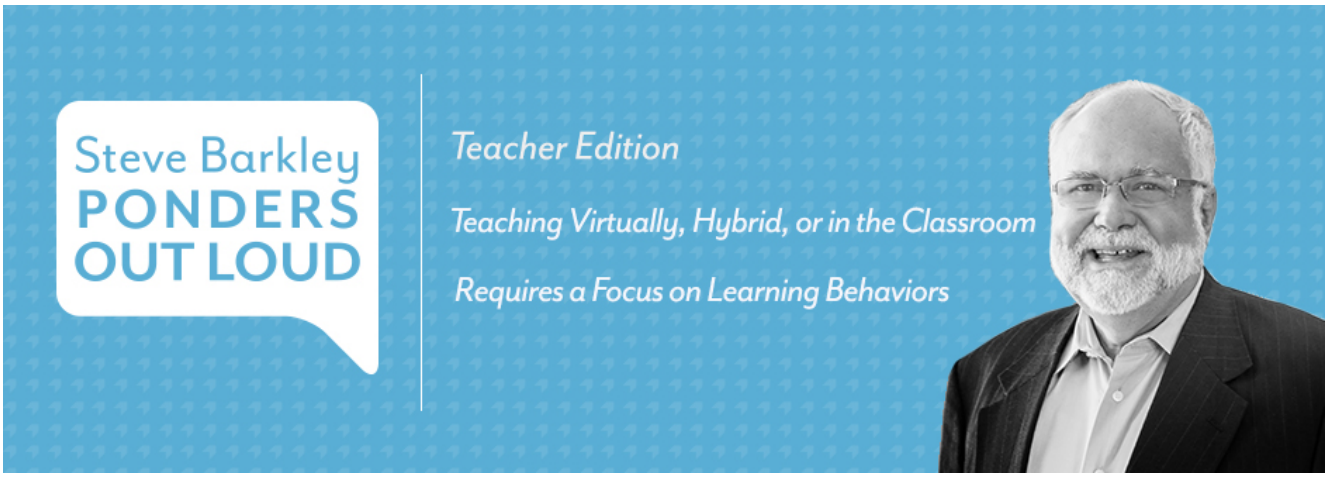
Podcast for Teachers: Teaching Virtually, Hybrid, or in the Classroom Requires a Focus on Learning Behaviors



Too often, instruction can be overly focused on teaching which can be seen as orderly, sequential and manageable, while learning is often spontaneous, irregular, non-linear and complex. The key element in achieving learning is generating critical learning behaviors. This podcast explores the connected learning behaviors in different instructional settings.

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PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Announcer: 00:00 Hello and welcome to the teacher edition of the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. For over three decades, I've had the opportunity to learn with teachers in and out of their classroom settings. I have a great respect for the complexity of teaching and I know that all great teachers are continuous learners. I invite you to join me as I

explore my thoughts and insights on a variety of topics, connected to teaching and learning. Thanks for listening in.

Steve: 00:33 Teaching virtually, hybrid, or in the classroom requires a focus on learning behaviors. Several years back, I began to discuss with educators, the differences that occur when a school becomes more focused on teaching than on learning. I described that the reason that could happen is that teaching can be neat, orderly, sequential, managed, and documented. We can take the required standards and place them onto a scope and sequence chart. We can identify which standards are being addressed within each lesson. After teaching a standard, we can stop and test it, assess it, and that way document that the standard was taught. The problem that emerged from that is that learning is often messy, spontaneous, irregular, non-linear and complex. Early in my teaching career, I had the shock of learning that complexity when I taught a fifth and sixth grade combination and had kids for two years. And so, students who started with me as fifth graders were still with me the next year as sixth graders.

Steve: 02:07 And I frequently found myself surprised when things that I had documented had been taught during their fifth grade year evidently weren't learned during that same activity. I sense that this need to focus on what causes learning versus how am I teaching this became increasingly important as virtual learning opportunities had to extend to most students. Initially, in the quick switch to virtual, a lot of focus went into ways to teach it. As we've looked to grow and strengthen our skillsets as educators, it's through an increased focus on how the learning is happening. What follows are my responses to a brief interview concerning the role of learning production behaviors in virtual settings.

Andrea: 03:21 So Steve, I think maybe we can start with the question about, you know, there's so much talk about online teaching online and how different it is, but what are some of the benefits of teaching online?

Steve: 03:34 I think I want to change the question slightly from teaching online to learning online, okay? And so, if you focus on what's the experience that the learner is having and the one of the big pluses to learning online is increased student agency or if you prefer, student empowerment. A recorded video from my teacher can be played when I'm most focused. It can be stopped if I'm distracted and restarted and I can review it. So if halfway through a question comes to my mind of something I may have missed back at the beginning, I can go back and watch it again when I have a question. If as a learner, I can access feedback as to my understanding and the clarity of my understanding, I can then make make learning decisions.

Steve: 04:51 So I did eight math problems, I got them, right. The feedback tells me that I clearly understand this. I don't need to do eight more
problems. I can move on to the next learning activity. An interesting example – I'm studying German now on Duolingo and they actually track my mistakes and they create a separate site for me to go back and spend extra practice times on the places where I need the most practice. So I would be labeling that as as personalized. So I think that increasing student agency, increasing personalization, increasing student empowerment are some of the real benefits of of learning online

Andrea: 05:45 That kind of swings us into student production behaviors. And we've talked a little bit about what those might look like for a student deciding that they've mastered the math concept because they've got all of their questions right and the feedback shows they know what they're doing. How did student production behaviors change in online settings or what differences are teachers looking out for and planning for?

Steve: 06:12 Yeah. I have to say that I'm not sure the student production behaviors change. What really changes are the

teaching behaviors. So what does the teacher design differently that leads to the student being engaged in the same learning production behaviors. So, I'm big on making the statement, "students cause student learning." And so, my term learning production behaviors identified what it is that the student does or experiences that generates the learning. So if you think about performing arts or athletics, the coach or the instructor provides the activity, and it's the student engaging in the task or the activity that causes the learning. So, I've shared when I've done some classroom observations with a principal, we walk out of a math class and I asked the principal, "do you think there's any kids in that class who aren't going to need a shower after the class?"

Steve: 07:24 And they kind of look at me as to wondering where I'm going with that. Well, if we were down in the gym and we were watching kids in a PE class, we'd be concerned if there were kids who weren't going to need a shower. And what that would mean is, they aren't engaged in the learning production behaviors. So I've been talking a little bit recently about sweat equity. The student needs to engage in sweat equity, that's an investment in the student's learning. So the the difficult part for the teacher is to consider how I perhaps got that student behavior previously when the student was in my classroom, but now that the now that the student isn't in my classroom, I need to look for a new way to get that same behavior.

Steve: 08:24 If I could share an example, I worked with a Spanish teacher working with beginning Spanish learners. And so when it went virtual, her struggle was that she knew that students needed to practice speaking in order to engage them in the learning that she wanted to have happen. In her classroom, that was her engaging the kids conversation with her. It was the teacher causing the kids to engage in conversation with each other. Now she was stranded with all the kids at home virtually. Well, what she uncovered was

having kids record a conversation on Flipgrid and submit it to her. And lo and behold, when the kids could listen to their conversation, they could assess their conversation, decide to redo the conversation based on their assessment of it. She actually found that the students were making better progress than when they were in her classroom. And she immediately shared with me, when we're back in school, we'll be keeping Flipgrid in the Spanish classroom because I found it as a better way to get that learner behavior.

Andrea: 09:52 What about those types of learning behaviors that students did not have to do previously? Some of that student agency that you were talking about, where they maybe were not empowered previously to make those kinds of decisions about their own learning.
Steve: 10:06 So what you're doing now is you're identifying the learning production behaviors that we had to teach. So what happens is, kids went online virtual, and they did not have those learning production behaviors. And so we have to create opportunities for the kids to learn those behaviors. So kind of two examples jump to mind. A whole lot of teachers advance their teaching with technology skills tremendously in a very short amount of time. Why? Because the teacher engaged in the learning production behaviors. Generally, what's the learning production behavior of technology? Jump in and do it. Do it wrong, do it wrong again, try something else, call somebody for some input. That's the fastest way for learning. And normally a teacher avoided engaging in those learning production behaviors that the teacher needed in order to advance. Well, equally, we had students who showed up and didn't have the right learning production behaviors.

Steve: 11:15 I'll give you one. The reason I started a podcast for parents, was to talk to parents about how they could coach students on those learning production behaviors that they needed. And so, for example, one learning production behavior students needed to be working independently, virtually at home

was time management. So if kids don’t possess the time management skills, we need to engage the kids in learning that skillset. And I found it interesting that when some of the schools came back hybrid or even some of the schools I worked with, they came back so that all the kids are in school Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, but they’re keeping Wednesday as a virtual day. One of the reasons they were doing that was they wanted to keep the kids and the teachers engaged in learning those learning production behaviors, fearful that we might end up going into another quarantine, and we don’t want to lose the skills that we built during this first chunk of time.

Steve: 12:27 So whether you’re planning for student learning virtually, hybrid, or face-to-face, continually consider the student behaviors and
actions that will cause learning and explore the multiple ways that you can generate those actions. Enjoy the complexity of learning. Thanks for listening.

Steve [Outro]: 12:57 Thanks again for listening. You can subscribe to Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud on iTunes and Podbean and please remember to rate and review us on iTunes. I also want to hear what you’re pondering. You can find me on twitter @stevebarkley or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.