

## **SAMPLE TEST ITEM**

**PROFESSOR RYAN BAKER**

### **QUESTION 0.**

#### **PART A. Define off-task behavior**

Off-task behavior is when a student withdraws their attention completely from the learning task at hand, and engages in some other task – for instance, discussing Spiderman with another student, or sleeping.

#### **PART B. What is the prevalence of off-task behavior in American classrooms?**

In a typical American classroom being taught through traditional instructional methods, or learning from intelligent tutoring systems, students typically spend 15-20% of their time off-task.

#### **PART C. You are a school psychologist at an urban school in Leominster, MA. A recent survey by an accreditation auditor has determined that students taking Mathematics from Mr. Kent Controllum spend as little as 20% of their class time engaged in learning Mathematics. Mr. Controllum is head of the local teachers' union. How would you work with Mr. Controllum to get his students spending a more reasonable amount of their time on-task?**

The amount of off-task behavior in Mr. Controllum's class is spectacularly high, higher than is almost ever seen in a normal classroom. This suggests that there is some sort of major problem in Mr. Controllum's class; therefore the first step will be to investigate possible very serious problems, such as teacher disengagement. I will ask the accreditation auditor if – for instance, Mr. Controllum is leaving the class for significant periods of time, or disengaging from class activity (perhaps reading a novel). I will also ask the accreditation auditor if there is some major distracting factor, such as loud disruptions out the hallway, or a specific student with serious behavior problems. If any of these are the cause of the frequent off-task behavior, I will take appropriate action. If Mr. Controllum is completely disengaging, it may be necessary to take disciplinary action even despite his personal power as head of the teachers' union; in this case, thorough documentation, video maybe, will be necessary. If a specific student or outside distraction is causing the problem it will need to be addressed through disciplining the student or eliminating the distraction (moving the class to another room, maybe?)

If none of these are the problem, I will work with Mr. Controllum to do a more in-depth study of his classroom. Perhaps Mr. Controllum is giving the students too much time to do classwork and they are bored, or maybe he is giving them overly hard challenges, and they are giving up. Perhaps classroom discussion is insufficiently participatory, and only specific favored students are allowed to talk; or perhaps the discourse is overly competitive and less competitive students withdraw. An in-depth study

of student classwork and what every student is doing, using field observation or video observation methods, would be the best thing (video observation would let Mr. Controllum see what I am basing my thoughts on). Then we could work together to adjust classroom challenge levels, or discourse practices (using Accountable Talk theory, perhaps, to re-design the classroom discourse).

**THINGS TO NOTE IN PART C:**

- **Identification of multiple potential issues, starting with most serious issues (note that on some problems, identifying one issue or solution is sufficient – read the problems carefully)**
- **Concrete links between potential issues and solutions, with explanation and justification**
- **The writing isn't perfect – yours doesn't have to be on this exam (as long as I can understand what you mean!)**