

Home runs, RBIs and batting averages — how today's educators measure up

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Growing up in the '50s and '60s, I loved collecting baseball cards. Laying out the 1960 New York Yankees cards on my bed by position still resonates. I read about each player on the back of his card. There was *previous performance data* and highlights that included RBIs, batting average, home runs, fielding percentage and hits. There was also *descriptive information* about where he had played before coming to the big leagues, that he batted right-handed and threw left-handed, and his hometown. Could this card that fits in my hand fully describe a player's contribution? No. Were they important measures? Absolutely.

A child today might look at Yankee shortstop **Derek Jeter's** card. While there's something to learn, it won't fully describe his contribution as captain, team leader, role model and community philanthropist. Some measures are more easily captured than others. But let's face it — those that are harder to capture can be just as important.

Let's consider educator measures. Today's modern testing regimen and sophisticated statistical techniques give

us tools to capture *part* of a teacher's contribution to student learning. Is value-added data the sole measure? No more than a baseball player's batting average. But, it's a critical measure and shouldn't be ignored, especially over time. Reducing teaching quality to statistics on a baseball card is not the intent. But the analogy has meaning.

How do you capture the whole story? What are the correct, multiple measures? Imagine a teacher's "baseball card." Similar to a player's home runs, batting averages and stolen bases, consider what might give an important snapshot of a teacher's impact.

The more pixels, the clearer the picture

The only way to suppress errors of measure is to have many data points. An individual student can fail a test because she broke up with her boyfriend or simply doesn't perform well on tests. That single student doesn't negate the impact of the teacher. There are many students whose aggregated scores determine that impact. When you look at a teacher's

influence on student learning over multiple years it becomes clearer the impact he or she makes. But, we need other measures beyond testing results to help paint the true picture.

Certainly teachers are promoting *achievement* for individual students. Progress measures are critical because all students start at different points. Measuring the observed scores against the predicted scores across students and time give us a valid measure of impact. The way to get to higher achievement is to consistently *accelerate progress*.

There are several, rubric-style instruments that observers can use to give classroom and teacher observations. **Charlotte Danielson's** and **Robert Pianta's** models are great examples. The power of these models is to give teachers feedback on their practice. And the models are linked to improved student results, which is central to our goal of improving student achievement.

Greener grass

The grass isn't greener on the other side of the fence; the grass is greenest where it's watered, according to **Robert**

Fulghum, and he is correct. Having a set of vital metrics creates focus for everyone. They help leverage all others. This is why test results alone will never suffice. We need measures that give us signals along the way to make improvements.

Woody Allen once said, “Ninety percent of life is just showing up.” Do students and teachers show up regularly where they want to be? Sure.

Attendance is a great indicator, and while it doesn’t predict student success any more than cold predicts snow, we know if students and teachers don’t show up, learning can’t happen.

What about school climate? Do the conditions in which someone works impact performance? Yes. For example, Gallup argues in its Q12 survey that predicts organizational outcomes that the two most important baseline questions that have to be answered positively by individuals in an organization are:

- Do I know what is expected of me?
- Do I have the right tools to do my job well?

Many effective teachers would trade stipends, days off and recognition for a terrific leader. And right next to my Yankees player cards was one of the manager, **Casey Stengel**, and his stats.

‘Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted’

Albert Einstein’s quote offers instruction. We know teachers have the ability to cause students to want to work harder and do better. So, how do you measure inspiration? We know a person’s positive energy can influence not only student learning, but also the ethos in a building, making it a place where teachers want to teach, students want to learn and parents want to send their children. How do you measure a teacher’s contribution to culture? Let’s acknowledge the difficulty of these measures and create imperfect measures around those worth measuring.

I remember hearing a speaker talk about how in his district, “If it’s not about instruction, it doesn’t matter.” I’ve coached too many athletes to see

firsthand how relationships carried over into the classroom. Teachers find many ways to connect with kids, and cocurricular activities such as the yearbook, school newspaper, athletics and others all add to the impact. The connecting relationship may be an imperfect measure, but a willingness to direct student activities that build students’ skills still matters.

What about student perceptions? A variety of measures are being used in this space. Gallup Inc. has created a student poll that measures student hope, engagement and well-being. They aren’t tied to test scores, but few would argue their importance. It tells us an important story of contribution to student outcomes, beyond test results. In Gallup’s work, these results have been linked to higher graduation rates, and thus are connected to hard outcomes.

The point in this is not to construct a teacher “baseball card,” but to encourage constructive dialogue about what measures should be considered. Focusing solely on student results leads to judgments, and, over time, a loss of the processes it takes to improve. Focusing solely on processes misses the point. You need both. It’s where the brilliance of “and” trumps the divisiveness of “or.”

There are the measures that might include parental observations, student portfolios, peer reviews or performance-based student assessments. But just because you *can* collect it, doesn’t mean you *should* collect it. We do a giant disservice by simply power-ranking teachers, which then can lead to a misdiagnosis followed by misapplication.

Daniel Pink argues in *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* that mastery is a fundamental piece of intrinsic motivation. When teachers receive regular feedback and coaching to improve their craft and they begin to see improved student results, it creates a success cycle.

The reason *multiple* measures are so important is because teaching and learning are complex. It would be a disservice to the teaching profession if we thought the only contribution of a teacher could be measured by one

annual student test converted to a simple score. Equally dishonorable, though, are those who believe test results should never be used as a measure. Of course they should — student results are part of a teacher’s performance. It’s an important piece of data — *just not the whole story*.

The challenge is to create a set of measures that remain integrated and help accelerate a new system. This is a developmental process and the clock has started. In baseball phrasing, it’s akin to having an extra inning. Right now, we need to think and select well.

At the heart of those discussions must be what really is best for students. □

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