotional needs of children and adults are a central responsibility of educational leadership. It is therefore understandable that many schools are prioritizing the social and emotional needs of students as they begin the school year in virtual, blended, and on-site learning environments. The question leaders and teachers must face is not whether to give emotional needs of students priority, but how to do so.

Social and emotional needs of children rest on the twin pillars of safety and identity. Students must be physically safe, with adequate nutrition, freedom from abuse and neglect, and protected to the maximum extent possible from COVID-19. They must also be emotionally safe, with the confidence to seek help without fear, express their needs without embarrassment, and share their joys, sorrows, and apprehensions with a loving and caring adult. In addition, students need a sense of identity – classmates, teachers, and trusted adults who know their names, appreciate their personalities, and engage with them about interests outside of school. That was true before 2020, and it is especially true now.

But as much as we care deeply about the social and emotional needs of students, some schools are making a grave error when they separate those needs from the "L" in SEL. The pursuit of social and emotional development without learning is futile and destructive. I recently saw a school leader suggest, "For the first few weeks of school, we're not going to worry about academics, but only focus on SEL." This attitude reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of what social and emotional learning is all about. If you want to see elementary school students who are stressed out, full of anxiety, and depressed, then deprive those students of school from March to August of 2020, and then when they at last re-engage with teachers and classmates, deprive them of the opportunity to regain their confidence as students. To say, "We don't have time for literacy, because we need to attend to their social and emotional needs" is counterproductive and dangerous. If you want to see middle and high school students who are self-destructive and ready to explode, then deprive them of social contact and a sense of personal agency for six months and then, when they are re-entering virtual, blended, or live learning environments, tell them that their personal competence doesn't matter as long as they are socially and emotionally well. There are no adolescents on the planet who will be emotionally healthy if they feel incompetent.

Think about it: Why do students retreat into the inner world of video games while they ignore schoolwork? Because with video games, as violent and inappropriate as they might be, the kids know that they are getting better all the time. They keep score, get feedback, improve and know the objective truth that they are competent. Misguided approaches to social and emotional care that exclude academic success – and that includes assessment, feedback, improvement, and competence – undermine the very emotional health that they seek to attain.

Finally, let us put aside social and emotional learning as a program – a curriculum to march through as if it were the psychological equivalent of flash cards, after which we can say, “Now that this program is done, we can get back to teaching.” The very best social and emotional learning includes practices that are imbued in all of our interactions with students and adults throughout the day. It is not something done to students, but rather an ethic that pervades interpersonal relationships at every level. It is the respect accorded to students, parents, bus drivers, cafeteria and custodial staff, and every human with whom we come into contact. We know their names, listen before speaking, and value them as humans. And we teach students to read, solve problems, and think not because it might be on the on test, but because that is part and parcel of our love and care for them.

To be clear: social and emotional learning is a vital part of every school year, and most especially in the fall of 2020. But the focus on social and emotional needs of students without learning will undermine the psychological health of the students who need us the most.

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Executive Summary
What's the Research on Homework?
By Dr. Douglas B. Reeves
April 14, 2019

There are few more emotional topics in education than homework. Advocates of homework contend that it is necessary because students need practice. The other side in the debate claims that homework is little more than an exercise in mindless compliance – “busywork,” in the terminology students often use. Here is a summary of recent research on the subject.

1. Students *do* need practice. Therefore, the relevant question is: What sort of practice is most effective? Anders Ericsson¹ is the leading researcher in the field of expert performance and expert practice. Ericsson, not Malcolm Gladwell, is the real originator of “the 10,000-hour rule.” His conclusion is that it is not the number of hours of practice that leads to expertise, but rather the use of “gold-standard practice.” Two students can have the same number of hours of practice in calculus, music, or reading, and some will stagnate and other will make exceptional progress. The characteristics of gold-standard practice include immediate feedback, explicit coaching on how to improve, and differentiation so that practice is slightly outside of their comfort zone – neither too easy nor too difficult. If the purpose of homework is practice, then the probability that typical homework assignments meet the criteria for gold-standard practice is zero. Some outstanding teachers, such as Harvard physics professor Eric Mazur, have radically changed the way that student practice. They work on problems during class – not in their dorm rooms – so that Professor Mazur can immediately identify and address misconceptions. Michael Doll, a nationally recognized high school math teacher, uses similar techniques, explaining that “we need to make it safe for students to admit mistakes and discuss what they don’t know.” Homework that is always conveniently right creates the illusion of perfection and prevents students and teachers from having honest conversations about learning. Both Mazur and Doll make the point that the shift to in-class practice rather than homework is not a lowering of standards; students are learning more college physics and high school math, as evidenced by their final exam performance.

2. Students and parents do benefit from collaborative academic pursuits. When I hear parents talk about titanic struggles, often ending in tears, with their children at every level – elementary, middle, and high school – it doesn’t call to mind the phrase “collaborative academic pursuits.” If we really want work done at home, then constructive ideas include reading aloud, joint meal preparation (with recipes doubled, tripled, or halved), and interviewing family members for a family history are all wonderful alternatives to angry arguments about completing the odd-numbered problems one through thirty.

3. Most homework assignments have no impact on student academic performance. In her synthesis of 37 studies on homework, Alexandria Neason² concluded that the value of homework

¹ Ericsson, A. and Pool, R. (2016). *Peak: Secrets from the new science of expertise*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

² Neason, A. (2017, January). Does homework help? *ASCD Education Update* 59(1). Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/jan17/vol59/num01/Does-Homework-Help%C2%A2.aspx>.

for elementary school students is zero, and the impact for students in middle and high school is negligible. Although practice is necessary, the sorts of tasks entailed in the vast majority of homework are not effective practice.

4. Homework, combined with toxic grading practices such as the average to calculate semester grades, discourages students from making intellectual breakthroughs that represent the best in teaching and learning. Many people have experienced the phenomenon of struggle and mistakes, followed by learning and performance. That is precisely the sort of intellectual resilience and persistence that we should encourage in every student. Yet the use of averages and the weighting of homework to calculate final grades essentially tells the student, “It doesn’t make any difference how you perform at the end of the semester that matters, because we are still going to punish you for the mistakes you made at the beginning of the semester.” Imagine if the instructions in the program for the end-of-year concerts and athletic competitions instructed the audience, “Please do not applaud or otherwise recognize these students, because we have evidence that they made many mistakes in rehearsals and practices earlier in the year for which they need to be held accountable.” As absurd as that sounds, it is the logic behind the weighting of homework and the use of the average to calculate end-of-semester grades.

Certainly people of good will disagree on homework policies. The reasoned middle ground is neither “all homework, all the time, because that’s what worked for me” nor “never assign homework because it’s irrelevant and harmful.” Rather, the reasoned middle ground is engaging in practice that matters – gold-standard practice with feedback, coaching, and differentiation. As for work done at home, there are many great alternatives to traditional homework assignments. As MIT Professor Alan Lightman³ suggests, we might even let them play with friends, organize a game without adult assistance, and discover the world beyond school.

³ Lightman, A. (2018). *In praise of wasting time*. New York: Simon and Schuster.