

FOCUS GUIDE  
**INTELLECTUAL  
ENGAGEMENT**



**THE FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING  
INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT**

**FFT FOCUS SERIES**



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## A GUIDE TO SUPPORT INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT

In our pursuit of excellent teaching for every student, we are consistently guided by our foundational beliefs about learning and our values as educators, which are reflected in the Framework for Teaching (FFT) developed by Charlotte Danielson. Our nation and our field are simultaneously managing the greatest and most ubiquitous crisis our education systems have confronted in our lifetimes and a racial reckoning that is long overdue. Our country was built on racial inequity, which continues to be reflected in too many of our public education systems. Students, families, and communities of color have long borne the trauma of systemic racism. Now that underlying inequity and systemic racism are becoming more public and visible, educators must accept responsibility for acknowledging them and working to heal both. The Danielson Group (DG) is committed to contributing to that healing.

An equity imperative has always been implicit in the FFT. As Charlotte Danielson wrote, “A commitment to excellence is not complete without a commitment to equity” (2007). In this guide, and in all of our work moving forward, we will make this imperative explicit and be unapologetic in our commitment to racial justice. As an organization, we must acknowledge that our approaches have allowed inequitable systems and unsupportive learning environments to go unchecked for too long. Promoting excellence means not only that we focus on best practices and encourage ongoing teacher learning and development, but it also means that we prioritize understanding how classroom practice does or does not center equity and justice - particularly as systemic racism continues to pose an ominous threat to communities of color. Good teaching cannot be blind to issues of racial justice. Excellence for some is not excellence at all.

Component 3c in the FFT is “Engaging Students in Learning.” As we note in the FFT, teachers are responsible for the learning and development of students, which requires students’ active, intellectual engagement in learning experiences. When teachers arrange for ambitious instruction with each of their students in mind and cultivate safe, supportive, and challenging learning environments, the conditions exist for this type of engagement to occur. As such, all other components of the Framework for Teaching contribute to this one, and many have referred to it as the “heart” of the Framework. We are excited to further explore this heart of the Framework by focusing on 3c and the other components that we believe most directly support it.

Student **Intellectual Engagement** is indeed at the heart of good teaching; it is often the first item educators identify when describing the classroom environment and learning experiences of a teacher whom they consider an expert. However, engagement does not have a single, or simple, definition. While one indicator of student intellectual engagement might be the answer to the question, “Who’s doing the work?”, intellectual engagement is not the same as being busy or on task. It’s possible for students to do work—for example, completing a worksheet—that does not represent new, relevant, or rigorous learning. Furthermore, physical activity is not sufficient when determining the level of intellectual engagement; a task might be “hands-on,” but to qualify as intellectually engaging, it must also be “minds-on.” During some teacher presentations or demonstrations, students can appear to be entirely passive. However, the teacher may be presenting new material in a way that is actually inviting students to connect new information with prior understanding, predict outcomes, explore nuances, and generate new understanding. Thus, a variation on the maxim: “Who’s doing the work?” is “Who’s doing the thinking?” Only when students are actively thinking are they intellectually engaged. In addition, students can become aware of their own cognitive processes when teachers engage students not only in cognitive work but also in the metacognitive work of reflecting on, critiquing, and revising one’s work. The



ability to think about one's own thinking is practiced when teachers ask students to grapple with questions like: How did you arrive at a certain conclusion? What's the evidence for it? When you find an error, can you identify where you went off track? Can you retrace your steps and find the error? Opportunities to practice metacognitive work through verbal and written learning experiences are highly transferable to other learning situations, and indeed to other subject areas.

It is also important to remember that when students are immersed in intellectually engaging work it does not always appear tidy; when students are wrestling with a new concept or making connections between new content and previously learned material, they are likely to have a few false starts and hit some rough patches. It's challenging for some teachers to allow their students to engage in this productive struggle, but ultimately, research has shown that pushing through the struggle to success is satisfying to students, empowering them as learners, and solidifying their understanding of their new learning.

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide and its approach are informed by our conversations with educators, our experience as an organization, and what we've learned from our partners. We provide here our current thinking, recommendations for reflection and practice, and suggestions for professional learning on the topic of intellectually engaging instruction. Recent events have focused more attention on systemic racism in our systems of education and our practices as a field, which many scholars and educators have long been working to dismantle. COVID-19 forced us into the type of personalized, 21st-century learning that many have long championed. With this richer context, we have an opportunity to create even more intellectually engaging and just learning environments that support student autonomy, a sense of belonging, and success.

While we recognize that some have already, and others will soon return to physical classrooms and school buildings, those related decisions about how to move forward will remain local ones. We anticipate that many schools will be doing some form of hybrid learning (or may move in that direction at some point during the year) so we have included suggestions and recommendations that apply to both learning formats.

This guide, though aligned to the FFT and rooted in its enduring principles, reflects some important shifts in response to our current context and information gathered from scholars and practitioners in the field:

### **A Focus on Fewer Components**



All 22 components of the FFT remain incredibly important, and we plan to continue adding others to this guide. And yet, our research, observations, and conversations with experts and practitioners have led us to a narrower set to better support educators in the context of online learning and remote instruction.

### **Updated Components and Elements**



A third edition of the entire Framework has been under development for the last year. Some of the most exciting and relevant changes are previewed here. We think these changes are especially important to online instruction as well as our work for racial justice.





## No Rubric

Teachers need support, not scores, to grow and improve their practice. Now is not the time to be thinking about how to evaluate teacher performance in a new and fluid context. This moment compels us to pause and engage in a thoughtful reset on our approaches to teacher support. For this reason, this guide does not contain a rubric with four levels of performance. Instead, we describe *priorities*, *actions*, and *strategies* that align to proficient and distinguished practice, are focused on supporting students' learning and wellbeing, and can help increase student autonomy and success.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Each of the eight components is presented on two pages.

The first page is descriptive and explains the component, including the elements of success that help define the component.

The second page includes:

### Priorities

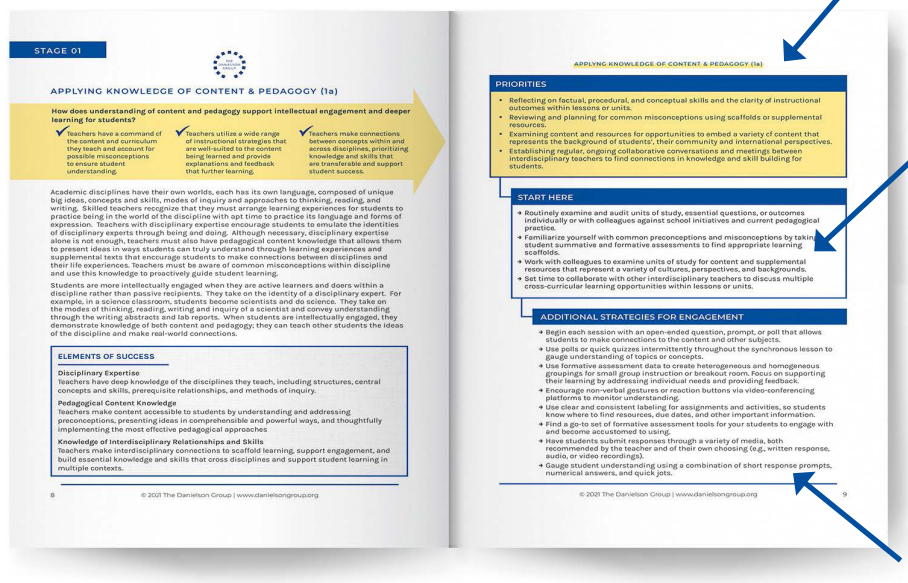
Our recommendations for where teachers should focus their time and energy, especially as school starts. These are the most important things to get right at the beginning of the school year.

### Start Here

A set of actions teachers can take immediately to set themselves and their students up for success.

### Additional Strategies for Engagement

Approaches and suggestions for how to engage students effectively in their learning in both in-person and remote environments.



This guide is among the many resources available that provide recommendations and strategies for how best to engage students in their learning. The recommendations and suggestions included are not exhaustive lists; local factors and context should always guide how you decide to apply them in your work. We will continue to share additional resources and align them to the components of the FFT. We hope that this guide will help educators apply the common language of the FFT to their current context and see the connection between the components of effective instruction and the goal of creating learning experiences that are intellectually engaging for students in our classrooms.

## A RECOMMENDED PATHWAY

The components are not presented in this guide in the order they have always appeared in the FFT. In the past, our support has focused on working with partners as they develop practices and approaches aligned to the rubrics that meet the needs of their context. Given the shared elements around intellectual engagement, our recommended pathway implores users of this guide to prioritize student wellbeing, equity, and racial justice. Without a deep understanding of students' identities and lives amid these crises, we have little chance of meeting their needs.



## AN INVITATION

It is our sincere hope that the content in this guide will be helpful to you, both by creating more student-centered and engaging learning opportunities and continuing to focus on anti-racist practices, that have the potential to fundamentally reset the purpose and practice of public education in this country.

At this moment, we hope that the FFT itself and the specific guidance included here will support teachers as they continue to work relentlessly on behalf of students with dignity and grace. The principles of effective pedagogy and our commitment to equity and racial justice will continue to drive our work. We are always in a process of becoming, and our understanding will evolve as we learn more from you and with you about teaching for racial justice so that we can continue to share the knowledge of the field and build equitable learning environments where all teachers and students can thrive.

We invite all educators to join us in the work of applying the enduring principles of the FFT to the needs of your present moment. We will continue to work throughout the year to provide relevant, just-in-time suggestions for serving all students with hope and dignity. Stay tuned for ways to offer suggestions, give feedback, and build on what we have started here.



## APPLYING KNOWLEDGE OF CONTENT & PEDAGOGY (1a)

**How does understanding of content and pedagogy support intellectual engagement and deeper learning for students?**

- ✓ Teachers have a command of the content and curriculum they teach and account for possible misconceptions to ensure student understanding.
- ✓ Teachers utilize a wide range of instructional strategies that are well-suited to the content being learned and provide explanations and feedback that further learning.
- ✓ Teachers make connections between concepts within and across disciplines, prioritizing knowledge and skills that are transferable and support student success.

Academic disciplines have their own worlds, each has its own language, composed of unique big ideas, concepts and skills, modes of inquiry and approaches to thinking, reading, and writing. Skilled teachers recognize that they must arrange learning so that students are able to experience working and writing in the world of the discipline with apt time to practice its language, reasoning, strategies, and forms of written expression. Teachers with disciplinary expertise encourage students to emulate the identities of disciplinary experts through being and doing. Although necessary, disciplinary expertise alone is not enough. Teachers must also have pedagogical content knowledge that allows them to present ideas through engaging learning experiences and robust supplemental texts in ways students can truly understand, and that encourage students to make connections between new knowledge and their life experiences. Teachers must be aware of common misconceptions within discipline and use this knowledge to proactively guide student learning.

Students are more intellectually engaged when they are active learners and doers within a discipline of study rather than passive recipients. They actively take on the identity of a disciplinary expert. For example, in a science classroom, students become scientists and do science. They take on the modes of thinking, reading, writing, and inquiry of a scientist and convey understanding through the writing abstracts and lab reports. When students are intellectually engaged, they demonstrate knowledge of both content and pedagogy; they can teach other students the ideas of the discipline and make real-world connections.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### Disciplinary Expertise

Teachers have deep knowledge of the disciplines they teach, including structures, central concepts and skills, prerequisite relationships, and methods of inquiry.

#### Pedagogical Content Knowledge

Teachers make content accessible to students by understanding and addressing preconceptions, presenting ideas in comprehensible and powerful ways, and thoughtfully implementing the most effective pedagogical approaches

#### Knowledge of Interdisciplinary Relationships and Skills

Teachers make interdisciplinary connections to scaffold learning, support engagement, and build essential knowledge and skills that cross disciplines and support student learning in multiple contexts.

## PRIORITIES

- Reflecting on factual, procedural, and conceptual skills and the clarity of instructional outcomes within lessons or units.
- Reviewing and planning for common misconceptions using scaffolds or supplemental resources.
- Examining content and resources for opportunities to embed a variety of content that represents the background of students, their community, and international perspectives.
- Establishing regular, ongoing collaborative conversations and meetings between interdisciplinary teachers to find connections in knowledge and skill building for students.

## START HERE

- » Routinely examine units of study, essential questions, or outcomes individually or with colleagues against school initiatives and current pedagogical practice.
- » Familiarize yourself with common preconceptions and misconceptions by taking student summative and formative assessments to find appropriate learning scaffolds.
- » Work with colleagues to examine units of study for content and supplemental resources that represent a variety of cultures, perspectives, and backgrounds.
- » Schedule time to collaborate with other interdisciplinary teachers to discuss multiple cross-curricular learning opportunities within lessons or units.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Begin each session with an open-ended question, prompt, or poll that allows students to make connections to the content and other subjects.
- » Use polls or quick quizzes intermittently throughout the lesson to gauge understanding of topics or concepts.
  - » Find a go-to set of formative assessment tools for your students to engage with and become accustomed to using.
- » Use formative assessment data to create heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings for small group instruction or breakout room. Focus on supporting their learning by addressing individual needs and providing feedback.
- » Encourage non-verbal gestures or reaction buttons via video-conferencing platforms to monitor understanding.
- » Use clear and consistent labeling for assignments and activities, so students know where to find resources, due dates, and other important information.
- » Have students submit responses through a variety of media, both recommended by the teacher and of their choosing (e.g., written response, audio, or video recordings).
- » Gauge student understanding using a combination of short response prompts, numerical answers, and quick jots.





## KNOWING AND VALUING STUDENTS (1b)

**How are each student's individual context, identity, assets, and brilliance valued and viewed as the foundation for their academic and personal success?**

- ✓ Teachers know and value their students' identities, as well as their academic, social, and emotional strengths and needs.
- ✓ Teachers build on students' assets to support the development of identity, intellect, and character.
- ✓ Teachers apply their knowledge of students to advocate boldly on their behalf and foster student assumption of responsibility for learning and personal development.

Knowing and valuing students is at the heart of great teaching no matter how or where it occurs. Successful teachers are consistently guided by who their students are, which means they understand, honor, and leverage students' identities - including their racial, cultural, religious, and gender identities, among others. Teachers' knowledge of their students also goes far beyond understanding their familiarity with content or their academic skills to include their social, emotional, and personality strengths. In the context of Intellectual Engagement, teachers use knowledge of their students to systematically affirm student identities and construct learning experiences that are meaningful and purposeful in students' lives.

Teachers use students' identities to determine key topics and activities that will hook students' interests and heighten their emotional investment. To invest time and energy in rigorous work, teachers must have a current understanding of where students' conceptual knowledge and skills stand to bridge connections to new content. When teachers are aware of students' developmental levels and learning differences, they are better able to craft assignments and instruction that engage students emotionally and intellectually.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### Respect for Students' Identities

Students' lived experiences and funds of knowledge are the foundation for the development of identity, purpose, intellect, and character.

#### Understanding of Students' Current Knowledge and Skills

Learning experiences reflect what students bring and are designed with their current knowledge and skills in mind.

#### Knowledge of Whole Child Development

Students' cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development are all addressed in the design of learning environments and experiences to promote student success and autonomy.

#### Knowledge of the Learning Process and Learning Differences

Learning requires active intellectual engagement and appropriate support aligned to students' individual differences and needs.

## PRIORITIES

- Learning about each student's motivations, driving interests, daily schedule and context, and current level of well-being, especially any trauma or stress resulting from current events.
- Creating a class and school-wide culture around the importance of daily moments where students have their identity and lived experience affirmed and acknowledged through activities and discussions.
- Establishing priority goals and objectives for each student for the first quarter, inclusive of social and emotional needs.
- Tracking information about students' context, mindsets, interests, and needs.
- Providing significant time for structured student sharing with other students around identity and well-being.

## START HERE

- » Conduct one-on-one student interviews to understand context and immediate needs. When individual interviews are not feasible, use narrative surveys or journal prompts.
- » Set individual priorities for each student focused on social-emotional needs and establishing routines for learning. When possible, group students to address priority needs.
- » Design curriculum and lesson plans that allow students to talk about their individual needs, their background and culture, and skills.
- » Collaborate with other colleagues who work with your students to create a shared system for storing, tracking, and updating student profiles and priorities.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Provide several opportunities for students to answer open-ended questions, prompts, or polls that allow students to make connections to the content and their own lived experiences in each session.
- » Ask a simple question that allows students to share relevant information about their current context or well-being that could impact their participation or focus in the session.
- » Create schedules (and backup schedules) for conferring with students around their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development.
- » Allow students to write or discuss personal connections in small or whole groups at the end of each session.
- » Provide opportunities for students to request or create groupings based on common interests or shared experiences.
- » Create folders or files that prompt students to share about their identity and interests related to daily lessons or units.
- » Create student profiles that students own and manage as a means of building their identity and how they show up for peers and the class.
- » Consider a journaling routine that supports daily reflection that is either kept private or submitted.



## PLANNING COHERENT INSTRUCTION (1e)

**How are learning experiences structured to provide flexible, student-centered opportunities to learn important content and develop positive habits and mindsets?**

- ✓ Learning opportunities are coherent in structure and suitable for the students in the class.
- ✓ Learning opportunities are specifically tailored to meet the needs of individual students in the class.
- ✓ Learning opportunities prioritize the needs of individual students and support student assumption of responsibility for learning.

The teacher's knowledge of the content, knowledge of students, clarity of instructional outcomes, and knowledge of resources all come together to enhance student learning of important content and enduring understandings. Even in classrooms where students assume considerable responsibility for their learning, the teacher is in charge of arranging for that learning to happen by preparing tasks and activities that establish the opportunity for investigations. Preparing coherent instruction is more complex than simply implementing a lesson plan. A high-quality curriculum serves as a starting point to support teachers in preparing for coherent instruction but in and of itself does not ensure student learning. Opportunities for flexible learning, as well as thoughtful collaboration, are key elements to consider when planning for coherent instruction. The teacher, whether designing or adjusting the structure and flow of learning experiences, or making needed enhancements, plays a critical role in arranging for learners to do the learning.

A great teacher combines knowledge of students and existing resources to create instructional outcomes and learning experiences that aptly sequences opportunities for students to learn and gain mastery. Teachers use high-quality curriculum as a starting point for constructing coherent instruction, but they rely equally on understanding the existing skills and knowledge of students to modify instructional materials and approaches. The teacher prepares tasks and activities that spark students' interests and nurtures an intellectual appetite for more learning and knowledge. Additionally, teachers have learning targets and outcomes, but are flexible in their delivery of instruction and modify plans according to the needs of the students without compromising intellectual rigor.

Intellectually engaged students become co-creators with the teacher of their own learning experiences. Students readily give feedback and input on the content and learning process. Students can express the purpose and meaning behind activities and content within the classroom. Students show evidence of intellectual engagement through the creation of autonomous learning projects by their own volition and by collaborating with others. They can make connections between the content and the real world.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### Tasks and Activities

Tasks and activities are specifically matched to learning outcomes, encourage higher-level thinking and student agency, and create authentic opportunities to engage with meaningful content.

#### Flexible Learning

Multiple strategies and approaches are tailored to individual student needs to create the appropriate level of challenge and support for each student.

#### Student Collaboration

Student groups are an essential component of learning and development, and are organized thoughtfully to maximize opportunities and build on students' strengths.

#### Structure and Flow

Lesson and unit plans are well structured and flow from one to the next to support student learning and development.



## PRIORITIES

- Meeting students where they are, given widely variable learning environments and social-emotional needs.
- Maintaining grade-level expectations while providing content that is right for each students' level of productive struggle.
- Aligning learning outcomes to the modified schedule to maximize fit between outcome and modality.
- Maintaining coherence for students across a variety of platforms and modes.
- Creating a schedule that allows students to practice and rehearse skills that they have not yet mastered.

## START HERE

- » Analyze your school schedule and expectations to identify time available for synchronous and asynchronous engagement.
- » Analyze your learning objectives to determine what is most suitable and critical for synchronous instruction. Consider:
  - » Whole group: direct instruction, modeling, experiments, community building
  - » Small group: targeted skill-building, repetition, discussion, peer to peer engagement,
  - » One-to-one: diagnosis, assessment, encouragement
- » Develop a manageable and easily accessible system for organizing schedules, materials, homework, and apps that support differentiated pathways for students.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » During guided practice, periodically provide differentiated tasks for students to self-select based on difficulty or skill mastery.
- » Pull together small groups of students, both heterogeneous and homogeneous, in synchronous sessions. Focus on supporting their learning by addressing individual needs and providing feedback.
- » Using summative and formative data, create groups to work on specific skills or strategies during independent practice. These instructional days could focus on re-teaching or reviewing important skills that have yet to be mastered.
- » Consider flipping new content acquisition and skill practice to independent sessions and allow students to record or write their responses.
- » Provide multiple tasks or activities for students to choose from to reach the objective. When applicable, allow students to create their own task or activity that meets the objective.
- » For major tasks or activities, find a volunteer to test out the activity to ensure it will be easily navigated and understood.
- » Create office hours or sign-in sheets for students to advocate when they need additional support or other supplemental materials.



## FOSTERING A CULTURE FOR LEARNING (2b)

**In what ways do teachers model and encourage the types of actions and attitudes that contribute to a joyful, rigorous, and purposeful classroom that supports personal and academic growth?**

- ✓ The culture of the class is conducive to student learning and development.
- ✓ The culture of the class is characterized by high expectations and the supports needed for the successful learning and development of all students.
- ✓ Students play an active role in establishing a culture that consistently fosters dialogue, joyful inquiry, reflection, and growth, allowing all students to flourish.

Excellent teachers are intentional about creating a culture conducive to student intellectual engagement. Intellectual engagement involves both an emotional and cognitive investment in learning. In a culture for learning, teachers help students set personal and mastery goals to heighten student investment in learning. Teachers model the behavioral, emotional, and thinking dispositions needed to work with others and persevere through challenging tasks. Teachers cultivate intellectual engagement when they convey a meaningful purpose behind tasks and activities within the classroom. They deliberately provide opportunities for students to apply agency and autonomy within classroom learning experiences.

When there is a culture for learning within the classroom, students set and share their personal and mastery goals within their community. Students can reflect on their academic growth and personal progress. In an intellectually engaged classroom, students exhibit curiosity and critical thinking skills in their expressions of thought. They also have agency and voice in what they learn and how they learn it. In classrooms where a culture of learning exists, students celebrate individual and collective accomplishments and efforts, thereby strengthening their abilities to persevere through challenging tasks.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### **Purpose and Motivation**

Teachers and students share an overarching dedication to both content mastery and personal growth.

#### **Dispositions for Learning**

Teachers model, encourage, explicitly teach, and reinforce curiosity, critical thinking, reasoning, and reflection to support student success and their social, emotional, and academic growth.

#### **Student Agency and Pride in Work**

Students make informed choices, devote energy to learning, take pride in their accomplishments, and actively suggest ways to make the classroom more joyful, rigorous, and purposeful.

#### **Support and Perseverance**

Teachers and students encourage one another to persevere and use strategies to support each other through challenging work.

## PRIORITIES

- Allocating time for students to pick or design tasks based on their identity, social-emotional needs, and interests.
- Recognizing when students persist in their efforts to learn challenging work or self-regulate emotions.
- Modeling the importance of critical thinking and curiosity as an aspect of content mastery and personal growth.
- Acknowledge progress and growth when recognizing student achievement.
- Celebrating when students use protocols, questions, or other strategies, including ones they create, to self-advocate for their learning and well-being.

## START HERE

- » Conduct one-on-one student interviews to monitor, track, and record student growth goals and mastery. When individual interviews are not feasible, use narrative surveys and journal prompts.
- » Set individual priorities for each student based on their academic and social-emotional needs. When possible, group students to address academic priorities and needs.
- » Plan for individual and group projects that are purely interest-based.
- » Audit your plans and assignments for points where students might be offered more choice and autonomy.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Present and review how to align student growth goals with helpful strategies and techniques.
- » Model several choices for students to show mastery and assume responsibilities of their learning (e.g., written response, audio, or video recordings).
- » Encourage students to give positive praise to their classmates for taking risks, reinforcing curiosity, or other actions that lead to intellectual engagement.
- » Display student work samples of notable progress or exemplar pieces of work as models. First, ask students if they are comfortable having their work shared, which shows respect for their privacy and social-emotional needs.
- » Establish a system for students to readily access their learning goals for lessons or units of study.
- » Create a file or folder of keywords, word banks, or other terminology that would be useful for the unit or session.
- » Record audio and video of explicit directions for students to access readily when appropriate.
- » Have students submit work to be showcased or used as an exemplar for future learning or review.



## SUPPORTING POSITIVE STUDENT BEHAVIOR (2d)

**In what ways do teachers model and encourage the types of actions and attitudes that contribute to a joyful, rigorous, and purposeful classroom that supports personal and academic growth?**

- ✓ The culture of the class is conducive to student learning and development.
- ✓ The culture of the class is characterized by high expectations and the supports needed for the successful learning and development of all students.
- ✓ Students play an active role in establishing a culture that consistently fosters dialogue, joyful inquiry, reflection, and growth, allowing all students to flourish.

A classroom transforms into a true learning community when teachers are intentional about explicitly teaching, modeling, and supporting positive behavior conducive to student learning, collectivism, and collaboration. Supportive and loving learning communities are actualized when teachers and students both co-create shared values, norms, expectations, and positive behavior for learning. Teachers consciously or unconsciously play an integral role in shaping the identities of their students. They must therefore reinforce behavior that fosters positive self-identities for students and allow them to be in community with others locally, nationally, and globally.

A supportive learning environment that elevates positive learning behavior is a prerequisite to student intellectual engagement. In an intellectually engaged classroom, students feel safe to take risks, persevere through hard tasks, reflect on learning and collaborate with others. They can identify and strengthen the positive behavior within them and others that cultivate intellectual engagement within the classroom. They set both content and process goals that enable them to achieve academic success. Students regularly discuss the impact of actions on themselves and others with the intent to have a positive impact on the larger world.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### **Expectations to Support the Common Good**

Students play an active role in establishing and maintaining expectations with regular opportunities for critical reflection both individually and as a group.

#### **Modeling and Teaching Habits of Character**

Teachers model, explicitly teach, and reinforce habits that promote learning, ethical behavior, and citizenship.

#### **Self-Monitoring, Reflection, and Collective Responsibility**

Students successfully monitor their behavior, attend to their impact on other students, and appropriately support one another.

## PRIORITIES

- Creating multiple opportunities for students to genuinely establish and reflect on norms around classroom behavior and expectations.
- Modeling citizenship and habits of character that contribute to a safe and productive learning environment.
- Allowing space for students to advocate for their own individual needs regarding self-regulation and behavior.
- Providing significant time throughout the day and week for structured student discussion and reflection on their impact on others in and out of the classroom.

## START HERE

- » Co-create norms with students around maintaining classroom expectations.
- » Give students sentence starters and prompts on how to have conversations about their behavior and citizenship inside and outside of school.
- » Provide opportunities for students to reflect verbally and in written form about their collective responsibility and thoughts on behavior regulation.
- » Create a student survey that can be administered multiple times a year to help gauge student monitoring of behavior and areas of growth, collectively and individually.
- » Explicitly teach and model ethical behavior such as advocating for others or upholding co-created classroom norms.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Begin class with a morning meeting focused on classroom expectations and ways to improve citizenship.
- » Have students design and implement a philanthropic class project that ties the themes of ethical behavior and citizenship to the school or local community.
- » Use multimedia (e.g., news segments, movie clips, or documentaries) to introduce or connect ethical behavior to curriculum, lessons, or student reflections.
- » Allow students to write or discuss citizenship periodically in small or whole groups.
- » At the end of each lesson, have students self-assess their level of collective responsibility and ethical behavior.
- » Create rubrics or checklists where students can reflect and set goals around their levels of collective responsibility.
- » Create folders or files that prompt students to share about civic-minded activities or ideas related to daily lessons or units.
- » Have local philanthropists or community leaders record the importance of citizenship and ways that students could volunteer or get involved in their community.
- » Consider a journaling routine that supports daily reflection either online or on paper.





## COMMUNICATING ABOUT PURPOSE AND CONTENT (3a)

**How do teachers communicate goals and objectives, expectations for learning activities, and content knowledge to students?**

- ✓ The teacher's communication with students is clear and accurate and supports student learning.
- ✓ The teacher's communication with students is clear and accurate; it supports their active engagement in a learning experience and models effective use of language.
- ✓ The teacher's communication is rich and nuanced, inviting students to think critically and contribute intellectually; it encourages curiosity and supports student autonomy.

Clarity is an essential ingredient for communicating with students in ways that foster intellectual engagement. Teachers who communicate effectively, spend ample time in the framing and delivery of clear learning goals that can be readily internalized by students. These teachers provide directions that allow students to truly engage with subject-area content and check for their understanding of new knowledge. Teachers think about a myriad of ways to explain content and utilize storytelling, metaphor, and other means to deepen student understanding. They are also acutely aware that students mirror teacher use of oral and written language and as such model accurate use of languages within specific contexts.

A hallmark of intellectually engaged students is their ability to convey the learning goals and purpose underlying class tasks and activities. They can explain directions to fellow students because of the clarity and accuracy of their teachers' planning. In this intellectually engaged classroom students find ways to explain content, utilizing analogies and metaphors and multimodal ways for communicating. Furthermore, these students emulate and practice accurate syntax and academic vocabulary useful in a given context through their writing and

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### Purpose for Learning and Criteria for Success

Teachers communicate the goals and objectives of learning activities and outline an instructional pathway for students to meet the established criteria for success.

#### Specific Expectations

Student actions during each step of learning activities are clearly and effectively communicated with specific expectations articulated and reinforced throughout.

#### Explanations of Content

Content knowledge is scaffolded and presented in multiple, engaging ways with frequent, integrated checks for student understanding.

#### Use of Academic Language

Verbal and written content-related language used by teachers and students is academically rigorous, accurate, and subject and grade-appropriate.

## PRIORITIES

- Communicating clearly and effectively with students to minimize confusion about expectations for learning goals.
- Using multiple modalities and formative assessments to ensure students are able to fully engage in learning.
- Designing lessons that allow students to repeat and put directions or instructions in their own words.
- Modeling how to use a combination of accurate, specific, vivid speech and written language to explain content knowledge or procedural steps during instruction.

## START HERE

- » Align the learning goals and outcomes for clarity and coherence.
- » Audit the explicit teaching sessions of your plans and assignments for directions that are clear and concise for students.
- » Review lessons to ensure there are various ways students can check for understanding and ask for clarification.
- » Analyze lesson plans for scaffolded help using figurative and illustrative language.
- » Ensure academic vocabulary and content-specific language is defined and used accurately throughout activities, lessons, and units.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Create a digital file or folder of protocols or procedures that students can readily access during the lesson or while they work independently.
- » Pull together small groups of students, both heterogeneous and homogeneous, to ensure they understand the directions or assignment.
- » Incorporate the use of visuals, sound, and written language in the explanation and presentation of important, robust content.
- » Host regular virtual or in-person office hours focused on the previous week's learning goals, strategies, and misconceptions that students may struggle with understanding.
- » Use a variety of infographics to explain topics, concepts, or skills that are relevant to the daily lesson or unit.
- » Ask students to submit student-generated procedures, protocols, or strategies that can be shared with other students around misconceptions or conceptual ideas from lessons.
- » Use clear and consistent labeling for assignments and activities, so students know where to find resources, due dates, and other important information.



## USING QUESTIONING AND DISCUSSION TECHNIQUES (3b)

**How do students reflect, reason, and explain their thinking by asking and answering questions and engaging in dialogue with others?**

- ✓ Questioning and discussion, framed and led by teachers, are used effectively to support student learning and development.
- ✓ Questioning and discussion, framed or led by teachers and students, support critical thinking, reasoning, and reflection.
- ✓ Students intentionally use questioning and discussion to develop their own and others' thinking, reasoning skills, and habits of reflection.

Learning is a social process, and dialogue supports the acquisition of new knowledge, critical thinking skills, and social-emotional development. It invites students to formulate hypotheses, make connections, deepen understandings, or challenge previously held views.

The quality of one's thoughts often depends on the quality of great questions asked by a thinker. Teachers spark student engagement by asking great questions that do not always have a right or wrong answer. Through planned and structured discussion techniques, students are encouraged and supported to think differently about themselves, new content knowledge, and the world. Through the high- quality questions prompted by the teacher and each other, students learn to generate and share ideas, prompting new understandings and ways of thinking.

Students are intellectually engaged when they are asking questions that move the collective learning forward and are demonstrating reasoning skills. They experiment with different discussion techniques to both learn content and display understanding. The majority of students in the classroom are participating in both whole class and small group discussions in ways that are respectful and foster deeper connections and inquiry.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### **Critical Thinking and Deeper Learning**

Questions and discussions require critical thinking, have multiple answers, and are used to deepen student understanding.

#### **Reasoning and Reflection**

Questions and discussions challenge students to reason, reflect on learning, justify their thinking, and generate ideas for future inquiry.

#### **Student Participation**

Students demonstrate curiosity and engage one another through questions and dialogue, challenging each other's thinking with respect and humility.



## PRIORITIES

- Prioritizing student curiosity and discourse through culturally relevant topics and materials.
- Creating opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement that support social, emotional, and academic development.
- Modeling curiosity and humility in dialogue with students.
- Providing multiple options for scaffolding dialogue.

## START HERE

- » Co-create norms for peer-to-peer engagement with students.
- » Adjust your daily and weekly schedule, challenging yourself to have students spend more time in peer discussion than any other modality (as developmentally appropriate).
- » Be explicit about when students are to maintain single attention (one conversation, one focus) versus when it is acceptable to use multiple channels (chatting during a video, recording reactions on a padlet, etc.).
- » Research and experiment to identify digital ways for students to generate ideas and responses individually and collaboratively that help prime their dialogue.
- » Create a shared space where students can continue discussions after a lesson and offer suggestions for future topics or discussions.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Use a discussion channel that also allows the conversation to continue when the lesson ends.
- » Prioritize small group discussions, which are typically more effective and engaging than whole-group discussions.
- » When a student responds, encourage students to express agreement or disagreement and a reason.
- » Give student facilitators opportunities to show their work or explanations rather than verbalizing everything.
- » Create spaces for offline discussions: blogs, chat spaces on LMS, shared Google docs, etc.
- » To support student autonomy, create sign-up sheets for informal discussion groups based on lesson or project assignments.
- » Periodically distribute papers or send brief surveys or emails that include questions written to prompt thinking and ask students to explain their reasoning.
- » Have students submit responses through a variety of media both recommended by the teacher and of their choosing (e.g., written response, audio, or video recordings).



## ENGAGING STUDENTS IN LEARNING (3c)

**Do learning experiences allow each student to do the learning and engage in ways that are challenging, authentic, and relevant?**

- ✓ Learning experiences engage students intellectually, requiring them to think and collaborate.
- ✓ Learning experiences support curiosity, encourage critical thinking, and include multiple ways for students to engage and represent their ideas.
- ✓ Students take the initiative to increase the challenge, complexity, relevance, and rigor of learning experiences.

For successful learning to occur for each student, intellectual engagement is a necessity. Knowledge of students, planning for instruction, assessment, routines and procedures, and other aspects of teachers' responsibilities are ultimately about creating opportunities for students to engage with content, with one another, and with their learning and development process. Teachers must provide rich opportunities, promote teamwork, use engaging materials, and give students time to reflect on their learning.

In an engaged classroom, students co-create rich learning experiences with their teacher and classmates by offering suggestions for activities, readings, and experiences. Students readily collaborate on tasks and extend the purpose beyond the classroom. Students engage with existing instructional materials and resources in ways that exhibit deep understanding and critical thinking. More importantly, they bring their funds of knowledge and suggestions of instructional materials and resources to enhance learning for all. Throughout the learning journey, students engage in reflection of content, knowledge, and their learning process.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### **Rich Learning Experiences**

Students demonstrate agency and critical thinking in the completion of tasks and activities that require high levels of intellectual engagement.

#### **Collaboration and Teamwork**

Student collaboration is a key component of learning and engagement, and students take initiative to collaborate in new or unplanned ways that further their learning and make it more engaging and meaningful.

#### **Use of Instructional Materials and Resources**

Instructional materials and resources are used effectively to support intellectual engagement and deep learning of the content.

#### **Opportunities for Thinking and Reflection**

Individual lessons, activities, and tasks, as well as instructional pathways, have multiple and effective opportunities to think, reflect, and consolidate understanding.

## PRIORITIES

- Encouraging multiple ways of interacting, modes of accessing information, and means of representing thinking.
- Making space for student choice and interest-driven learning across all subjects.
- Celebrating and sharing student creativity, curiosity, and resilience.
- Allocating time for students to research and discover on their own through project-based learning or collaborative inquiry.
- Allowing students to develop their own summative or culminating projects.
- Deviating from the plan in the face of authentic student curiosity and initiative.

## START HERE

- » Plan for individual and group projects that are purely interest-based.
- » Audit your plans and assignments for points where students might be offered more choice.
- » Know your content "critical path" - what you must convey versus what you can hold lightly if spontaneous opportunities for student innovation appear.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Take advantage of small group sessions to gauge student engagement.
- » Consider holding one-on-one meetings with students to dig into how they are engaging in work.
- » Provide opportunities for students to partake in collaborative, inquiry-based research using websites or online articles.
- » Allow students to submit assignments in a variety of forms such as PowerPoint, Prezi, or pre-recorded segments.
- » Create a choice board to provide both structure and choice. For instance, post the board on Monday and give students until Friday to complete it, at which time you can have a discussion to reflect on the key ideas and an assessment.
- » Find or create interactive presentations that guide students through information, activities, and inquiry.
- » Using Google Docs or discussion boards, have students pose questions to their classmates.
- » Have students submit an end-of-session reflection on either level of understanding, a review question, or response to the material.



## RESPONDING FLEXIBLY TO STUDENT NEEDS (3e)

**How do teachers respond to student understanding, interest levels, and life events as they work toward lesson and unit goals and objectives?**

- ✓ The teacher adjusts lessons and is responsive to student needs.
- ✓ The teacher's adjustments and responsiveness lead to deeper understanding for students and/or new learning experiences.
- ✓ Students voice their needs, ask questions or make suggestions that spark new learning opportunities, and make effective adjustments and modifications based on their self-monitoring and reflection.

To foster intellectual engagement, educators must be both purposeful and agile in their planning and delivery of instruction. Although well-planned and intentional, they recognize and act on opportune moments to shift direction based on students' needs and are present and responsive to existing class dynamics. They encourage students to build their knowledge by becoming experts and teaching concepts to others. These teachers adjust lesson plans accordingly because they recognize that schools are situated within a larger context and are receptive and responsive to external events that impact students in the moment. To reach the most students consistently and effectively, they pursue flexible teaching approaches to engage students.

Students are co-creative pedagogues and offer suggestions for content and delivery of instruction. They share their knowledge of outside world events and feel safe being vulnerable for the sake of building community and connection. When working with others or teaching other students, they seek pedagogical ways to convey meaning and understanding to their audience.

### ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

#### **Evidence-Based Adjustments**

When appropriate, teachers use their expertise to alter or replace pre-planned activities based on students' understanding, questions, and interests.

#### **Receptiveness and Responsiveness**

Teachers are open to and capitalize upon unexpected student actions, questions, and internal and external events; they encourage and support students to pursue new learning and opportunities on their own.

#### **Determination and Persistence**

Teachers are committed to efficacy, even when students encounter difficulty in learning, and pursue alternative approaches when necessary to help students be successful.

## PRIORITIES

- Planning learning activities that provide the ability to be flexible and responsive with grouping, pacing, or structure.
- Using student inquiry, assessments, and discussion to drive instructional decision making around pedagogical agility.
- Selecting a variety of auditory and tactile manipulatives given widely variable learning environments and social-emotional needs.
- Leveraging student feedback on lesson and unit design around content, interest, and engagement.

## START HERE

- » Create daily and weekly learning activities that include flexible activities based on student responses and accessibility to content.
- » Identify additional resources to support the diversity of learners in a classroom from enrichment activities to prerequisite skills.
- » Ask students for real-time feedback on lesson structure, learning tasks, and pacing to determine how to adjust for student learning and success.
- » Purposely model opportunities where you "stop and pause" the lesson to alter or replace the current learning to address unexpected student actions, questions, or concerns.

## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

- » Utilize breakout rooms or shoulder partners to capitalize on unexpected student questions or misconceptions.
- » Use student answers as a learning tool, provide additional discussion time (partner or small group), when students grapple with content.
- » Have students use nonverbal ways to ask questions, raise concerns, or indicate understanding.
- » Have students generate questions or problems of practice and present their questions to the class.
- » Create an additional resource folder for each unit that is labeled by either objective or difficulty. Students can self-select that task or resource based on their understanding for supplemental help or enrichment.
- » Through a Google Doc or other interactive tool, ask students if they need more or less time to master the objective or outcome from the task or assignment.
- » Record short "error analysis" or misconception videos for each lesson or topic of study. Students can watch these small videos if they struggle with the content.