



Literacy Connects

A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue LV

Understanding the NEPF Series-Standard 2



Standard 2: Learning Tasks have High Cognitive Demand for Diverse Learners

- **Indicator 1:** Tasks purposefully employ all students' cognitive abilities and skills
- **Indicator 2:** Tasks place appropriate demands on each student
- **Indicator 3:** Tasks progressively develop all students' cognitive abilities and skills
- **Indicator 4:** The teacher operates with a deep belief that all children can achieve regardless of race, perceived ability and socio-economic status

Initially, Standard 2 seems straightforward: "Teachers support student learning through the provision of learning tasks....different tasks require different levels of thinking" (Lin, 2005). Therefore, all learning tasks should engage all students in high levels of thinking. It seems like that should be easy, right? Wrong! Upon closer examination, there are many factors that must be in place for this to happen. Let's take a look at some of the facets of this notion in order to better understand how teachers can insure that the needs of all learners are being met.

A Collaborative Classroom

The importance of collaboration in the classroom cannot be overstated. Although educators have always understood the importance of building and nurturing positive relationships with and among students, recent brain research has shown that emotions are the single most important consideration in learning. Emotions determine whether or not we pay attention or make personal connections, while positive emotions increase our motivation to learn. Additionally, in preparation for college and careers, 21st century skills require schools prepare students to become collaborative citizens. Following are a few ways to create a more collaborative classroom:

- **Introductions and getting to know you activities** are an important step towards building a safe and welcoming climate. The first week, play games that get kids up and moving, meeting each other, and sharing information (both personal and academic). [See Literacy Connects #30, Building Classroom Community, for "Getting to Know You" activities.](#)
- **Assessing learning styles/modalities:** Give students surveys that measure their learning modalities and/or multiple-intelligences. Afterwards discuss the results and teach students about learning styles and strategies specific to each. Discussing learning styles not only helps students understand more about how they learn and ways they can learn better, it also creates an awareness of others in the class and how they learn. This is the first step to creating solid cooperative learning groups. For K-12 learning styles inventories go to the "Additional Resources" file of your Literacy Connects Interact Icon or to RPDP.net, ELA, [Literacy Connects Resources.](#)
- **Along with content specific pre-assessments, have students complete interest surveys.** Use them to help create cooperative learning groups. Students' personalities and interests are as important a consideration in the creation of effective cooperative learning groups as ability levels. Also use interest survey questions to create student scavenger hunts. After students have completed their surveys, ask them to find a classmate who has a similar answer. For example, ask students to find another classmate who has the same favorite movie; the next time, ask students to find someone else who has similar taste in music, and so on. This is a fun and easy way to get kids to talking about



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themselves. A variety of K- 12 student interest surveys are posted in the “Additional Resources” file of your Literacy Connects Interact Icon and at RPD.net, ELA, [Literacy Connects Resources](#).

- **Classroom Norms:** Allowing students to participate in setting class norms will build community and promote student buy-in. Rather than telling students the rules, have them write down 4 – 6 classroom conditions they need to optimize their learning experiences. Tell them to base their responses on past learning experiences and what they know about their learning styles. Once individual student lists are done, in groups of 4 or 5, have students create a group list, eliminating duplicates answers and combining similar ones.

Even if you provide the norms, decide on a maximum of five and discuss each with your classes explaining why these behaviors are essential for learning. Wording is important: These should be statements of desired behaviors as opposed to a list of what not to do. Once you have established your classroom norms, have students choose the one norm with which they struggle the most. Have them write a short reflection explaining why they struggle with this particular directive and specific ways they can work on changing the undesired behavior. Post norms where they are fully visible to everyone.

- **Don't confuse class norms with classroom procedures.** Classroom procedures are routines that facilitate movement and student needs. Turning in and passing back papers, beginning and ending the period, transitioning from large group to small groups, getting out and putting away books and supplies, and greeting new students are just a few examples of activities that happen every day in a classroom. Teach these procedures as you would skills, refining and adding new ones as the need arises.
- **Establish a climate where learners feel comfortable making mistakes.** We learn best from our mistakes! Discuss errors as a natural part of the learning process and have students identify, correct and explain their mistakes. Don't be afraid to point out your own mistakes and what you have learned from them.
- **Provide plenty of wait time after asking questions,** so students don't feel pressured to have an immediate answer. Research has revealed that teacher wait-time rarely lasts more than 1.5 seconds in a typical classroom. Increasing this to 3 – 5 seconds has been proven to have a positive impact on student learning, motivation and attitude.
- **Teach Them How to Listen:** Good listeners are both rare and valued in our culture. Through direct instruction, modeling and by example show students how people listen (make eye contact, offer empathy, restrain from cutting others off in a conversation). [Save The Last Word](#) is a great activity that allows students to practice listening. Provide several rounds of this structured activity followed by time for students to reflect on the experience and evaluate their own listening skills. Students also need opportunities to restrain themselves from speaking in order to keep their attention on listening. Consider adding "Three then Me" to the class norms/agreements. This simply means that before one can speak again, they need to wait for three others to share first.



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- **Teach Them How to Negotiate:** A group member who speaks the loudest and frequently asserts may get the most said but that doesn't mean they'll convince a group of anything. A good negotiator listens well, shows patience and flexibility, points out shared ideas and areas of group agreement, and thinks under pressure. After sharing this list with students, generate together more characteristics to add to it. Indulge them in a brief activity called "Build a Consensus." In this activity, set the timer and give mere minutes to group plan a mock birthday party, fieldtrip, or a lunchtime meal so they can practice their negotiation skills.
- **Model What is Expected:** When it comes to creating a highly collaborative classroom, teachers need to model listening, paraphrasing, artful questioning and negotiation any and every chance they get. In a student-centered classroom, there is little actual teaching (in the traditional sense of the word). The most effective teachers facilitate learning experiences for whole and smaller groups. Sending students out in the world with the incredible ability to effectively facilitate a group is a 21st century skill crucial to success in the university and the work world.

Questioning and Critical Thinking

- **Teach Students the Art of Asking Good Questions:** On average, teachers ask 80 questions each hour, while students ask only two. Take the time to teach students how to ask high-level questions and their thinking will follow. Have the class generate questions on any given topic, writing each one on the board. Decide on the most pressing and interesting questions of the bunch and discuss with students what makes these particular ones stand out. Talk about the types of questions that more often yield the best responses -- those that are open-ended, thoughtful and sometimes even daring. Describe how well-received questions are neutral and don't sound as if someone is being interrogated. Introduce them to invitational questions stems such as, "When you think about _____, what comes to mind?" and, "Considering what we already know about _____, how will we ____?" As a scaffold, provide a handout with question starters or question prompt cards for students to use during group discussions. Students also need to know about wait time. Explain -- better yet, demonstrate -- that once someone in the group poses a question, there needs to be a few seconds of silence, giving everyone time to think.
- **Teach students to tolerate ambiguity** by allowing ideas or positions to exist side by side while evidence is being present or sorted. Teach them to support their claims with evidence from the source (speaking and listening, reading and writing), and refrain from presenting yourself as the expert. Learn to mediate discussions, not provide all the answers. Often the need to be right all the time is the biggest bar to new ideas. Allow students the freedom to explore and revise their questions and responses without the fear of being wrong.



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- **Following are a few examples of question stems that will help promote critical thinking:**
 - **Making Predictions:**
 - What will happen next?
 - What is the author implying?
 - Does the author offer hints of things to come?
 - What conclusions can you draw?
 - Can you predict the outcome if....?
 - **Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion:**
 - What is fact in the text? How can you tell?
 - Does the author make statements without supporting them?
 - Does the author base any part of the argument on feelings rather than fact? How can you tell?
 - Does the author generalize rather than support with specific details?
 - **Using Relevant Information when Responding:**
 - Support your answer with facts from the text.
 - List the reasons for your answer.
 - How do you know?
 - Cite evidence to support your answer.
 - **Synthesizing and Extending Information:**
 - How would you improve ...?
 - Propose an alternative to
 - What changes would you make to solve...?
 - **Awareness of Values, Customs and Beliefs Represented:**
 - Who is the speaker?
 - What does he/she believe?
 - What is most important to the author/speaker?
 - How does the author describe women/children/minorities?
 - What groups are not represented in this writing?
 - **Analyzing the Author's Craft:**
 - What literacy devices does the author use (metaphors, similes, irony, personification...)?
 - What is the author's purpose (to entertain, inform, persuade...)?
 - For what audience is this piece intended? How do you know?
 - Analyze the sentences in this piece (long, short, formal, informal...).
 - In what format (essay, letter, editorial....) is this written? Why?
 - Classify the words the author uses (long, short, hard, easy, common, regional)
 - **More critical and text dependent** questions stems at [Literacy Connects Resources](#).



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Engagement

It is imperative that students are interacting with new learning. Real learning is not a spectator sport. For new learning to "stick," students must be cognitively engaged and doing the work. This begins with gaining and keeping their attention and interest. Following are a few suggestions to promote active, engaged learning:

- **Evaluation:** Have students assess before and after an individual response. Before the response, the teacher might prompt them with "Who thinks they know the answer?" or "Alright, listen closely and see if you agree." After the response, ask, "Is that correct?" or "Do you agree?"
- **Questioning:** Keep them thinking, inquiring and wondering (see the section on critical thinking and questioning).
- **Surveying:** As opposed to asking one student, ask everyone the same question. This may require more of a multiple-choice method: "Which one do you believe is correct? Why?"
- **Individual white boards:** Again, as opposed to asking one person, ask everyone to write and display an answer. This is a great way to ensure everyone is thinking about the topic; it's also great formative assessment.
- **Call and response:** Having students repeat, chant, sing or choral read is a high-energy way to engage everyone.
- **Find a core:** Build a lesson or presentation around a problem, issue or situation that's likely to engage all students.
- **Peer discussion:** Rather than asking one student a question, have students discuss the problem, issue or situation while monitoring the accuracy of their discussion.
- **Building schema:** How can real life be applied to this discussion? What connections can be made? Have students discuss this as a class or with a partner.
- **Guided lessons or scavenger hunts:** Have students look for or find certain pieces of information in order to synthesize meaning at the end. This could be as simple as fill-in-the-blanks notes, guided questions throughout the lesson, or actual built-in clues that kids have to figure out to construct meaning.
- **Notemaking:** Give students the opportunity to synthesize their thoughts in a meaningful way to build understanding. Use a graphic organizer to help them put thoughts together and build meaning as new information is presented.
- **Divide and conquer:** Assigning students to small groups or stations can help eliminate idle time, as any quick mini-lesson would be focused in a small-group setting while others are doing meaningful tasks.



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- **Eliminate whole-group discussions**, if possible: Before entering into such an experience, ask yourself if there's a better way for students to use an inductive or more inquiry-based experience to gain the same knowledge in a more meaningful way.

Gradual Release Model

Scaffolded instruction, or the gradual release model, is broadly recognized as a successful approach for moving classroom instruction from teacher-centered, whole-group delivery to student-centered collaboration and independent practice. Often referred to as “I do it, we do it, you do it,” model proposes a plan of instruction that includes demonstration, prompt, and practice.

At the beginning of the lesson or when new material is being introduced, the teacher has a prominent role in the delivery of the content. This is the “I do” phase. As the student acquires the new information and skills, the responsibility of learning shifts from teacher-directed instruction to student processing activities. In the “We do” phase of learning, the teacher continues to model, question, prompt and cue students; however, as students move into the “You do” phases, they rely more on themselves and less on the teacher to complete the task. The following chart explains this process:

	Teacher	Student
<p style="text-align: center;">I do it <i>Direct Instruction</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides direct instruction ▪ Establishes goals and purpose ▪ Models ▪ Think aloud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Actively listens ▪ Take notes ▪ Asks for clarification
<p style="text-align: center;">We do it <i>Guided Instruction</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interactive instruction ▪ Works with students ▪ Checks, prompts, cues ▪ Provides additional modeling ▪ Meets with needs-based groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Asks and responds to questions ▪ Works with teacher and classmates ▪ Completes process alongside others
<p style="text-align: center;">You do it together <i>Collaborative Learning</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Moves among groups ▪ Clarifies confusion ▪ Provides support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Works with classmates, shares outcome ▪ Collaborates on authentic task ▪ Consolidates learning ▪ Completes process in small groups ▪ Looks to peers for clarification
<p style="text-align: center;">You do it independently <i>Independent Practice</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides feedback ▪ Evaluates ▪ Determines level of understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Works alone ▪ Relies on notes, activities, classroom learning to complete assignment ▪ Takes full responsibility for outcome