# The Framework for Teaching Clusters



**Six Clusters Supporting High Level Learning**

**ELA Version**

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# The Framework for Teaching: Six Clusters Supporting High-Level Literacy Learning

The *Framework for Teaching Clusters* provide a description of the skills demonstrated by accomplished teachers in promoting high levels of student performance—skills based on foundational knowledge and dispositions and grounded in a deep understanding of the nature of human learning. The Clusters are an outgrowth of *The Framework for Teaching* (the FfT), which has been validated through empirical studies as predictive of student learning as measured by state assessments. But while the FfT has enjoyed wide acceptance among members of the professional community of educators, its level of detail can make it cumbersome for everyday use. The FfT Clusters are an attempt to distill the "big ideas" of the FfT's four domains and 22 components into an efficient tool (composed of six large concepts) that can serve as the foundation for many purposes, most importantly— professional growth by teachers, not only through their own reflection on practice, but also through their conversations with colleagues, mentors and coaches, and supervisors.

The Clusters—like the full Framework—are themselves generic in nature; that is, they apply to all teaching situations, in all disciplines and at different ages and levels. Furthermore, they reflect teaching to high standards of student learning, as reflected in the Common Core State Standards and other high-level standards. Some of these principles of teaching for CCSS learning are, indeed, generic. For example, teaching for deep conceptual understanding, the use of precise academic language, and the skills of argumentation are evident in all disciplines. Similarly, student skill in questioning the reasoning of classmates and their perseverance with challenging content occur in all settings.

On the other hand, teaching occurs in real settings, with real students, and about specific content. Therefore, while there is a generic skill of argumentation, for example, it plays out differently in mathematics than in literacy. Hence, The Clusters document is offered in several versions: a generic version, and separate versions for literacy and mathematics. Literacy skills are evident not only in English classrooms for literary analysis, but also in social studies and science, for reading for meaning. These versions translate the generic language of the narratives and critical attributes, where appropriate, into content-specific language to guide both teachers and leaders.

Furthermore, while the FfT Clusters – like the full Framework for Teaching – reflect teaching practices that are common across all settings, actual teaching occurs with students in all their diversity – cultural, linguistic, and developmental. Hence, accomplished teachers must be familiar with their students' individual characteristics and needs, and create their plans and provide instruction accordingly. Therefore, when the language of the Framework refers to attending to individual students, it is to this full range of learners that it applies. These are the "Common Themes" of the Framework for Teaching, which permeate all the components, and elements, and ensure an inclusive environment for learning.

Literacy instruction is, as every teacher can attest, highly complex, ranging from the foundational skills of phonemic awareness and decoding, through advanced interpretation of complex texts. This complexity is a function of both the vocabulary used and the concepts explored. Students bring their own interests and knowledge to this endeavor, with the consequence that a reading passage that is routine for one student can be highly challenging to others. The same considerations apply to the other literacy disciplines of writing, speaking, and language.

An important feature of the College and Career-Ready Standards for literacy is a focus on text complexity. Its seemingly simple message that all students need "to read and comprehend literary and informational text independently and proficiently by the end of the year" has also proven to be one of the most challenging to implement. Such standards ask students to demonstrate this facility by reading texts that get progressively more complex

throughout their school careers. Standard 10 of the CCSS, for example, divides text complexity into grade bands rather than grade by grade and calls for "scaffolding as needed" for texts at the high end of each band. The fact that the quantitative measures operate in bands rather than specific grades gives room for teachers to employ their professional judgment to match texts to particular groups of students and tasks.

Likewise, the College and Career-Ready Standards focus on students' writing and speaking skills—their effective use of language—as a key means of asserting and defending claims; showing what they know about a subject; and conveying what they have experienced, imagined, thought, and felt. These standards ask students to learn how to adapt the form and content of their writing and speaking to accomplish a particular task and purpose. They focus on teaching students how the makeup of an audience should affect tone, how the choice of words affects meaning, and how to combine different elements—for example, using narrative strategies within argument and explanation within narrative—to produce complex and nuanced communications.

The text(s) and writing, speaking, or other activities that accompany them should be challenging and rigorous, but also appropriate for the students in the class; this suggests that instructional supports must be customized, to some degree, to give all students access to the curriculum. Students' interests, and particularly students' knowledge, influence the complexity of text they can read with understanding. For example, a student who knows a lot about the Arctic will understand a description of Eskimo life that would mystify another student, of the same general reading level, who lacks that knowledge. Teaching students to read and understand complex texts requires that teachers use a wide range of instructional supports and scaffolds to accommodate different students' backgrounds in prerequisite understanding, interest levels, language proficiency, and special needs. Supports can include routines such as teachers reading aloud to students while they follow along, engaging students in paired reading, asking a sequence of well-crafted questions to help students unlock the meaning of particularly complex sections of a text, and modeling strategies to resolve the meaning of unknown words. Students should be expected to read widely, both texts they want to read and texts selected to build their knowledge and vocabulary; they need a range of experiences with content-rich texts at a variety of complexity levels and a sliding scale of scaffolds and supports to access the information contained within and across them.

The field of literacy instruction includes stances toward multiple approaches to teaching literacy, including workshop teaching, thematic or topic-based units of study, and project-based learning, among others. A teacher must understand the premises and structures relevant to the approach that he or she is using. Regardless of the approach used, the teacher must understand and articulate the ideas of literacy learning which underlie the approach. The teacher with deep knowledge of literacy-specific pedagogy will understand the big ideas underlying how the chosen instructional approach and methods are intended to support students in strengthening their learning of practices.

For those familiar with *The Framework for Teaching*, the following table summarizes the relationship between the clusters and the full FfT, together with the ways in which teachers demonstrate their skill for each one. Sources of Evidence are provided for guidance, but the lists are not definitive. Not every artifact may be available. Quality evidence provides the raw data for meaningful, professional conversations.

**The Link between the Six Large Component Clusters and the Full Framework for Teaching**

| Cluster | FfT Components/Elements | Sources of Evidence |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Clarity of Instructional Purpose and Accuracy of Content<br><br>• *To what extent does the teacher demonstrate depth of important content knowledge and conduct the class with a clear and ambitious purpose, reflective of the standards for the discipline and appropriate to the students' levels of knowledge and skill?*<br><br>• *To what degree are the elements of a lesson (the sequence of topics, instructional strategies, and materials and resources) well designed and executed and aligned with the purposes of the lesson? To what extent are they designed to engage students in high-level learning in the discipline?*<br><br>• *To what extent did the teacher make adaptations to the lesson?*<br><br>• *To what extent did the teacher use formative assessment to check for student understanding?* | • 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d: Knowledge of content, clarity, and appropriateness for students of instructional outcomes; resources for classroom use<br>• 1e: Planned activities aligned to instructional purpose<br>• 3a: Expectations for learning, accuracy of content, clarity of explanations, use of academic language<br>• 3b, 3c: Questions, activities, and assignments aligned to instructional purpose<br>• 3d: Use of formative assessment aligned to instructional goals | • Planning documents: learning outcomes, planned instructional activities<br>• Observation:<br> o Statements to students about purpose, conversation with students<br> o Accuracy of content<br> o Alignment of questions, activities, and assignments to purpose<br>• Reflection: success in facilitating the lesson's objectives? |
| 2. Safe, Respectful, Supportive, and Challenging Learning Environment<br><br>• *To what extent do the interactions between teacher and students, and among students, demonstrate genuine caring and a safe, respectful, supportive, and also challenging learning environment? Do teachers convey high expectations for student learning and encourage hard work and perseverance? Is the environment safe for risk taking? Do students take pride in their work and demonstrate a commitment to mastering challenging content?* | • 2a: All elements<br>• 2b: Expectations for learning and achievement, student perseverance in challenging work, and pride in that work | • Observation:<br> o Interactions of students and teacher<br> o Student perseverance and pride<br>• Student surveys |
| 3. Classroom Management<br><br>• *Is the classroom well run and organized? Are classroom routines and procedures clear and carried out efficiently by both teacher and students with little loss of instructional time? To what extent do students themselves take an active role in their smooth operation? Are directions for activities clearly explained so that there is no confusion? Do students not only understand and comply with standards of conduct but also play an active part in setting the tone for maintaining those standards? How does the physical environment support the learning activities?* | • 2c: All elements<br>• 2d: All elements<br>• 2e: All elements | • Observation:<br> o Routines<br> o Student conduct<br> o Physical environment |

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| **4. Student Intellectual Engagement**<br><br>• *To what extent are students intellectually engaged in a classroom of high intellectual energy? What is the nature of what students are doing? Are they being challenged to think and make connections through both the instructional activities and the questions explored? Do the teacher's explanations of content correctly model academic language and invite intellectual work by students? Are students asked to explain their thinking, to construct logical arguments citing evidence, and to question the thinking of others? Are the instructional strategies used by the teacher suitable to the discipline, and to what extent do they promote student agency in the learning of challenging content?* | • 1e: Design of instruction<br>• 2b: Importance of the content<br>• 3a: Explanations of content: their rigor and invitations for thinking<br>• 3b: Quality of questions/discussions, student discourse<br>• 3c: Intellectual challenge<br><br>• | • Planning documents<br>• Observation:<br>  o The nature of the work students are doing<br>  o The quality of teacher presentation of content<br>  o The nature of student discourse and class discussion<br>• Student worksheets<br>• Samples of student work<br>• |
| **5. Successful Learning by All Students**<br><br>• *To what extent does the teacher ensure learning by all students? Does the teacher monitor student understanding through specifically designed questions or instructional techniques? To what extent do students monitor their own learning and provide respectful feedback to classmates? Does the teacher make modifications in presentations or learning activities where necessary, taking into account the degree of student learning? Has he or she sought out other resources (including parents) to support students' learning? In reflection, is the teacher aware of the success of the lesson in reaching students?* | • 1b: Knowledge of students<br>• 1d: Resources for students<br>• 1f: Design of summative and formative assessments aligned to outcomes<br>• 3d: Monitoring of student learning, feedback to students, student self-assessment<br>• 3e: Persistence, lesson adjustment<br>• 4a: All elements<br>• 4b: All elements<br>• 4c: All elements<br>• | • Planning documents for formative and summative assessments<br>• Observation: monitoring, feedback, adjustment<br>• Reflection: comments on learning of individuals<br>• Artifacts documenting both record keeping and communication with families<br>• |
| **6. Professionalism**<br><br>*To what extent does the teacher engage with the professional community (within the school and beyond) and demonstrate a commitment to ongoing professional learning? Does the teacher collaborate productively with colleagues and contribute to the life of the school? Does the teacher engage in professional learning? Does the teacher take a leadership role in the school to promote the welfare of students?* | • 1d: Resources to extend professional knowledge<br>• 4d: All elements<br>• 4e: All elements<br>• • 4f: All elements | • Artifacts documenting<br>  o Contributions to professional culture<br>  o Engagement with professional learning<br>  o Participation in other professional activities<br>• |

# Cluster 1: Clarity of Instructional Purpose and Accuracy of Content

Teaching literacy, like all teaching, is a purposeful activity; it is goal directed, designed to develop comprehension and promote critical thinking through all the sub-disciplines of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language. Even when operating within the confines of an established curriculum, (as is virtually always the case), teachers must determine the purposes for a given class on a given day, considering the longer-term literacy purposes and the particular students in the class. Those daily purposes are embedded in larger goals that develop over time. That is, important understanding of complex concepts (such as analyzing how an author's specific word choices impact meaning and tone or how documents address related themes and concepts) and the skills of constructing paths of reasoning, do not lend themselves to a single day's lesson, and are not "checked off" as complete. They develop slowly, with the purpose for a given day anchoring a longer sequence of lessons. In fact, the very phrase "habits of mind" suggests that it takes time to develop such understanding and skill, represented by increased sophistication in content. Therefore, while it is essential for teachers to be able to demonstrate clarity of instructional purpose, those purposes are not typically of the type that can be considered "finished."

Instructional purposes are statements of what the teacher intends for students to learn, or work towards; they should be clear and appropriately challenging for students in the class. It is not sufficient for a teacher to state what the students will *do* during a lesson; he or she should also be clear about what they will *learn*. Admittedly, the learning outcomes are realized for students through the tasks, and investigations in which they engage, but these activities and tasks should be designed such that they serve the teacher's instructional purpose.

Clarity of purpose in literacy implies alignment with the state or district's curriculum outcomes (the Common Core or other high level standards) related to reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language. These outcomes consist of the factual, conceptual and procedural knowledge, skills, and understandings identified in the standards as well as the strategies and processes, which relate to and underlie these skills and understandings. Moreover, as in all teaching, reading instruction requires that teachers select texts of a suitable level of challenge for their students. This is rarely a simple matter, since a text's level of difficulty for students consists of interplay between the complexity of the text's vocabulary and syntax, themes, text structures, and knowledge demands on the one hand, and students' own expertise and interest in a topic on the other. Thus, the selection of appropriate texts for reading requires high-level judgment by teachers.

Clarity of purpose requires deep knowledge on the part of the teacher: both of the content, of subject-specific pedagogy, and of one's students. Deep knowledge of content (as distinct from superficial familiarity) includes the teacher's understanding of the different strands of literacy (reading—of both literature and informational text—writing, speaking, listening, and language), and how these are related to one another. Teachers understand deeply, and are able to communicate to students, the key purposes for engaging with literacy (e.g. in order to learn, to read literature, to research a topic, to compose arguments, to deliver a speech, and so on) and the conceptual knowledge and strategies students need to learn in order to achieve those purposes. The literacy teacher recognizes the importance of teaching students the strategies they can draw upon to help achieve their desired purposes. Given effortful attention, abundant opportunities, and time, these practices become internalized.

Deep knowledge also implies flexibility of thinking and recognition that there are many pathways to understanding. In planning lessons, teachers should be clear about those pathways and what sequence of activities and tasks will lead to student understanding. The literacy teacher with deep content knowledge always understands the relationships of aspects of work that are basic to students being able to carry out broader purposes. This means, therefore, that the teacher understands the relationship of teaching foundational skills within the larger goal of supporting students' growth as readers and writers. It means that while teaching about one approach, the teacher reminds students that they have a repertoire of strategies upon which to draw when they encounter difficulty. The teacher with deep understanding can maximize opportunities for making connections between reading and writing, for example, as well as connections across disciplines.

Teachers demonstrate their deep knowledge of content and pedagogy in many ways, both in planning documents and in the course of a lesson, in which the presentation of ideas and strategies and responses to student questions and comments are essential to learning. Indeed, a knowledgeable teacher will know whether a student's question is important to the lesson's trajectory and therefore worth pursuing in depth, or whether it represents a sidebar and can be handled in less time. Furthermore, teachers must be mindful of where literacy instruction varies across the disciplines. The skills of analyzing a source document in, for example a history lesson, may be quite different from those required to consider a character's development in a novel, or in discerning the causal relationships in a science text.

A lesson's activities, as revealed both in the planning documents and in their execution in the classroom, must serve to achieve the lesson's purpose. It is

not sufficient that an activity is fun; it must also serve an important instructional goal. In a well-designed lesson, these tasks and activities are sequenced and are designed to engage students in the intellectual work required for learning. Although reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are taught spirally rather than vertically, the sequence of activities and tasks must be focused on the instructional goal. *What* is being taught and *how it is being* taught must both have purpose. Furthermore, "clarity" extends to the activities themselves. Students should not be in the dark about how to complete an activity, what steps they should take, and whether they are expected to work on their own or with classmates, and how learning will be assessed. Instructive assessments will be grounded on the clarity of instructional purposes and the accuracy of content. The use of assessments is a focus of Cluster 5.

Well-run classrooms are purposeful and businesslike; they may be joyful, but students and teachers are clear not only about what they are doing, but also about how these activities and tasks aid in the exploration of the written and spoken word. There is a sense conveyed, through both words and actions, that what's going on in the lesson is important and that learning is exhilarating and empowering. Serendipity may permit the extension of the learning into other areas, but the fundamentals are clear and are grounded in the teacher's deep knowledge of the content and of the ways to engage students in that content.

Teachers also demonstrate their knowledge of content through their reflection on and analysis of the lesson. By identifying those portions of the lesson that were successful (while other portions were less so) and the reasons for these discrepancies, they demonstrate their understanding of the internal connections between different aspects of the content and how student learning can be assured.

| Indicators: | Evidence: |
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| • Clarity of instructional outcomes, reflecting not only knowledge of content and of CCSS or other high-level standards and practices that underlie these, but also suitability for the students in the class (1a, 1b, 1c)<br>• Instructional outcomes reflecting the range of important types of content represented in the discipline: for example, factual and procedural knowledge, skills of reasoning, and collaborative group work, and analysis of texts that are within the complexity level expected for the grade band and texts at students current levels for independent reading (1c)<br>• Planned resources and activities aligned to the literacy and content goals and the instructional purpose (1d, 1e)<br>• Expectations for learning, accuracy of content, clarity of explanations, and use of academic language (3a)<br>• Many activities and assignments, questions and student discussion require gathering and using evidence from content-rich text(s) and other sources, all aligned to the instructional purpose (3b, 3c) | • Planning documents, which state the instructional purpose, planned activities, and demonstrate how students will have access to content-rich texts at a range of complexity levels<br>• Observation:<br>  o Statements to students about purpose both for this lesson and unit; conversations with students<br>  o Accuracy of content<br>  o Alignment of activities and assignments to the purpose<br>  o Questioning sequences that reflect a deep understanding of the content of the lesson, and in particular, the texts under discussion<br>• Reflection: success in achieving the lesson objectives |

| Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
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| The instructional purpose and learning tasks are unclear, the information presented is inaccurate or inappropriate and unsuitable to the students, through some combination of the following: | The instructional purpose and learning tasks are somewhat clear; the information presented is primarily accurate and partially appropriate to the students, through some combination of the following: | The instructional purpose and learning tasks are clear, the information presented is accurate and suitable to the students, through some combination of the following: | The purpose and learning tasks of the lesson are very clear, through some combination of the following, in addition to elements listed under "Proficient": |
| • *The teacher's plans indicate weak knowledge of the anchor and grade-level literacy standards.*<br>• *The teacher is not aware of varied skill and ability levels among students in the class to use in planning.*<br>• *Learning outcomes, as stated by the teacher, are poorly aligned to the literacy standards and either lack clarity or are stated as activities. They are unsuitable for many students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher demonstrates no awareness of why a particular text was selected: how it is suited to the particular goals of the lesson, unit, or longer-term work, and to the students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher demonstrates little to no awareness of possible student misconceptions and how they can be addressed.*<br>• *There are few or no planned questions* | • *The teacher's plans reflect rudimentary understanding of the anchor and grade-level literacy standards.*<br>• *The teacher is aware that there are different skill and ability levels in the class but does not use this information in planning.*<br>• *Learning outcomes, as stated by the teacher, are a combination of outcomes and activities or lack clarity; they are only partially aligned to the literacy standards. They are unsuitable for some students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher is able to provide a partial explanation why a particular text was selected: how it is suited to the goals of the lesson, the unit, or longer-term work, and to the students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher demonstrates limited awareness of possible student misconceptions and how they can be addressed.*<br>• *The teacher's planned questions about texts students are reading lack depth and seem* | • *The teacher's plans reflect anchor and grade-level literacy standards and the relationships of standards to one another across the sub-disciplines of literacy.*<br>• *The teacher has identified broad skill groups of students within the class and uses this information in planning.*<br>• *Learning outcomes, as stated by the teacher, are written in the form of student learning and are aligned to the literacy standards. They are suitable for the groups of students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher is able to explain why a particular text was selected: why this text is suited for the particular goals and topics of the lesson, unit, or longer-term work, and to the students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher demonstrates awareness of possible student misconceptions and how they can be addressed.*<br>• *The teacher crafts a coherent sequence of text dependent questions and tasks to help move students to stronger engagement with texts at a* | • *The teacher's plans cite intra- and interdisciplinary content relationships.*<br>• *The teacher is aware of the proficiency levels of students in the class, has anticipated areas of student challenge, and incorporates this understanding into plans.*<br>• *Learning outcomes, as stated by the teacher, are suitable for all students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher is able to explain fully and specifically why a particular text was selected (considering its complexity and reader and task considerations): why this text is well suited for the particular goals and topics of the lesson, unit, or longer-term work, and to the students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher's plans demonstrate awareness of a full range of possible student misconceptions and how they can be addressed using formative assessment to regularly gauge student learning.* |

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| *about texts students are reading.*<br>• *At no time during the lesson does the teacher convey to the students what they will be learning.*<br>• *The teacher makes a serious error of content or academic language that will affect students' understanding of the lesson.*<br>• *Students indicate through body language or verbal exchanges that they don't understand some aspect of the lesson and the teacher either gives no, or an inadequate, response.*<br>• *Students appear confused about the learning task.*<br>• *Planned learning tasks, texts, and question sequences are all of low cognitive challenge or quality, are unrelated to the lesson's stated purpose, or are not suitable for many students.*<br>• *The teacher's plans over time do not offer students an opportunity to read a broad range of texts both at students' current proficiency levels and at levels as defined by the standards.* | *largely superficial or peripheral.*<br>• *The teacher refers in passing to what the students will be learning, or it is written on the board with no elaboration or explanation.*<br>• *The teacher makes no serious content errors but may make minor ones, including imprecise use of academic language.*<br>• *The teacher talks about the text with minimal participation or intellectual engagement by students.*<br>• *The teacher finds it necessary to repeatedly clarify the learning task so that students can complete it.*<br>• *Planned learning tasks, texts, and question sequences are of moderate cognitive challenge or are only partially related to the lesson's stated purpose, or both. They are unsuitable for some students.*<br>• *The teacher's plans offer limited or poorly organized opportunities for students to read a broad range of texts both at students' current proficiency levels and at levels defined by the standards.* | *variety of complexity levels.*<br>• *The teacher states clearly, at some point during the lesson, what the students are learning and makes clear how this learning links to a broader purpose for engaging with literacy and content.*<br>• *The teacher makes no content errors and models the correct use of academic language and literacy skills.*<br>• *The teacher's talk about the text invites student participation and intellectual engagement.*<br>• *Students engage with the learning task, indicating that they understand what they are to do; if modeling the process to be followed in the task is appropriate, the teacher does so.*<br>• *Planned learning tasks, texts, and question sequences support the lesson's purpose; they are well sequenced, provide cognitive challenge and are suitable for most students in the class.*<br>• *The teacher's plans reflect opportunities for students to read a broad range of texts both at students' current proficiency levels and at levels defined by the standards.* | • *The teacher's carefully crafted questions about the texts and content under discussion enable students to extend the lesson objective for deeper understanding.*<br>• *The teacher states clearly, at some point during the lesson, what the students are learning, and invites students to connect this learning with the longer sweep of curriculum outcomes.*<br>• *The teacher explains content clearly, using metaphors and analogies to bring content to life when appropriate.*<br>• *Students have the opportunity for reflection and closure on the content being learned, especially its relation to the unit or broader purposes.*<br>• *Planned learning tasks and materials permit advanced students to extend the lesson's purpose and provide students who need it most with more time, attention, and supports.*<br>• *The teacher's plans reflect regular and thoughtfully designed opportunities for students to read a broad range of texts both at students' current proficiency levels and at levels defined by the standards.* |

## Cluster 2: Safe, Respectful, Supportive, and Challenging Learning Environment

In order to do their best work, and in order to make a commitment to the activity we call school, students must feel respected and honored as people. They must sense that their teachers believe in their capabilities; many adults can trace their success in school and in later years to a teacher who believed they could *be* somebody. For some students, this teacher may be the first, or the only, adult who has conveyed such confidence. It can be life altering.

Teachers convey their respect for students through myriad verbal and nonverbal cues, listening carefully to students' ideas, asking for clarification and elaboration, displaying sensitivity to students' feelings. A teacher's attitude may be outwardly friendly or stern, but beneath even a stern demeanor a teacher conveys an essential *caring*, a sense that each student, regardless of background or family circumstances, is important and has potential. Thus, students need not fear that they will be belittled by the teacher or demeaned in front of other students.

The atmosphere of support and respect is not confined to students as people but extends to them as learners. Many adults are convinced that they "can't do science" or "were never good at reading poetry." While it's difficult to know the origin of such sentiments, teachers should never convey them. Thus, when teachers indicate that they sincerely honor all students in their journeys for understanding, then students can engage in that quest assured of deep support by the teacher. It's a safe environment, in other words, for students to take intellectual risks, to try out ideas, to question the teacher's—or the book's, or another student's—account. Students know they need not fear ridicule, or unkind sarcasm, from the teacher or from other students. Such an environment builds confidence. In addition, though the emotional environment clearly signals support and respect, the physical environment also conveys that learning is important and is literacy-rich and inviting.

While feeling safe with the teacher and other students will encourage their best work, students must also feel challenged, and they must be willing to rise to that challenge. This is partly a matter of the nature of the work itself; that work must be rigorous, engaging, and meaningful. But in addition, students must be willing to make a commitment to it. There must be, in other words, a prevailing norm of student commitment to high-level work; those who engage in such work must not be regarded by their classmates as "geeks," or "nerds," or some other term that, in student culture, denotes "un-cool." Furthermore, just as a classroom culture should honor intellectual work, that same culture should insist that students persevere in reading challenging texts and completing authentic

writing, sticking with it until they "get" it and have achieved a higher level of proficiency. The classroom environment should encourage students to persist and problem solve in order to become independent readers of complex texts.

Student cultural attitudes toward work vary profoundly depending on the age of the students and from one school to another. Overwhelmingly, young children are keen to learn, to explore the world, and in most cases, if instructional tasks are interesting, then they will participate willingly and aim to excel. With older students, the situation is more complex; most of the actions these students take to succeed in school, after all, occur in private – for example, reading novels, completing their homework assignments, and studying for tests. But other actions occur in public, in front of their peers, such as participating in class discussions and engaging in group work. Thus, students who decide to make a commitment to high-level work in school are making a public declaration of that commitment; it's essential for them that they not become isolated or "punished" by their peers for that commitment.

In some settings, student norms already expect such commitment, for example, schools in communities whose families appreciate the importance of a rigorous education to ensure a successful future, or schools that have made a serious commitment to creating a culture for learning. But in other settings, particularly schools serving students of poorly educated families, the challenge for educators is far greater. Students' parents may themselves not have experienced the benefits that accrue from a solid education and from further study beyond secondary school. Parents may set expectations for their children's future based on their limited access to classrooms.

Educators have recently become aware of the powerful research regarding student mindsets, that is, how students view the role of intelligence in learning, (whether it's regarded as fixed or malleable), and the extent to which student success is a function of their views on the interaction between intelligence on the one hand, and effort and hard work on the other. Researchers and teachers have found that to the extent that students acquire a growth (rather than a fixed) mindset, the more capable they are of both working hard and persevering through the inevitable difficulties all learners encounter in mastering complex material. Thus, teachers have an obligation to encourage such a growth mindset in their students.

Teachers whose classrooms constitute a safe and challenging environment for student learning have artfully combined challenge with support. They know their students well enough to know when a student has "blown off" an

assignment, or when, in contrast, the student simply does not understand a concept well enough to complete high-quality work. When it comes to student commitment to learning, teachers don't take no for an answer, yet they are ready to provide necessary assistance when needed. This teaching is not formulaic; it is a high-level professional enterprise in which teachers know when to cajole, when to re-teach, when to praise, and when to enlist the participation of other students—all in the service of high-level learning within an environment of challenge and support. Within this environment, students persevere in their quest for deep understanding and mastery of literacy skills pertaining to reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

A specific tool used by many teachers for ensuring high-quality work, and for enlisting students in the effort to engage everyone in the work and learning at hand, is to teach students the skills of group work. After all, much important academic work is best done in small groups—discussion, solving problems, completing projects. Such group work, in order to be productive, requires important skills; for example, listening to and respectfully disagreeing with others, assuming tasks for completing work, and summarizing the status of a project. Furthermore, students must be able to engage in such work even when not under the direct supervision of the teacher. These are specific skills, and are reflective of a more general classroom culture of productivity. Students are not born with such skills; they need to be explicitly taught, and practiced. When they are, they make a material contribution to the culture of productive engagement with high-level work and learning.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"><em>Indicators:</em><br><br>■ Language of caring and respect between teacher and students and among students, and teacher's awareness of students' lives beyond school (2a)<br>■ High levels of cognitive energy (2b)<br>■ A safe environment for student risk taking (2a)<br>■ High expectations for students' capabilities for learning (2b)<br>■ Productive student engagement in small group work (2c)<br>■ Students persevere, even in the face of challenges (2b)</td><td colspan="2"><em>Evidence</em>:<br><br>• Observation:<br>  o Interactions between teacher and students and among students<br>  o Student perseverance and commitment to learning<br>  o Student participation and productivity in partner, small group, and whole class work<br>• Student surveys</td></tr>
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| Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interactions between teacher and students and among students are characterized by negativity, lack of support, low expectations, and low levels of student perseverance, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *The teacher uses disrespectful talk toward students; student body language indicates feelings of hurt or insecurity.*<br>• *The teacher does not address disrespectful interactions among students, or the teacher's attempts to respond to disrespectful behavior are not successful.*<br>• *The teacher displays no familiarity with, or caring about, individual students' interests or personalities.*<br>• *The teacher conveys, to at least some students, that the work is too challenging for them.*<br>• *Students exhibit little or no pride in their work; they abandon their efforts in the face of difficulty.*<br>• *Students participate in only routine responses and tasks.*<br>• *Students receive no support from their classmates.*<br>• *Students show no signs of active collaboration in group work, answers are copied or one student dominates the group's work.* | Interactions between teacher and students and among students are a mix of high and low support, moderate expectations, and modest levels of student perseverance, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *The quality of interactions between teacher and students, or among students, is uneven, with occasional disrespect.*<br>• *The teacher attempts to respond to disrespectful behavior among students, with uneven results.*<br>• *The teacher attempts to make connections with individual students, but student reactions indicate that the efforts are only partially successful.*<br>• *The teacher conveys only modest expectations for students.*<br>• *The teacher encourages students to persevere with challenging work; but only some do so, or they do so in a desultory manner.*<br>• *Few students offer their ideas on questions that seem to entail intellectual risk.*<br>• *Students offer assistance to classmates in a supportive manner when prompted by the teacher.*<br>• *Group work is sometimes collaborative, sometimes not. Teacher makes intermittent attempts to support group processes.* | The classroom is characterized by interactions that are both supportive and challenging, with student perseverance in challenging work, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *Talk between teacher and students and among students is uniformly respectful, with little to no intervention needed by the teacher to correct disrespectful talk among students.*<br>• *The teacher makes connections with individual students.*<br>• *The teacher demonstrates a high regard for student abilities.*<br>• *Student work and conduct during a lesson indicate commitment to high quality; students persevere in understanding challenging content and texts.*<br>• *Students participate willingly and appear confident in offering their ideas in front of classmates.*<br>• *Students spontaneously offer assistance to classmates in a supportive manner.*<br>• *Students are productively engaged collaboratively during small-group work.* | Classroom interactions indicate high levels of caring and respect, and student assumption of responsibility for the culture of civility, mutual support for work of high quality, and perseverance in achieving that quality, through some combination of the following, in addition to elements listed under "Proficient":<br><br>• *Talk between teacher and students and among students is uniformly respectful, with no intervention needed by the teacher to correct disrespectful talk among students.*<br>• *The teacher demonstrates knowledge and caring about the lives of students beyond school.*<br>• *Students take initiative in improving the quality of their work.*<br>• *Student questions and comments indicate a desire for deep understanding of the content; student discussions are lively and content-driven.*<br>• *Students volunteer ideas, even when these ideas might seem to be unpopular among classmates.*<br>• *Students recognize and express appreciation for the efforts of their classmates.*<br>• *Group work is productive; groups take shared ownership of, and pride in, the products of their work. All members contribute to the group's work.* |

## Cluster 3: Classroom Management

A fundamental requirement for any productive classroom is that it runs smoothly. Teachers must establish efficient procedures for the completion of routine tasks, such as taking attendance, guiding transitions into work groups, distributing and collecting materials, and handling end-of-class dismissal. These procedures accomplish several essential purposes, are taken care of with a minimal loss of instructional time, and provide the security of familiar routines for students. Efficient routines convey to students that the teacher is in charge, though not a dictator, thus assuring them that they need not fear chaos.

Classrooms are, after all, crowded places; there are typically over 25 students, plus a teacher, in a relatively small space. This fact is a source of anxiety for many new teachers; they fear that the large numbers of students in the classroom will overwhelm them, particularly if the students are physically larger than the teacher. What is to prevent, after all, an outright mutiny, with students simply refusing to comply with the teacher's directions? How to avoid chaos, with students doing whatever they choose, perhaps causing harm to themselves or other students? How can a teacher ensure that students actually *learn* anything? What is to guarantee that students will actually follow the rules, rather than just take charge themselves? These are not unreasonable questions, and a new teacher's anxieties are understandable. In creating and then promulgating classroom routines and procedures, including behavioral norms, a teacher should keep in mind the principles that follow.

*Routines and norms should be created with student participation.*

Students, like other people, need to feel in control of their lives; they are quickly alienated by a teacher whose approach to classroom management is one of "This is how it is because I say so." Moreover, classroom routines are established not only to maintain an orderly environment, but also to solve real or potential practical problems. Thus, students will readily recognize that since they like to have a chance to speak in a discussion, the challenge is to work out an approach allowing everyone the opportunity to be heard. The same thinking applies to virtually all routines: the question "What would happen if we all just went for the door at the same time?" will elicit, even from young children, the recognition that the result would be chaotic—chairs could be overturned or some students knocked over. Next can come the question "What might be some reasonable procedures for leaving the room?"

The attitude of the teacher in establishing routines and procedures is all-important. It's essential that the teacher convey to the students a concern to establish, with them, an environment in which important and interesting work

can be accomplished. Therefore, routines and norms are needed for many activities: distributing and collecting materials, keeping a neat classroom, moving between large- and small-group activities, and so on. That is, the purpose of the routines is to maximize student learning; it's not because the teacher insists on control. This attitude permits the teacher to sincerely elicit student contributions.

*Routines must be taught.*

But even after students and the teacher have developed the routines and norms for how the class will operate, those routines must be taught and practiced. That is, teachers cannot simply assume that their students will automatically know what is intended by a direction such as "Move into your small work groups." Unless students have practiced a routine by which to accomplish such a task, the alternative, given the crowded nature of many classrooms, can be chaos. Thus, experienced teachers devote some time at the beginning of a year to actually *teach* the routines for all sorts of everyday classroom procedures: distributing and collecting materials, pushing chairs in at the end of class, and so on. Teaching routines is the same as teaching other skills: the routine is described, and students have a structured opportunity to practice it (for example, a transition to small groups) and do it again, incorporating feedback about the success of the first attempt. The same also applies to norms of behavior; they can be isolated, and role-played, so that students know what to expect when involved in a situation calling for a teacher to take corrective action. In this way, students are not caught off guard, or unprepared, by events.

It's likely that an observer can only infer from teacher directions and student actions whether routines were, in fact, established earlier in the year. Moreover, those teachers who are fortunate enough to have the assistance of volunteers or paraprofessionals in their classrooms have the additional challenge of ensuring that those individuals are productively engaged in making a substantive contribution to the life of the class.

*Classrooms should be literacy rich and inviting.*

A literacy-rich classroom environment is inviting to students, with reading materials at many different levels, to encourage their engagement with text at both their independent reading level and above. Books and other materials are available to students in both fiction and non-fiction genres, consistent with topics they're studying in science and social studies. Therefore, it's not a static collection, but one that changes over time.

Providing an array of reading materials conveys a subtle message to students: that there's pleasure to be derived from exploration of printed materials, and their worlds can be stretched. But in order for students to find appeal in independent reading, the resources themselves must represent a broad range, one in which every student can find appealing and accessible material.

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| Indicators: | Evidence: |
|---|---|

Indicators:

- Efficient procedures for non-instructional activities: taking roll, distributing and collecting materials, making transitions, etc. (2c)
- Clear guidelines for student work when it is unsupervised, e.g., in small groups (2c)
- Evidence of clear standards of conduct, understood by the students, monitored by the teacher, corrected successfully (when necessary) by teacher or students, or both (2d)
- Physical environment is literacy-rich and supportive of learning activities (2e)
- Productive contribution to the class by volunteers and paraprofessionals (2c)

Evidence:

- Observation:
  o Routines
  o Student conduct
  o Physical environment: literacy rich

| Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|
| The classroom environment is disorganized and chaotic, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *Classroom procedures for transitions and other non-instructional duties are either absent or inefficient, resulting in the loss of much instructional time.*<br>• *Groups not working with the teacher are not involved in productive work.*<br>• *No standards of conduct appear to have been established, or the teacher does not monitor student behavior, or, when noticing student misbehavior, appears helpless to do anything about it.*<br>• *There are physical hazards in the classroom, endangering student safety.*<br>• *Volunteers and paraprofessionals have no defined role and may be idle much of the time.*<br>• *The physical classroom is barren; texts for student use to promote a volume of independent reading are not visible.* | The classroom environment is a little rough, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *Procedures for transitions, materials, and other non-instructional duties seem to have been established, but their operation is rough or inconsistent, resulting in some loss of instructional time.*<br>• *Small groups are only intermittently engaged while not working directly with the teacher.*<br>• *Standards of conduct appear to have been set, but the teacher's attempts to maintain order meet with uneven success, or the teacher's response to student misbehavior is inconsistent: sometimes very harsh, other times lenient.*<br>• *The physical environment is not an impediment to learning but does not enhance it.*<br>• *Volunteers and paraprofessionals participate but require frequent supervision or their work is not well integrated with classroom activities.*<br>• *Attempts to create a literacy-rich physical environment are perfunctory; there are varied texts in the classroom, but they are not readily accessible to students, nor connected to current or previous topics of interest.* | The classroom functions smoothly and efficiently, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *Efficient procedures have been established for non-instructional activities, such as distribution and collection of materials and supplies, transitions to other grouping patterns, etc. resulting in minimal to no loss of instructional time. Students carry out procedures with little or no teacher direction.*<br>• *All students are productively engaged during small-group work, a fact indicating established procedures.*<br>• *The teacher regularly monitors student behavior; student behavior is generally appropriate. When needed, the teacher's response to misbehavior is effective.*<br>• *The classroom is arranged to support the instructional goals and learning activities.*<br>• *Volunteers and paraprofessionals work with minimal supervision in synch with classroom goals.*<br>• *The physical environment of the classroom is both literacy-rich and inviting; students have access to a wide variety of texts that are related to current or previous topics of interest.* | The classroom functions seamlessly, through some combination of the following, in addition to elements listed under "Proficient":<br><br>• *Students take the initiative with their classmates to ensure non-instructional routines run smoothly.*<br>• *Students ensure productive small-group work by, for example, assigning roles.*<br>• *The teacher's monitoring of student behavior is seamless and preventive, accomplished through nonverbal means; student behavior is entirely appropriate.*<br>• *Productive classroom norms are well established, and students, as well as the teacher, act to maintain them*<br>• *Students take the initiative to contribute to and adjust the physical environment so it supports learning for all students.*<br>• *Volunteers and paraprofessionals take initiative in their work in the class, a fact indicating clear roles and training.*<br>• *Students freely access a text collection (whether physical or virtual) that contains an observably wide range of texts that are related to current or previous topics of interest and varying in genre. These texts are at a variety of complexity levels.* |

## Cluster 4: Student Intellectual Engagement

Student engagement is at the very heart of good teaching; it is typically the first item educators identify when invited to describe the classroom of a teacher whom they consider an expert. Literacy teachers engage students both in texts at a variety of complexity levels—within the grade band and at the student's own independent reading level—and in building the skills of communication through writing and speaking. Engagement in literacy includes critical reading, discussions requiring text based questions and answers, writing assignments requiring analysis and technical skill, exploring and communicating increasingly complex ideas, and deepening students' knowledge about a range of topics.

The term *engagement* does not have a single, or a simple, definition. First, intellectual engagement is not the same as being busy or on task. It's quite possible for students to be occupied doing work; but work that does not challenge their thinking; does not represent new learning; or is not connected to the goals of lesson, the unit, or longer-term work. Furthermore, physical activity is not sufficient; an activity might involve students in working with physical materials but doing so in a formulaic manner. The key to student engagement is not physical, but mental activity. A task might be "hands-on." But in order to qualify as intellectual engagement, it must be "minds-on." School, in other words, from the point of view of students, is not a spectator sport. Therefore, it's essential to maximize the extent to which students are involved in intellectual activities such as exploring new ideas, themes and topics; making connections within the text or between texts; or justifying interpretations through oral discussions and written work.

A useful rule of thumb that indicates the degree of student intellectual engagement is the answer to the question, "Who's doing the work?" When students listen while the teacher makes a presentation or demonstrates a strategy, their role may be entirely passive; they may be simply watching while the teacher performs. However, a teacher may present new material in such a way that students are invited to connect new information with prior understanding or predict outcomes of a scenario. When teachers structure lessons in such a way that students are intellectually active, those students must explore the nuances of meaning of various concepts, and generate new understanding. This process involves thinking. Thus, a variation on the maxim "Who's doing the work?" is "Who's doing the thinking?" Only when students are actively thinking (as part of a presentation of content, engaging in a discussion led by the teacher or with classmates, or completing a task) can they be intellectually engaged. Engaged learners may be involved in a struggle with texts, but the thinking and grappling is where the productive learning occurs. Teachers probe and insist that students

persist in the work, while helping them continue to strengthen their language and reading/writing foundational skills.

In addition to students being engaged in thinking; they can also become aware of their own cognitive processes: that is, teachers can engage students not only in cognitive work, but also in *metacognitive* work. How did they arrive at a certain conclusion in their paper? What's the textual evidence to support the idea? Did their speech or paper lose focus at some point? These questions deal with the process of thinking, and are highly transferable to other situations, and indeed to other subjects. They enable students, when they encounter difficulty in, for example, arriving at a false conclusion, to retrace their steps and take corrective action.

It should also be noted that student engagement in learning does not always appear tidy; when students are wrestling with a new concept or making connections between new content and previously learned material, they may make a few false starts or pursue what turns out to be a dead end before making a course correction. It's challenging for some teachers to allow their students to engage in this *productive struggle*, but the resulting understanding is satisfying to students, empowering them as learners and solidifying their comprehension. Another important point to note is that engagement in learning does not always involve students talking and having discussions; for example, students may be immersed in reading or writing for a lengthy period, while the teacher works with individuals and engages in small group instruction. If one enters a room in which the majority of students are independently reading, one would need to talk with students to learn the extent to which they are cognitively challenged.

A lesson in which students are engaged usually has a discernible structure: a beginning, a middle, and an end, with scaffolding provided by the teacher or by the activities themselves. Literacy lessons often begin with the text, with several readings required before the lesson is finished. An engaging lesson in literacy requires students to return to the text repeatedly for a variety of purposes: while they try to define unknown vocabulary words or understand a purpose or the tone, for example. Student writing and speaking tasks provide cognitive challenge and encourage students to reflect on what they have done and what they have learned. That is, the lesson has closure, in which the teacher encourages students to derive important learning from the learning tasks, from the discussion, or from what they have read or written. The lesson is also typically connected to the previous lesson as well as the subsequent one, and to the larger goals of the unit, and the year's or semester's work.

Visitors have no difficulty recognizing a classroom with high levels of student cognitive engagement. There is palpable (almost electric) energy in the room, as students display commitment to their work, and are eager to explain their accomplishments to visitors. This is not the busy work of students complying with a teacher's requests for them to complete assignments; in a classroom in which students are pursuing their own goals, their work is self-directed, and the environment is vibrant.

For teachers, there are two critical aspects to teaching for student intellectual engagement: designing (or locating) and managing rich learning tasks, and skillfully using student discourse.

*Rich learning tasks*

Designing (or identifying) suitably demanding learning tasks for students is one of the most challenging aspects of teaching, since a task that is challenging for one student may be routine for another. Text is central to literacy tasks, and these texts must be rich enough to demand student engagement. One can analyze the cognitive demand of a text and the task/product assigned to the student; whether the task is suitably rigorous or appropriate for an individual student is determined by the level of knowledge and cognitive development of the student. Thus, a task, in and of itself, is not rigorous or routine; what makes it rigorous or routine is the interplay between the demands of the task, the complexity of the text, and the current capabilities of the student. If the demand caused by that interplay is small or nonexistent, the task is routine and boring; if the demand is too great, the task may be overwhelming. Like Goldilocks's porridge, the gap (mediated by teacher supports) should be "just right."

This way of teaching represents a true challenge. One technique to address this challenge is to assign tasks with a "low bar and a high ceiling," taking into account text complexity. Such tasks are accessible to all students, but through their expansion, or through the teacher's asking more demanding follow-up questions, they can challenge all, including the more advanced students in the class. Employing this technique is not a simple matter and is developed only after considerable experience. Reading instruction will also take into account the level of the text as well as reader and task considerations.

Another characteristic of rich learning tasks relates to their being "group-worthy," that is, they invite vigorous discussion and multiple perspectives that may be represented by students working together in a group. In such arrangements, the teacher plays a mediating, rather than a direct "teaching," role. Tasks that are suitable for collaborative work enable students with different strengths to make a contribution to the overall effort. In order for such work to be productive, of course, students must have acquired the skills of collaboration described in Cluster 2.

*Student discourse*

Questioning and discussion is used to deepen student understanding (rather than serve as recitation, or a verbal "quiz"). Effective teachers use divergent as well as convergent questions, framed in such a way that they invite students to formulate hypotheses, make connections, or challenge previously held views. These teachers are especially adept at responding to and building on student responses and making use of their ideas. Simply "going over" the text is not engaging for learners because they have been left out of the work and the thinking.

Class discussions should be animated, engaging students in important issues and promoting the use of precise language to deepen and extend understanding. These discussions may be based around questions formulated by the students themselves. Furthermore, when a teacher is building on student responses to questions (whether posed by the teacher or by other students), students are challenged to explain their thinking, to critique the reasoning of others, and to cite specific textual evidence to back up a position. This focus on argumentation forms the foundation of logical reasoning, a critical skill in all disciplines. Writing prompts and products also help students focus on logical reasoning through precise language and writing skill, so engaged students in a literacy classroom are constantly thinking through reading, writing, and oral discussions of a variety of texts.

*Indicators:*

- The content is seen as worthwhile, important, and interesting (2b)
- Content is presented in a manner that engages students in thinking and reasoning (3a)
- Learning tasks require students to engage intellectually, to *think;* some may involve productive struggle (3c)
- Questions/discussions involve higher-order cognitive activity; students have time to develop their ideas and productive habits of mind (3b)
- The lesson has a recognizable structure, with time for reflection and closure (3c)
- Students explain their thinking and question the thinking of others (3b)

*Evidence*:

- Classroom observation:
  o The quality of teacher presentation of content
  o The structure of the lesson
  o The nature of the work students are doing
    - students have multiple and varied chances to speak and listen, read and write, in response to what they are reading and studying
    - the lesson attends to the academic language contained in the text and gives students frequent opportunities to examine and use diverse syntax and words
  o The nature of student discourse and class discussion
  o Student metacognition
- Students worksheets or activities
- Samples of student work (written responses to reading or authentic student writing)

| Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|
| The level of intellectual engagement on the part of students is low, through some combination of the following: | The level of intellectual engagement on the part of students is modest, through some combination of the following: | The classroom is a cognitively busy place, with students encouraged to use their minds, through some combination of the following: | The classroom is a cognitively vibrant place, with students encouraged to use their minds, through some combination of the following, in addition to elements listed under "Proficient": |
| • *The teacher conveys no energy for the importance of the learning goals and assignments.* <br> • *Students are not invited to engage in sustained independent reading.* <br> • *The teacher does little to ensure students are appropriately challenged and able to access complex texts consistent with grade-band complexity as defined by the standards.* <br> • *Content (concepts, strategies, etc.) is presented in a didactic manner, with no invitation for students to think.* <br> • *Learning tasks require only recall or have a single correct response or method; students are neither invited to expand their thinking nor to cite specific evidence from the text.* <br> • *The teacher's questions are rapid-fire or convergent, with a single correct answer, and do not invite students to think deeply about what they are reading.* <br> • *All discussion is between the teacher and individual students; students are not invited to speak directly to one another.* | • *The teacher displays little energy for the lesson's purpose and assignments.* <br> • *The teacher offers students access to a limited range of texts in the classroom for sustained independent reading.* <br> • *Some students are appropriately challenged and able to access texts consistent with grade-band complexity as defined by the standards. The teacher provides few strategic supports, scaffolds, and extensions.* <br> • *The teacher's explanation of concepts and strategies includes perfunctory invitations for student thinking.* <br> • *Learning tasks are so highly scaffolded that the result is a single pathway to completion and denies students the requirement to think or to cite specific evidence from the text.* <br> • *Most of the teacher's questions have explicit answers from the text, with only a few that invite students to make inferences.* <br> • *The teacher invites students to respond directly to one another's ideas, but few students do so.* <br> • *The teacher asks students to explain their reasoning and cite specific evidence, but only* | • *The teacher exhibits energy for the lesson's purpose and assignments, and conveys their importance.* <br> • *The teacher actively offers students access to a broad range of texts in the classroom at varying levels for sustained independent reading.* <br> • *Many students are appropriately challenged and able to access texts consistent with grade-band complexity as defined by the standards. The teacher provides strategic supports, scaffolds, and extensions as needed.* <br> • *The teacher's explanation of concepts and strategies invites student intellectual engagement.* <br> • *Learning tasks, some of which are "group-worthy," demand logical reasoning, inviting students to take initiative, and cite specific evidence from the text.* <br> • *The teacher's questions serve to engage students in discussions about the text(s), inviting student conjectures and claims based on evidence from the texts they are reading. Wait time is used productively.* <br> • *Students direct their comments to one another during full class discussions; there is lively discussion during small-group work.* | • *Students provide suggestions for texts that they would like to have access to in the classroom for independent reading.* <br> • *The teacher ensures all students are appropriately challenged and able to access texts consistent with grade-band complexity as defined by the standards. The teacher provides a wide range of strategic supports, scaffolds, and extensions to individual students as needed.* <br> • *Students appear to relish being challenged to explain their thinking, to critique the reasoning of others, and to cite specific textual evidence to back up a position.* <br> • *The teacher frames questions in such a way that they invite students to formulate hypotheses, make connections, or challenge previously held views.* <br> • *Students initiate higher-order questions.* <br> • *Students invite comments from their classmates during a discussion and push their classmates with extended questions in both small group and whole class contexts.* <br> • *Students build on each other's ideas and make well-supported* |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| • *The teacher does not ask students to explain their thinking with evidence.*<br>• *Few students are involved in the activities and discussions.*<br>• *Little to no attention is paid to the syntax or academic vocabulary contained in the reading.*<br>• *The lesson has no recognizable structure; it's a random series of events with no culminating tasks that ask students to reflect on what they have done and what they have learned.* | *some students attempt to do so.*<br>• *Only some students are involved in activities and discussions.*<br>• *Some attention is paid to syntax and academic vocabulary contained in the reading.*<br>• *The lesson has a recognizable structure, although parts of it may be rushed, while others drag.* | • *The teacher asks students to explain their thinking and cite specific reasons grounded in evidence; most do so.*<br>• *Virtually all students are involved in the activities and discussions.*<br>• *Attention and focus is drawn, as appropriate, to academic vocabulary and syntax contained in the reading.*<br>• *The lesson has a clear structure, with time for students to engage in thoughtful participation in discussions and learning tasks. The teacher makes clear connections to what came before and the unit or broader goals of the class.* | *conjectures/connections, resulting in deeper conceptual understanding.*<br>• *Students themselves ensure that all their classmates are involved in the activities and discussions.*<br>• *Academic language (syntax and vocabulary) is examined frequently during each lesson.*<br>• *Students have an opportunity for reflection and closure on the lesson to consolidate their understanding.* |

# Cluster 5: Successful Learning by All Students

It is not sufficient for teachers to engage in an activity called teaching; they must ensure that students learn. That is, one way of defining *teaching* is as "that which causes student learning." While this appears an obvious statement, educators frequently overlook it as they attempt to codify good teaching in ways that focus exclusively on the actions of teachers without considering the success of those efforts in ensuring student learning. In the same way, effective literacy instruction is not about employing a specific system or approach, but rather the specific actions to improve one or more of the components of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Teachers recognize that all learning is complex, involving the interplay of conceptual and procedural knowledge, facts and processes, dispositions and habits of mind. Students don't "master" all of these in the same way, or in the same sequence, with the important exception of foundational reading skills, and they enter any lesson with their own strengths and areas for growth. However, every lesson and longer unit has a focus, and it's in that area of focus that teachers must be able to articulate, and make specific plans to address, what they intend students to learn. This learning encompasses critical reading/writing/thinking and language skills, and includes gaining a broad understanding of ideas, concepts, themes, events and relationships that are presented through the well-chosen curricular materials. Ascertaining whether students have, in fact, learned what was intended requires the design (or adoption) of summative assessments aligned to those outcomes (so that the teacher can take corrective action before moving on), and formative assessments to be used, on short notice, during the course of a unit or lesson. This requires sophisticated record-keeping systems. In addition, in order for teachers to modify their approach to ensure that all students are making progress toward the instructional purposes of the lesson, they must not only be aware of resources (in the school or, more broadly, in the district or the community) that can be brought to bear; they also must be committed to do what is needed to help every student succeed.

Traditionally, teachers did not ascertain the extent to which their students had learned the material being taught until they had completed an instructional unit; indeed, the assessment (usually a test of some type) signaled the end of instruction, students' work was graded, and the class went on to the next unit. In this approach, teachers could know whether or to what extent their students *had* learned but could not ensure that they did so. Fortunately, many teachers now employ a subtler approach, one designed to shape instruction during the course of a lesson or unit. Teachers monitor students' responses and activities constantly, monitoring the "pulse" of the class frequently during a lesson and making revisions to their approach when needed. These changes might take the form of making a slight modification in the pace of an activity or in the activity itself, based on students' indications of lack of comprehension (too challenging) or boredom (too easy). In a literacy classroom, student responses—both oral and written—provide formative feedback for the teacher who adjusts his/her teaching, almost seamlessly. Such monitoring occurs constantly and is not specifically planned.

To be effective, monitoring of student learning must be addressed to individual students. Hence, the global question: "Does anyone have any questions?" is unlikely to yield much information on which a teacher can act. Instead, accomplished teachers devise techniques to determine the level of understanding of individuals. For example, students' responses to a carefully-crafted question, with their answers written on whiteboards and held up for the teacher to see, provide important information to the teacher about the extent of individual students' understanding. And if the question has been carefully designed to yield diagnostic information, the teacher acquires a fairly specific notion of what needs to be done to ensure that every student understands. While not providing such timely information, exit tickets, on which students hand in their response to a carefully designed question as they leave the class, can also supply information on the learning of individual students.

Assessments become completely integrated into instruction, with teachers alert to what's going on during a lesson, watching students for indications that they are following the discussion or that they are acquiring the desired understanding from an instructional activity. Sometimes students provide such indications explicitly; they ask clarifying questions, for example. On other occasions, however, the indications are much more subtle or camouflaged, for example a quizzical look. That said, it is also the case that some objectives are long-term and may necessitate more time for students to achieve mastery. After considering assessment information, the teacher is able to describe how the students are progressing toward that larger goal. In addition, it is important to note that students will also be engaged in assessing their own progress—working with deliberateness toward goals and aware of how much progress they have made or how they have gone off track.

Another important mechanism to ensure students' success is arranging for them to receive specific and timely feedback on their efforts. The teacher can provide this feedback, of course. But it can also be supplied by other students (as when they challenge—respectfully—the thinking of their classmates), or by the instructional activities themselves. For example, revisions to a piece of writing

may serve to confuse the reader, rather than clarify the writer's meaning. Whatever the source of the feedback, students come to realize that learning is a process of continual iteration; it's never complete. Structuring class time effectively to allow for individual and/or small group instruction while students are engaged in independent work is another way to build in opportunities for targeted diagnostic questioning and immediate feedback as well as for teaching in response to assessment information gathered previously.

Families, too, can be allies in a teacher's quest to ensure student success. They have, after all, known the students for a longer time than has the teacher, and can provide insight into the students' lives and interests beyond school. Such information can be invaluable to a teacher in planning instruction and responding to individuals.

Attention to every student's learning is grounded in some important assumptions, namely, that the students are capable of high-level learning and that the teacher has the necessary skill, resources, and attitude to enable them to succeed. These beliefs are fundamental. If teachers lack a strong sense of efficacy, then they will be inclined to give up easily when students experience difficulty (as virtually all students do at some points.) In such cases, teachers find other factors on which to place the "blame" for students' struggles: their backgrounds ("His parents are getting a divorce"), the perceived weaknesses of older siblings ("Her brother never could do fractions either"), the lack of skill of a previous teacher ("They should have learned this last year"), or the inadequacy of the adopted materials ("This textbook is terrible"). Therefore, teachers' ensuring the learning of every student is a reflection of their confidence that they can teach well and that their students are capable of high-level learning.

*Indicators:*

- Both summative and formative assessments, aligned to learning outcomes, have been planned (1f)
- The teacher monitors student learning during the lesson (individuals and groups) through a variety of means (3d)
- Students receive specific feedback on their work from the teacher, the activities themselves, or other students (3d).
- If necessary, the teacher modifies the lesson to ensure that students "get it," drawing on other resources as needed (1d, 3e)
- The teacher's records permit detailed analysis of learning by individuals and groups of students (4b)
- The teacher enlists, as appropriate, the engagement of families in student learning (4c)
- In reflection, the teacher assumes responsibility for student learning (4a)

*Evidence*:

- Planning documents: formative and summative assessments
- Observation: monitoring, feedback, adjustment
- Artifacts documenting record keeping, communication with families
- Reflection: comments on individual students' learning

| Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|
| The teacher makes no attempt to ensure the learning of all students, through some combination of the following: | The teacher makes sporadic or inconsistent attempts to ensure the learning of all students, through some combination of the following: | The teacher makes genuine attempts to ensure the learning of all students, through some combination of the following: | The teacher indicates a deep commitment to the learning of all students, through some combination of the following, in addition to elements listed under "Proficient": |
| <ul><li>*Summative assessments are poorly aligned with the learning outcomes.*</li><li>*No formative assessments have been designed for use during the lesson.*</li><li>*The teacher makes no effort to determine whether students understand the content of the lesson or ignores indications of student boredom or lack of understanding.*</li><li>*Feedback to students is only global, such as, "Good job, everyone."*</li><li>*The teacher makes no attempt to adjust the lesson, even when such action is clearly needed.*</li><li>*The teacher conveys to students that when they have difficulty learning it is their fault.*</li><li>*Record-keeping systems are in disarray.*</li><li>*Families are unaware of their children's progress.*</li><li>*In reflecting on the lesson, the teacher cites the extent to which students were busy or were well behaved, with no comments about the extent to which they achieved the intended outcomes.*</li></ul> | <ul><li>*Only some of the instructional outcomes are addressed in the planned assessments.*</li><li>*Plans refer to the use of formative assessments but with no specificity.*</li><li>*The teacher requests only global indications of student understanding, such as "Any questions?"*</li><li>*Feedback to students is neither specific nor oriented toward future improvement of work.*</li><li>*The teacher's efforts to modify the lesson are only partially successful.*</li><li>*The teacher conveys to students a sense of his or her own responsibility for their learning but also uncertainty about how to assist them.*</li><li>*The teacher maintains school-required record-keeping systems but does little else to inform families about student progress.*</li><li>*In reflecting on the lesson, the teacher cites a combination of student attainment of the instructional goals and other factors, such as whether students were well behaved.*</li></ul> | <ul><li>*All the learning outcomes have a method for summative assessment, differentiated as needed for students with different learning goals.*</li><li>*Plans include specific formative assessments for use during instruction.*</li><li>*The teacher monitors student learning through a variety of means, including using specifically formulated questions to elicit evidence of student understanding.*</li><li>*Feedback includes specific and timely guidance on how students can improve their learning.*</li><li>*The teacher makes productive changes to the lesson plan in response to evidence of student difficulties*</li><li>*The teacher conveys to students that s/he has other approaches to try when the students experience difficulty.*</li><li>*The teacher maintains a coherent record-keeping system on student learning and regularly sends home information about student progress.*</li><li>*In reflecting on the lesson, the teacher cites specific examples of student attainment of the instructional goals.*</li></ul> | <ul><li>*The teacher constantly "takes the pulse" of the class; monitoring of student understanding is sophisticated and continuous and makes use of strategies to elicit information about individual student learning.*</li><li>*Students monitor their own learning, either on their own initiative or as a result of tasks set by the teacher.*</li><li>*High-quality feedback comes from many sources, including other students; it is specific and focused on improvement.*</li><li>*The teacher actively encourages two-way communication with families regarding student learning.*</li><li>*In reflecting on the lesson, the teacher has specific ideas about how the lesson could be improved. The teacher cites student assessment data that will be taken into account in future planning.*</li></ul> |

## Cluster 6: Professionalism

Schools are, first of all, environments to promote the learning of students. But they are also places for the intellectual engagement of teachers, so that they can better promote the learning of their students. Schools are, in other words, learning organizations for teachers, and full potential is realized only when teachers regard themselves as members of a professional community. This community is characterized by mutual support and respect, as well as by recognition of the responsibility of all teachers constantly to seek ways to improve their practice and to contribute to the life of the school and to the broader professional community. Inevitably, teachers' duties extend beyond the doors of their classrooms and include activities related to the entire school or larger district, or both. These activities include such things as service on school and district curriculum committees or engagement with the parent-teacher organization. With experience, teachers assume leadership roles in these activities or others, and in their school communities in general.

As in other professions, the complexity of teaching requires continued growth and development in order for teachers to keep their knowledge and skills current. Continuing to stay informed and increasing their skills allows teachers to become ever more effective, to exercise leadership with their colleagues, and to constantly refine their understanding of how to engage students in learning. Thus, growth in content and content-specific pedagogy is essential to good teaching. And to the extent that information technology is an aid to student learning, it's essential for teachers to stay abreast of developments in that area as well.

Networking with colleagues through such activities as joint planning, study groups, and lesson study provides opportunities for teachers to learn from one another. In particular, sharing perspectives while jointly examining student work can provide invaluable insight, that is not available any other way, into the cognitive processes of individual students who may have wrestled with concepts. These activities allow for job-embedded professional development. In addition, professional educators increase their effectiveness in the classroom by belonging to professional organizations (at the regional, state, or even national level), reading professional journals, and attending educational conferences, workshops, or university classes. As they gain experience and expertise, educators find ways to contribute to their colleagues' understanding and to the profession.

Expert teachers also demonstrate professionalism in service both to students and to the profession. Teaching at the highest levels of performance requires that teachers remain focused on students, putting them first regardless

of how this stance might challenge long-held assumptions, past practice, or simply an easier or more convenient procedure. For example, dialogue around the issues surrounding the appropriate use of homework is certain to be spirited, and reveal teachers' deep belief about student learning and how best to support it.

Accomplished teachers have a strong moral compass and are guided by what is in the best interest of each student, even when this ethos involves challenging long-established school policies or procedures. They display professionalism in a number of ways. For example, they conduct interactions with colleagues in a manner notable for honesty and integrity. Furthermore, they know their students' needs and can readily access resources with which to step in and provide help that may extend beyond the classroom. Seeking greater flexibility in the ways school rules and policies are applied, expert teachers advocate for their students in ways that might challenge traditional views and the educational establishment. They also display professionalism in the ways they approach problem solving and decision making, with student needs constantly in mind. Finally, accomplished teachers consistently adhere to school and district policies and procedures but are willing to work to improve those that may be outdated or ineffective.

| Unsatisfactory | Basic | Proficient | Distinguished |
|---|---|---|---|
| The teacher makes no attempt to continue with professional learning or engage with the professional community to advance the interests of students, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *The teacher's relationships with colleagues are characterized by negativity and lack of trust.*<br>• *The teacher avoids involvement both in school activities and in district and community projects.*<br>• *The teacher ignores or avoids opportunities to participate in activities for professional learning.*<br>• *The teacher declines to participate in team and departmental decision-making, except when required by superiors.*<br>• *The teacher does not prioritize the needs of students and operates in a self-serving manner.*<br>• *The teacher ignores school and district regulations.* | The teacher makes sporadic or inconsistent attempts to continue with professional learning or engage with the professional community to advance the interests of students, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *The teacher has cordial relationships with colleagues and is trusted by them.*<br>• *When asked, the teacher participates in school activities, as well as district and community projects.*<br>• *The teacher participates in professional activities when they are required or provided by the district.*<br>• *The teacher participates minimally in team and departmental decision-making.*<br>• *The teacher notices the needs of students but is inconsistent in addressing them.*<br>• *The teacher minimally complies with school and district regulations.* | The teacher makes genuine attempts to continue with professional learning and to engage with the professional community to advance the interests of students, through some combination of the following:<br><br>• *The teacher has supportive, collaborative, and trusting relationships with colleagues and is known for having high standards of integrity.*<br>• *The teacher frequently volunteers to participate in school events and in school, district, and community projects.*<br>• *The teacher seeks opportunities for continued professional development.*<br>• *The teacher actively participates in team and departmental decision making.*<br>• *The teacher actively addresses student needs and actively works to provide opportunities for student success.*<br>• *The teacher completely complies with the spirit, as well as the letter, of school and district regulations.* | The teacher indicates, through various actions and statements, a deep commitment to continuing professional learning and engagement with the professional community to advance the interests of students, through some combination of the following, in addition to elements listed under "Proficient":<br><br>• *The teacher takes initiative and a leadership role in organizing collaborative projects.*<br>• *The teacher regularly contributes to, and leads, significant district and community projects.*<br>• *The teacher takes a leadership role in finding opportunities for continued professional development and in contributing to professional organizations.*<br>• *The teacher takes a leadership role in team and departmental decision making, and enjoys the trust of colleagues in terms of honesty, integrity, and confidentiality.*<br>• *The teacher makes a concerted effort to ensure opportunities are available for all students to be successful, even when these efforts challenge school or district policies.*<br>• *The teacher makes material suggestions for the improvement of school and district regulations.* |