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## Study Measures Which Teaching Traits Boost Student Agency, Mindsets

By [Evie Blad](#) on October 27, 2015 8:18 AM | [No comments](#)

Schools increasingly recognize that students need a lot more than academic competency to be college and career ready. But what can teachers do to ensure their students are hopeful, engaged, and willing to endure through challenges?

Teaching the skills required to boost those traits in students differ from the skills required to boost gains in academic achievement; that's a finding of [a study released today by the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University](#).

Researchers drew their findings from the results of more than 300,000 [Tripod student surveys](#) administered in more than 16,000 6th-to-9th grade classrooms in 490 schools, 14 states, and in all major regions of the nation during the 2013-14 school year.

They used the results to match what they call "agency-related factors"—defined as emotions, motivations, mindsets, and behaviors associated with personal agency—with the distinct components of teaching respondents experienced in their classroom. Specifically, the Tripod surveys asked questions related to seven teaching skills, called "the 7Cs," which measure how much teachers care, confer, captivate, clarify, consolidate, challenge, and emphasize classroom management.

While all of these skills are important for teachers, they each have different effects on students' abilities to succeed in the classroom and in life, the study finds. And some may even have negative effects if they aren't balanced properly with other teaching traits. For example: Too much care can make a student feel coddled, thereby depressing student conduct and academic persistence, researchers found.

Teaching traits most linked to increased college aspirations in students are care and captivate, researchers found. A previous study by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation explored the same seven teaching traits as the Harvard study and found that totally different traits, challenge and classroom management, are linked to annual gains in academics.

So what does this mean? Because teacher training and professional development have been largely linked to increasing academic achievement as demonstrated through standardized tests, it's likely that some skills necessary for student success haven't been emphasized, researchers said. Good teachers demonstrate a balanced array of these traits, the report says.

"Certainly, without the skills that tests measure, college aspirations might be futile," the report says. "But in turn, without college aspirations, the payoffs to those skills may be limited."

"We need teaching that produces both skills and inspiration," Ronald Ferguson, the faculty director of the Achievement Gap Initiative, said in a statement. "To improve in all of the important ways will take the right types of feedback, professional development, and supervisory supports for teachers. It goes beyond what we learn from standardized testing."

Here's a chart from the report that very briefly summarizes its implications for teaching.

### Exhibit 5 Implications for Teaching Across the 7Cs to Develop Agency

<b>1. CARE</b>	<b>Be attentive and sensitive, but don't coddle.</b>
<b>2. CONFER</b>	<b>Encourage and respect students' perspectives, but don't waste class time with idle chatter.</b>
<b>3. CAPTIVATE</b>	<b>Make lessons stimulating and relevant while knowing that some students may hide their interest.</b>
<b>4. CLARIFY:</b> - <b>Clear up Confusion</b> - <b>Lucid Explanations</b> - <b>Instructive Feedback</b>	<b>Take regular steps to detect and respond to confusion, but don't just tell students the answers.</b>



For a more thorough explanation of the report's findings, [read the whole thing here](#).

The Achievement Gap Initiative's research was funded by the Raikes Foundation, which also helps support *Education Week's* coverage of student mindsets and skills.

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