CLASSROOM TEACHING

# Education's Trifecta

The three guiding lights for education are: wonder, resilience and mastery.

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Kids do remarkable work when given remarkable work to do

Mark Batterson describes in A Million Little Miracles, the wonder of tears. Yes, tears!  No two are alike just as no two snowflakes are alike. Further, tears have different chemical composition depending upon the reason for the tears: pain, emotion or irritation. Tears are an example of wonder, the starting point for everyone's learning.

We know that the opportunities for school creativity are less than desired. Why else would there be 79,000,000 views of Sir Ken Robinson's TED talk urging us to embrace creativity in schools? Today a soft murmur of creativity drifts through classrooms downed out by the great bronze gong demanding more learning faster. Good news! Education's Trifecta brings creativity and increased learning in the most delightful way.

Education's trifecta selects the three guiding lights for education and then places them in the perfect order: wonder, resilience and mastery. The trifecta comes from observing toddlers. From birth on, children wonder about the world around them, have the resilience to pursue learning and they master skill after skill on their new life journey.

Without the trifecta, education falls into the trap of starting instruction with the content to be mastered. Without wonder, students think, "Who cares?? And we experience the lack of student resilience to complete the work. No problem. We have an infinite supply of bribes. Educators in the USA estimate that students receive, on the average, 10,000 bribes (aka incentives) between kindergarten and grade 12. (You can calculate this for your school. Multiply the typical number of incentives each day times the number of school days each year times 13 years.) Skipping wonder, bribing students to do the work and then inspecting them with grades creates the education few admire. A criticism about spending time on wonder is a "lack of time." John Maxwell reminds us, "The longest distance between two points is a shortcut." *

**Wonder** first. It is created through curiosity, surprise, anticipation and memories. Sometimes wonder even creates goose pimples. Not only is this wonder exciting for students, but it is also equally interesting for teachers.

How can busy teachers add wonder expectations to the daily routine. The secret starts with providing students the first week of class the key concepts they will learn for the complete school year. Number them. Give students only the essential content; leave trivia out. By itself the key concept list creates curiosity, anticipation and some anxiety.

Wonder is learned from students, families, colleagues, the library and artificial intelligence. Students are anxious to share the wonder they learned about any of the key concepts. One of the best uses of AI in education is finding the wonder for all topics listed on annual key concept list. For example, I did an AI search asking for interesting facts about adjectives. I didn't know there were absolute and regular adjectives. Happy and beautiful are the normal adjectives that can be adjusted to happier and more beautiful. However, dead and perfect are absolute adjectives. We cannot say more dead or perfecter. I wonder how many absolute adjectives students can find?

**Resilience** is essential for long-term memory. Toddlers understand this ("Can't we read a different book; I already read the cow book 50 times?") We replace bribery with the same thinking that creates resilience outside of school - choice, creativity, community, adults listening to students and hands-on-activities. Resilience cannot be left to chance; it is a choice to have resilience reside in classrooms. Rember, bribery (complete this work or you cannot be on the cricket team) only manufactures the illusion of learning.

Jim Rohn wrote, 'Kids can do remarkable things when they are given remarkable things to do. If they don't have remarkable things to do, there's no telling what they will do.' Remarkable resilience resides in your realm with mastery, creativity, choice, community, listening to students and hands-on learning experiences.
When students are actively involved with choices about how and when to learn key concepts, we celebrate their resilience and at the same time worry about meeting learning expectations. Hang on…

Think of **Mastery** as a journey. Suppose you are in Brisbane and are planning a year-long journey to Adelaide. No matter which roads you select you need to have traveled 500 kilometers by the first quarter, 1000 km by semester, 1500 km by third quarter and all 2000 km by the end of the year. During first quarter you leave Queensland and are in northern New South Wales. By semester you are clearly in central New South Wales. By third quarter you can almost see South Australia. Finally, you enter South Australia just before the end of the year and arrive at Adelaide. Mastery is a long, rising journey - never a shuffle of cram-and-forget inspections. It is the road that is remembered, not the checkpoints that fade.

Compare inspections to student-led conferences with teachers and students. Every student can point to their graphs and can tell mom and dad if they are on target to meet year end expectations, if they are speeding, if they have already learned the year's content or what is being tried now to help them learn the year's content.

The school mastery journey is analogous to the Brisbane to Adelaide trip. By the end of the first quarter students are to know a quarter of the key concepts, by semester half of them, by third quarter three quarters of the concepts and all or almost all at end of the year. How is this accomplished when students are choosing different routes to Adelaide? Here are the steps implemented with all grade levels and all subjects.

1. Count the number of key concepts provided students the first week of the school year and tell students they will have a non-graded quiz on some of the concepts most weeks (seven per quarter). The square root is the approximate number of questions. For example, with 150 key concepts, the weekly quiz will be questions on 12 of the key concepts randomly selected at time of quiz.
2. The twelve are selected at random by pulling number slips of paper out of a bowl, using a digital random number generator, or more ingenious ways such as a biology teacher from Saskatchewan who designed a hyperlinked periodic table. Each element was written on a tongue depressor. A student randomly drew a tongue depressor, potassium, for example. The student clicked on "K" on the smart board and up came a question that had nothing to do with potassium. It was a question of one of the biology key concepts.
3. The quiz answers are scored by indicating number correct.
4. Students graph their individual number of correct answers on a blank student run chart. In this example the y-axis is from 0 to 12 and the x-axis is 1-28 for the 28 quizzes in a year. (blank graphs free at crazysimpleeducation.com)

5. The number of questions correct for all students together is graphed and posted on the wall (blank class run charts available for free at crazysimpleeducation.com. The Y-axis is the number of students times the number of questions each quiz).
6. When students as individuals or as a classroom score higher than ever before (All-Time Bests or ATB's), there are simple celebrations for fun - not for gifts.
7. Students understand that by the end of the first quarter, they should be answering 3 of the 12 randomly selected questions correctly. They have proven that they know a quarter of content, one quarter of the year-long journey. It takes a while to understand that we are on an education journey, not a factory with 100% inspection requirements.

Just like wonder, creativity and choice create resilience, so does a mastery learning journey create resilience. Students look forward to the next quiz to see if they can earn yet another All-Time Best. Wanting to score higher and the joy of helping the whole classroom succeed energizes resilience big time!

John Hattie explained to me that the data from the learning journey can be used to calculate effect sizes. I gathered the beginning and ending year data from 300 K-12 classrooms and calculated the effect size for each classroom. The average was an effect size of 2.35, which is 5.9 times the average of 250 other influences upon student learning.

Ancient Hebrew literature described two lamps needed to guide people. One light is in the distance illuminating the destination and the other light shines on the feet to ensure safe progress along the way.** The key concept list provided to students, at the beginning of the school year, is the destination light and the graphs along the way shine on progress.  The wonder and resilience create the reason for the journey in the first place. Yes, Jim Rohn is right. Kids do remarkable work when given remarkable work to do; Education's Trifecta is the framework for remarkable! *

*John Maxwell Leadership Bible, Second Edition, p 1378
**Psalm 119:105

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Note: Most classrooms have skill expectations in addition to content knowledge. The trifecta framework applies to skill attainment using the dichotomous rubric and blank graphs located at CrazySimpleEducation.com.