



SHIFT THE THINKING LOAD TO STUDENTS

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES PROMOTE PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITIES

In 2018, TNTP published *The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down — and How to Fix It*. The report’s findings were troubling: Students spent more than 500 hours a year on assignments that weren’t rigorous or grade-appropriate and said they were engaged in their classes less than half the time. These patterns were most pronounced for students of color, English learners, those from low-income families, and those with disabilities.

In response, TNTP created the Student Experience Toolkit, a set of resources to help educators, policymakers, and families improve the learning experience for students by focusing on four key areas: grade-appropriate assignments, strong instruction, deep engagement, and high expectations.

Learning Forward worked with TNTP to turn one of those resources

TO LEARN MORE

For more information and resources on all four improvement areas, visit tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.

into a reflection tool for shifting the cognitive load to students from teachers so that students are actively engaged, use critical thinking, and demonstrate understanding. Coaches, teacher leaders, and other professional learning leaders can use this tool in partnership with teachers to observe, discuss, and reflect on current practices and how to expand them so that students own the thinking in the classroom.

This nonevaluative tool focuses on the following principles and practices that embody them:

- Ask questions and assign tasks that require critical thinking.
- Give all students a chance to do the work.
- Check for understanding frequently and strategically.
- Hold high expectations for student responses and ask targeted follow-up questions.
- Facilitate academic discussion and feedback among students.

There are also two foundational practices included in TNTP’s resource that may not be obvious in a scheduled observation but are essential for this work and worthy of discussion:

- Proactively build academic mindsets with students.
- Set clear behavioral and academic expectations for student participation and work.

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INSTRUCTIONS:

This nonevaluative tool can be used by coach-teacher pairs to guide observation and discussion. Alternatively, it can be used by teachers or teacher leaders for self-reflection.

1. Pick one or more of the categories as your focus.
2. Select a time frame for observation and reflection. You may decide to do several observations before discussion, as the practices included here may be observed during some lessons or periods more than others.
3. Reflect on and discuss the strategies that were used effectively and others that could be used more. Note that the strategies described here are examples. You should not expect all of them to be used. Rather, each item should inspire a conversation and ideas for improvement.
4. After reflection and discussion, set specific goals and a plan for implementing changes in practice.
5. Conduct follow-up observations and reflection to continue the learning and progress.

ASK QUESTIONS AND ASSIGN TASKS THAT REQUIRE CRITICAL THINKING.

- Instruction uses the language embedded in grade-level standards to reflect the appropriate level of thinking for target standard(s).
- Lessons that involve a text include text-dependent questions that focus on the most important details or ideas in the text to deepen students' understanding of what they read.
- Activities immerse students in real-world problem-solving and prompt them to explain and justify their thinking.
- Teacher poses more open-ended questions than closed-ended questions.
- After asking a closed-ended question, teacher follows up with open-ended questions (such as "How did you get that answer?" or "Why do you say that?").

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

NOTES

Source: TNTP. (2018). *The student experience toolkit*. Available at tntp.org/student-experience-toolkit.

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GIVE ALL STUDENTS A CHANCE TO DO THE WORK.

- Students are expected to take responsibility for answering questions before teacher calls on someone to respond.
- Students have opportunities and necessary materials to answer questions nonverbally, for example, by showing written responses on whiteboards or holding up fingers to represent multiple choice answer options.
- During group work, teacher assigns roles to all students to ensure that all students participate.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

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CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING FREQUENTLY AND STRATEGICALLY.

- Teacher checks for understanding of each of the key concepts and components to make sure students are on track throughout the class.
- Students have multiple opportunities and ways to demonstrate their understanding of and engagement with the content.
- Strategies to check for understanding are appropriate for their purpose (for example, thumbs up/down is not a reliable check for understanding of content, but it can be effective for showing agreement/disagreement).
- Teacher prompts students to monitor their own understanding and take action when they need support.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

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HOLD HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT RESPONSES AND ASK TARGETED FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS.

- Students are expected to answer questions and cannot decline because they don't know or don't want to answer.
- When students give incomplete or overly simple responses, teacher asks follow-up questions to lead students to a more complete and accurate response.
- When students make an error, teacher asks probing questions to determine the source of their error and help them respond correctly.
- Teacher addresses with the whole class trends in errors or misconceptions that occur in multiple students' work or verbal responses.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

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FACILITATE ACADEMIC DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK AMONG STUDENTS.

- Students have many chances to share their thoughts informally and work with one another in every lesson (such as "turn and talk" or "think-pair-share").
- Students have opportunities to participate in formal discussions or problem-solving protocols with guidance from teacher(s).
- Students discuss and provide feedback on each other's work.

EXAMPLES AND EVIDENCE

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SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

FOCUS AREAS FOR THIS REFLECTION:

WHAT'S WORKING:

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH:

ACTION STEPS:

PLAN FOR FOLLOW UP:

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