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Am I a Star Teacher? Developing Dispositions That Support Student Learning

It is certainly possible for both novice and veteran teachers to develop into Star Teachers, but doing so requires a great deal of work and introspection. “[Star] Teachers are not born,” writes Haberman. “They develop the appropriate ideology and relationship skills by reflecting upon, learning from, and benefitting from their life experiences.”¹ Teachers committed to embracing a growth mindset can mature and progress as effective educators.

With the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),² teachers have an opportunity to reinvent their professional development goals in accordance with their individualized needs. Effective teaching is not one-size-fits-all, and effective professional development shouldn't be either. The development needs of a first-year teacher are not the same as those of a teacher with 15 years under his or her belt. Currently teachers are held accountable by value-added measurements (VAMs)—high-stakes, summative evaluations based on student improvement. Rather than improve instruction, VAMs undermine it.³ Research shows that they are burdensome,⁴ demoralizing,⁵ and unreliable for determining effective practice.⁶

In their book *Making Teachers Better, Not Bitter: Balancing Evaluation, Supervision, and Reflection for Professional Growth*, Tony Frontier and Paul Mielke envision new teacher evaluation frameworks that replace the ranking model with a developmental one, noting that teacher evaluation systems were founded on ideas related to performance and not growth.⁷

Haberman's seven dispositions (persistence, protecting learners and learning, ability to put theory into practice, approach to at-risk learners, professional versus a personal orientation to learners, ability to survive in a bureaucracy, and fallibility) are not items on a checklist or means of high-stakes evaluation, but are goals that teachers use to take ownership of their professional progress by adjusting their dispositional skills to better match those of hypothetical Star Teachers. They are meant to help teachers move away from district-directed evaluations and choose their own low-stakes, formative goals toward becoming Star Teachers.

The five stages of development on the way to becoming a Star Teacher are as follows for each disposition:

1. **Pre-Star:** The teacher has a common knowledge or an understanding of basic techniques and concepts and *rarely* performs the actions associated with the disposition. This stage of development denotes an open but naive understanding of dispositional behavior and its significance.
2. **Developing:** The teacher has gained classroom experience with the disposition and *sometimes* asks for help understanding and performing dispositional behaviors.
3. **Proficient:** The teacher is *regularly* successful at completing tasks associated with one of Haberman's seven dispositions. Help from an expert may be required from time to time, but the teacher can usually perform dispositional behaviors independently.
4. **Accomplished:** The teacher *consistently* performs the actions associated with the disposition without assistance. He or she is recognized by peers as a go-to person for questions about the disposition.
5. **Star:** The teacher is known as a distinguished expert in the disposition by his or her peers. Star Teachers almost *always* provide support for and guidance in the disposition to others with humility (see Appendix).

Haberman believed in the potential of every K–12 educator to become a distinguished Star Teacher, writing, "There is every reason to believe that even greater numbers of potential teachers . . . can be selected and coached to do as well as these [S]tar [T]eachers."⁸ Using Haberman's seven dispositions as a guide, teachers can learn to avoid the burdens of restrictive school or district systems,

more deeply contemplate their effectiveness as teachers, and ultimately become empowered to create a professional development plan that is personalized and growth-oriented.

Why Use the Ideas in this Book for Your Practice?

What Makes a Star Teacher synthesizes Haberman's research-based recommendations about relational dispositions into a framework that can improve instruction. The purpose of the book is to serve not as a rigid to-do list but rather as a guide to support your professional growth through identification of goals, strategies, resources, and intended results. By reading the book and using its ideas and the online study guide, you will learn how to

- Develop a clear vision of the dispositions of Star Teachers.
- Self-assess by tracking and reflecting on evidence for dispositional activities.
- Set goals for further learning.

The overall aim of this chapter is to improve instruction through formative assessment of teacher dispositions. *What Makes a Star Teacher* is designed to be used as a standalone manual—you do not need to purchase other books by Dr. Haberman or on the topic of teacher dispositions to fully understand it. To get the most out of the book, we recommend discussing key points in the text with peers, sharing the strategies you try in the classroom and your observations of how they are working, completing one or more Star Tracker activities, as well as the extension exercises in each chapter, to help you understand the differences between pre-Star and Star Teachers. Whether you have elected to work alone or alongside colleagues, we encourage you to read and respond individually to the ideas presented in each chapter.

The Star Teacher Development Protocol

Our Star Teacher Developmental Protocol (STDP) is an experiential, hands-on approach for teachers who are interested in the personal development of Haberman's seven dispositions. The protocol is underpinned by best practices and research maintaining that teachers learn best when they work alongside peers on hands-on strategies that they can immediately try out in the classroom and when

they have time to reflect on their practice. The STDP is an open-ended formative assessment that involves the following steps (see Figure 8.1):

1. The teacher reflects on his or her relational dispositions, professional standards, and student learning objectives and identifies professional growth goals.
2. The teacher engages in a pre-conference.
3. The teacher completes a peer observation.
4. The teacher traces progress toward goals over the course of the year.
5. The teacher completes a post-conference to review goal attainment and discuss how professional development enhanced his or her effectiveness.

In the STDP process, peers engage in a combination of independent study and ongoing collaboration with an instructional partner, including peer observation. Although being observed in the classroom can be unsettling for some teachers, observations support professional growth for both the observer and the observed. The observed teacher is able to have a trusted colleague share valuable feedback on his or her dispositional behaviors in the classroom, and the observer is able to watch dispositional behaviors in action, articulate their strengths and weaknesses, and compare them to his or her own. The process enables teachers to

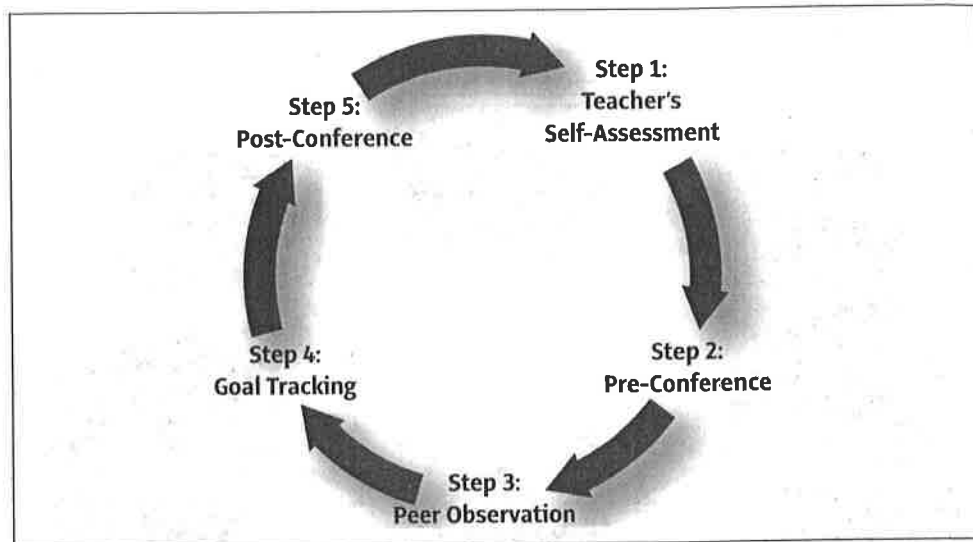
- Connect with their colleagues in collaborative relationships,
- Reflect on and gain insight into their instructional skills, and
- Engage in public discourse about best teaching practices.⁹

Peer observation often occurs as a low-stakes, friendly, summative exercise in which teachers “buddy up to observe each other teach and discuss what happened during a single teaching encounter.”¹⁰ In “Rethinking Classroom Observation,” Emily Grimm, Trent Kaufman, and Dave Doty note that teacher-driven peer observation helps teachers to focus on their own development, immediately apply what they’ve learned to their classrooms, and refine their skills because they are provided “with a classroom-embedded process to refine their instruction. Through teacher-driven observation, teachers engage peers in gathering and analyzing classroom data—data that speak to the unique context of their own classrooms. This approach has demonstrated potential to meaningfully improve instruction and student achievement.”¹¹

Peer observation is an effective form of professional development because it

- Is embedded into teachers' workdays;
- Is flexible in design, content, and time;
- Is continuous;
- Supports initiating and maintaining change; and
- Leverages expertise within schools.¹²

Figure 8.1 The Star Teacher Developmental Protocol



Source: Adapted from: Ball, D. L. & Cohen, D. K. (1999). Developing practice, developing practitioners: Toward a practice-based theory of professional education. In G. Sykes & L. Darling-Hammond (Eds.), *Teaching as the learning profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (pp. 3–32). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Peer observation provides teachers a shared vision on which to base professional and instructional conversations.¹³ Successful peer observations are guided by seven principles: they are purposeful, autonomous, constructive, ethical, flexible, collaborative, and inclusive (see Figure 8.2).

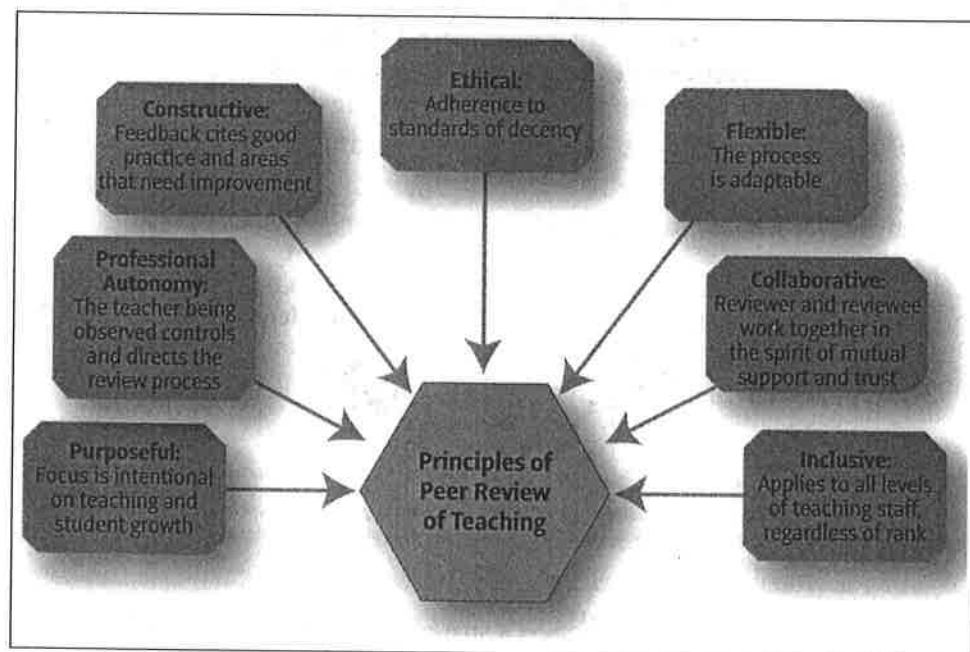
Step 1: Teacher Self-Assessment

The STDP, which is modeled after other peer-observation protocols (e.g., Gibbs's Reflective Teaching Cycle), starts with the teacher reflecting on his or her relational dispositions, professional standards, and student-learning objectives.

The teacher conducts a self-assessment by reviewing data and reflecting on professional practices to determine teacher and student needs, then conducts an in-depth analysis of Haberman's seven dispositions. The teacher's goals should include collecting evidence of practices that positively affect student outcomes.

The teacher begins his or her self-assessment by reviewing the five stages of teacher development (see p. 193) and Haberman's seven dispositions. After determining a specific disposition that he or she would like to develop further, then they would complete a self-assessment (see Figure 8.3).

Figure 8.2 **Principles of Peer Review**



Step 2: Pre-conference

The teacher meets with a trusted peer who will perform the classroom observation to ensure that they are both clear about goals and actions. During the pre-conference, the teacher shares with his or her peer the goals identified in the self-assessment. This is also an opportunity for the teacher to outline the support systems needed to achieve the goals, as well as the means for tracking evidence of progress or goal attainment. If trust and confidentiality are present, peer

Figure 8.3 Self-Assessment of Dispositions

Disposition / Professional Goal: _____	

Related professional standards (consider national, state, district, and subject matter): _____	

Related student standard(s) to professional goal: _____	

Behaviors or actions needed to accomplish the goal: _____	

Timeline for completion:	
Milestone 1: _____	Date: _____
Milestone 2: _____	Date: _____
Completion Date: _____	
Evidence of Goal Attainment: _____	

observation can stimulate confidence in a teacher as well as promote reflective thinking.¹⁴ During this step, the two teachers set the parameters of the observation and select a date. They can also choose which chapters of this book to focus on, although open dialogue should be a key element of this and any future meetings.¹⁵

Step 3: Peer Observation

The peer observation determines how proficiently the observed teacher is implementing the disposition he or she selected (see Appendix). The most valuable part of the process is in the dialogue and reflections that the two teachers share. The observer is less like a supervisor and more like a critical friend, sharing feedback that is honest, collegial, and constructive in a nonjudgmental environment. However, these conversations are only productive if the teachers are willing to develop relationships, take risks, and engage in collaborative reflection.¹⁶

Step 4: Tracking the Evidence

The teacher tracks evidence of goal attainment and dispositional behaviors using such tools as portfolios, electronic profiles, students' classroom or state reporting data, recordings of lessons and interactions with students, and personal reflections. During this step, which may last for several lessons or over the entire academic year, teachers should also consider additional professional development activities such as attending workshops, reading books and articles, and watching videos.

Step 5: Post-Conference

In the last stage of the STDP, the teacher and peer observer reflect on goals attained and how much the dispositional behaviors enhanced instructional practice. They discuss further goals and create a professional development plan if needed. This is also an opportunity to celebrate successes, identify areas for continued learning, and record lessons learned. Using the Appendix as the guide, the teacher assigns himself or herself a score between 1 and 5 based on his or her stage of development: (1) Pre-Star, (2) Developing, (3) Proficient, (4) Accomplished, or (5) Star. This score is not meant for public dissemination, but to empower the teacher with the knowledge of his or her dispositional growth. During the conference, the two teachers may plan to further the development of the disposition, abandon training, or move forward with a different one of Haberman's seven dispositions and newly identified goals.

Teachers involved in the STDP process should always find ways to celebrate the important milestone of having experienced it. Because the STDP is designed to be ongoing, teachers may decide to repeat the above cycle of steps for every one of Haberman's dispositions. Upon the successful assessment of all seven dispositions, the teacher may then elect to record his or her results on a dispositions summary form (see Figure 8.4). Authors' note: Because the STDP is an integrated process in which each stage supports the next, all five stages must be completed from beginning to end for each disposition that is being assessed.

Summary

Star Teachers persistently seek what works for learners, unapologetically protect learners, link theory and practice, see students as at promise and not at risk, value respect above love from their students, effectively navigate the bureaucracy of schools, own their faults, and are willing to grow. Although Star Teachers make the job look easy, as any educator knows, the art of teaching requires plenty of time, practice, and development.

Beginning in 1959, Haberman conducted more than 5,000 classroom observations upon which the Star Teacher framework was founded. This first-generation research focused on teachers' mindsets and behaviors. He wrote more than 200 major papers, 150 refereed articles, 20 research projects, 50 chapters and monographs, and 8 books.

The second generation of Haberman's research emerged in the early 1990s, when he formulated a Star Teacher Pre-Screener to help school districts identify and hire Star Teachers. The pre-screener consists of 50 questions and evaluates teachers' dispositions, knowledge, and skills. Nearly 400 school districts around the country have used Haberman's selection and interview protocols to identify and hire teachers with Star potential. (For more information, visit www.habermanfoundation.org.)

For the third generation of Haberman's research, we have translated the theories from his landmark book *Star Teachers of Children in Poverty*,¹⁷ and the follow-up companion book *Star Teachers: The Ideology and Best Practice of Effective Teachers of Diverse Children and youth in Poverty*¹⁸ into observable behaviors, strategies, and assessment tools in this book.

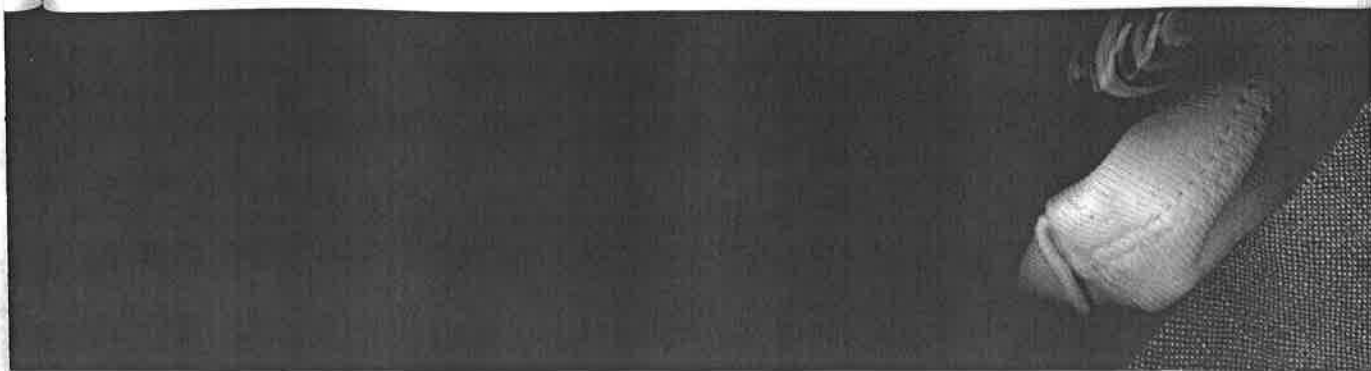


Figure 8.4 Dispositions Summary

In the chart below, specify how often you perform each disposition: routinely, consistently, regularly, sometimes, or rarely. If you are not certain, leave the box blank.

Disposition	Star	Accomplished	Proficient	Developing	Pre-Star
1. Persistence					
2. Protecting Learners and Learning					
3. Putting Theory into Practice					
4. Approaching Learners Who Are at Risk					
5. Orienting to Learners: Professional Versus Personal					
6. Surviving in a Bureaucracy					
7. Accepting and Admitting Fallibility					

Endnotes

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