

What Teachers Want: An Education Parable Written By a Math Teacher

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Our scene opens with the **Teacher** and the **Student** in a moderately decorated classroom. The walls are covered with posters, both inspirational and informative. The Student is seated at one of dozens of neatly aligned desks, facing the Teacher, who stands in front of a whiteboard covered in information, examples, and tasks. The Teacher is just finishing the lesson, which was carefully planned out, aligning with the standards of instruction set by the State. In addition to covering the State-mandated material, the Teacher demonstrated **seven examples** during the lesson of the Concept being taught today. Each step of each example was carefully explained, with the Teacher showing every action required by the Example on the whiteboard.

Upon completion of the lesson, the Teacher assigns the Student an **Activity** in order to both allow the Student to practice the **Concept** presented during the lesson and to assess the Student's understanding of the Concept. The Activity could be in the form of a worksheet to be completed, or the construction of a poster, or a presentation to be given to the entire class. Whatever the assignment, the Teacher was careful to include only tasks that were specifically addressed in the lesson presented just moments ago. The **tasks are very similar** to the ones the Teacher just demonstrated in front of the class. In many instances only a few words or numbers were altered from the tasks the Teacher just performed. Now that we have set up the scenario, let us now briefly examine the **motivating forces** of the Teacher and the Student.

What the Teacher wants is to produce a **generation of critical thinkers**, able to work through a difficult problem themselves with minimal "handholding." The Activity assigned is meant to reinforce the Concepts presented on the whiteboard just moments ago. It is the Teacher's hope that this Activity will spur the Student to be able to reproduce the actions required by the presented Concept.

What the Student wants is to **finish the assignment** with as little pain and anguish as possible, preferably being awarded a high score. It is in this context that the Student **raises his or her hand**, followed by a request of instructions on how to do the tasks required by the Activity.

The Teacher is often **surprised**, baffled, and frustrated by questions such as "How do I do this?" Sometimes the Teacher will even respond with a simple command: "Just think about it." Because, after all, the Teacher just spent 30 minutes to an hour explaining in detail, step-by-step, how to do several similar looking

problems.

The Student is often **surprised** when the Teacher won't just tell them how to do this. Because, after all, the Teacher just spent 30 minutes to an hour explaining in detail, step-by-step, how to do several similar looking problems.

“Why,” the Teacher asks, “won't the Student just apply critical thinking skills to the problem I just imparted? After all, *it's almost identical to the seven problems I just demonstrated in front of them?*”

“Why,” the Student asks, “won't the Teacher just tell us how to do this particular problem, right after the lesson? After all, *it's almost identical to the seven problems the Teacher just demonstrated in front of us?*”

Both Teacher and Student have a **gripe**. The question is this: **Which one has a legitimate grievance?**

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