

Reflection: Using the 12 Touchstones

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Introduction

In the final step of implementing the touchstone lesson, I observed my cooperating teacher teach my touchstone lesson to her students while I observed her. Next, I met with her to go over the observation discuss student data on the demonstration of learning from the lesson as well as students' interim assessment data, which my cooperating teacher had analyzed on January 23. Finally, I reflected on the entire process to determine how the 12 touchstones could be for administrators in the future.

Step One: Observation

To ensure my observation was based on the *12 Touchstones of Good Teaching*, I created a Google Form of my own based on the checklist from the text and used that form during the observation. I provided my cooperating teacher with a copy prior to the observation so she would be aware of how I was measuring each touchstone. She was most concerned during our pre-observation discussion that she would forget to have a meaningful conversation with each student by the end of the lesson—that she would somehow miss a student—and determined to make a checklist of students and keep a specific record during the lesson to ensure did not miss any students.

My cooperating teacher, whom we will call Linda, tied every activity to the standards clearly and made clear connections to students' personal learning goals at every opportunity during the lesson. She ensured that students used their personal proficiency scales during the lesson and even had replacement copies for students in case they had left their copy at home.

She set high expectations for student work but did not have a clear grade category established for students' writing assignment at the end of the lesson.

Linda used multiple methods of engagement at regular intervals during the lesson to engage all students, demonstrating strong command of engagement strategies, and she also demonstrated awareness of students, who wanted to sit on the perimeter in order to avoid engagement so she could redirect them to their assigned group seats as they arrived to class. Linda also met her personal goal of interacting meaningfully with each student at some point during the lesson. Linda used feedback to encourage effort during the lesson. Her feedback was not always clear, specific, or tied to the language of the learning objectives. Linda managed the classroom with limited interruptions and kept the focus on learning. The length of transitions was noticeable.

The time to find notes or materials for the next activity or to answer a question before moving onto the next activity were a notable factor during transitions. Once transitions occurred, attention to all six C's of good instruction were CLEAR! Linda coached 70% of students to their primary learning goal (concessions and refutations) at 76% and 67% to mastery of their remediation goal of a precise claim. Linda offered extensions for proficient students through reflection on their learning goals. Proficient students were allowed to plan their next move, which is a research paper. Proficient students will begin writing early and may be allowed to develop a digital argument instead of a classical Toulmin paper if they have already documented their grade-level argumentation skills.

Step Two: Data Analysis and Student Learning Outcomes

After analyzing the pretest data, I predicted that Linda’s students would grow to 40% proficient on their goal of citing the best textual evidence to support analysis of a text and that they would grow to 60% proficient on writing precise claims. I plan for 15% growth during units of instruction when specific standards are targeted daily, and I generally see those numbers, so I hoped to see the same numbers again for my cooperating teacher. The numbers were nearly exact. Students were 43% proficient on their use of best evidence and 67% proficient on writing precise claims according to their data table after the lesson and after their interim assessments:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
Cites Best Textual Evidence (Multiple Choice)	Identifies Claim and Support	Identifies Meaningful Evidence in Argument	Identifies Refutations and Concessions	Addresses Prompt	Complete Essay	Structure	Precise Claim	Textual Evidence	Sum	Score
0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	1
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	3	1.5
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	4	2
0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	3	1.5
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.5
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	4	2
0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	2.5
1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	2
43%	76%	67%	76%	100%	86%	71%	67%	86%	Average of 4	Average of 2.1 Median of 2.5

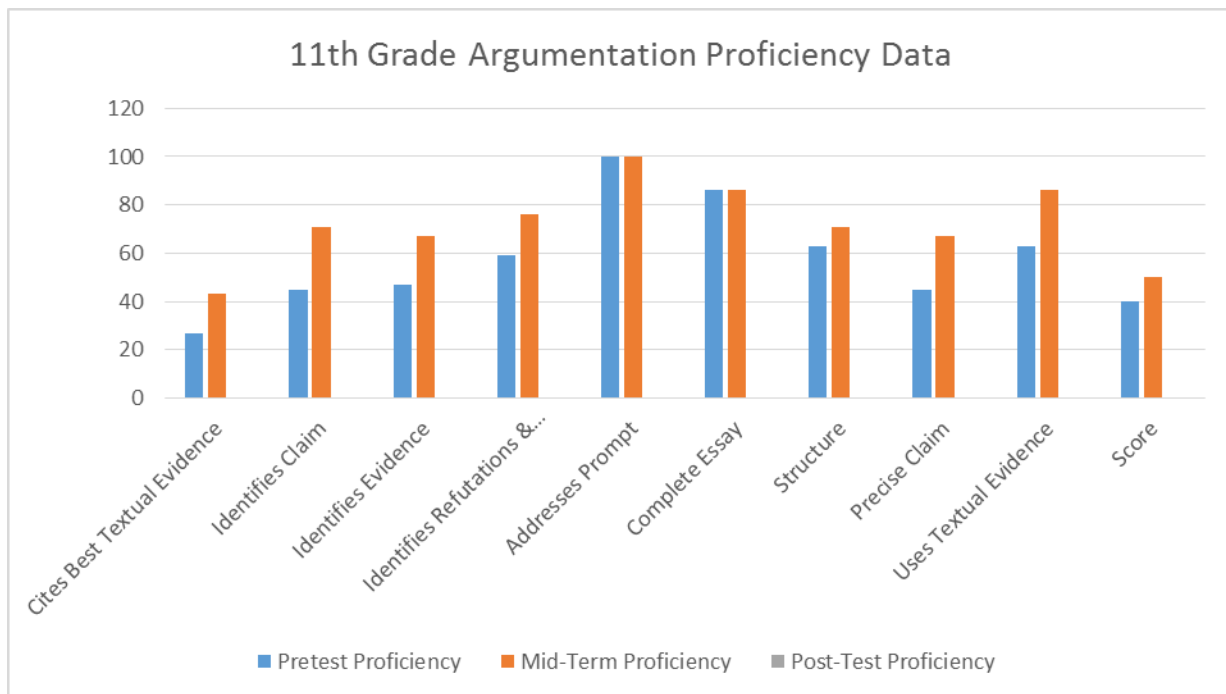
Skill from Assessment	Class Percentage
Cites Best Textual Evidence from Grade-Level Reading	43%
Identifies Claim and Support	71%
Identifies Meaningful Textual Evidence in an Argument	67%
Identifies Refutations and Concessions	76%
Addresses Prompt	100%
Complete Essay	86%
Structure	71%

Precise Claim	67%
Textual Evidence	86%
Score	4 (out of 5)
Mode Score	2.1 (out of 5)

Analysis of the student data after the lesson clearly showed that targeting students’ lowest skills from the previous unit helped them to increase their proficiency during the new unit.

Furthermore, using the 12 touchstones during this unit of instruction to plan instruction with the end in mind, to engage students at all times, to ensure that students wrote meaningful personal goals connected to unit standards, and assessing students regularly and providing meaningful feedback aligned to unit objectives clearly increased learning outcomes for Linda’s students.

Their proficiency on almost every skill increased by the midterm for the unit:



Step Three: Cooperating Teacher Feedback

As a principal candidate, I sought the opportunity to practice meaningful feedback after observing my cooperating teacher, and with her prior permission, I offered her feedback after her observation. Her biggest concern before the observation had been missing the opportunity to interact meaningfully with every student during the lesson, so I began our feedback by addressing that concern. Linda, due to her strong relationships with her students and due to her planning, had successfully interacted with each student—specifically about their learning—during the lesson. She knew she had spoken with each student because of her checklist, but she was concerned that she had not interacted “meaningfully” with each one, and she had managed to do so.

After addressing her biggest concern, I told her we should move next to the biggest area to grow, and then we would be done—because that’s how I coach. One big celebration, one big area to target for growth, and that’s plenty of feedback since most of us can really only fix one thing at a time, anyway. So I brought up feedback. Linda provided a lot of feedback to her students, but it was often, “Yes,” or, “that’s right,” with a lot of body language to back it up. Students need more specific language from the standards and even details on how their examples met the standards. I provided her some examples from her own feedback and then ways that she could have responded with more specificity to be clear in my own feedback.

Finally, I asked Linda if she had any questions for me. She asked for a blank copy of my observation for so she could use it as a planning tool, and I shared it with her digitally. She also asked for a full copy of her observation, and I gave her that, as well, so she could address other strengths and challenges as she had time. But since feedback has more impact on student

growth, it was more important to address as a growth opportunity this year than transitions—her only other area of significant need this year.

Step Four: What Went Well

Writing a lesson for cooperating teacher to implement in her classroom for her teachers went much smoother than I had anticipated. I had many concerns writing a lesson for a group of students in the middle of their school year when I had no relationship with them—no information about their proficiency, their future career goals, their dreams, even their behavior. So when I saw their academic growth after the lesson, I was most pleased with learning outcomes. Nothing matters more to me as an educator than student data. It drives almost every decision I make as an educator—data doesn't lie. And the data from this instructional unit says implementing the 12 touchstones as planning tools positively affects student data. You see, my cooperating teacher, Linda, didn't just teach my lesson. She was influenced by my approach on the pretest. She was influenced by the thorough lesson plan, which I gave her in December when I originally wrote it, and as a result, she used the 12 touchstones to plan from the beginning of the entire unit and used the touchstones from the beginning of this teaching cycle to transform learning in her room—the data changed, too.

The other surprise for me was the success of the observation form. Because I had never created an observation form, I was actually afraid of how clear the feedback from the form would be. I felt anxiety about using an original form and actually considered using a product from an online vendor or even from my current district. None of these tools, however, had any meaningful connections to the 12 Touchstones, which were the guiding principles the lesson should demonstrate. After generating the form and performing an observation with it, I realized

that to meaningful, all observational forms need to be directly linked to the guiding principles and goals teachers are required to demonstrate each year. Principals have to generate meaningful, new “rubrics,” in other words, when they ask teachers to demonstrate meaningful, new skills.

Step Five: Things I Would Do Differently

When I originally wrote the Touchstone lesson, I failed to write a detailed rationale with rules and procedures for cooperative group learning because I had helped my cooperating teacher establish those rules and procedures before this lesson. She wanted to establish those changes at the beginning of Unit 3 and maintain that change for the rest of the school year. I failed to see that, like Linda, many teachers on the secondary level struggle to manage content delivery, classroom management, discipline, and coaching to proficiency while utilizing the cooperative learning model, and that I had a platform through this assignment to share one method of doing so. When I revised this lesson, I provided a detailed rationale for cooperative learning.

As a principal candidate, I would recommend that future candidates be paired with a teaching candidate, and rather than writing a lesson at all, principal candidates should be coaching during the entire process as teacher candidates write a lesson. Principal candidates do need planning and writing skills, but they should be applying the 12 Touchstones to the planning and writing skills more appropriate to their futures. I would have been more challenged if I had been asked to write a professional development plan on how to implement the 12 Touchstones for teachers than by being asked to write a lesson plan using them—or I could have coached someone else to write their own plan and provided meaningful feedback each step of the way. Writing the plan so I could watch someone teach it never felt authentic. If I could change that

one thing, I would change it in a heartbeat and observe teachers teaching lessons they had written by themselves. The differentiation idea for this course has an accommodation, which might have allowed for this option if I had asked for it during the first week of the semester.

Step Six: Implementation In the Future

When I read the introduction to *The 12 Touchstones of Good Teaching*, I was skeptical—not of all checklists—but of this one in particular. 12 items for daily planning seemed twice as long as an effective tool should be. But when I had read each of the 12 touchstones themselves and understood the underlying principles behind each one, I saw them as a highly effective weekly planning tool. The 12 touchstones cover the essentials of effective classroom instruction, and if teachers learned to use them with fidelity as an organized planning tool to prepare their weekly lessons rather than their daily classroom behaviors, they would almost certainly see improved student learning outcomes. I plan to use my own version of the 12 touchstones next year as a weekly lesson planner to experiment with my idea and see if a weekly version of these 12 guiding principles isn't more effective than a daily checklist for effective planning and use that experiment as my growth goal for 2017.

Conclusions for Principals:

Goodwin and Hubbell's (2013) *The 12 Touchstones of Good Teaching* is an excellent resource on effective teaching practices, and it synthesizes many practices into a manageable framework and growth ideology. It is not the one ideology, however, which will revolutionize education. The ideology, which will finally revolutionize education, already exists. We just won't stick with it because we have so many stakeholders distracting us from the people who hold the key to quality education: our students!