

North Carolina New Schools Project (NCNSP) Common Instructional Framework

Every student reads, writes, thinks and talks in every classroom every day

This common framework for instruction drives the instructional practice at NCNSP partner schools and has supported their success because it defines common practices that are used consistently from classroom to classroom. These strategies give all students of all skill levels access to the complex information needed to meet state and college-ready standard and engage all students, requiring each to take an active role in their own learning.

Collaborative Group Work: Collaborative group work involves bringing students together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Effective group work is well planned and strategic. Students are grouped intentionally with each student held accountable for contributing to the group work. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers. Collaborative group work uses questioning, scaffolding and classroom talk and centers literacy groups.

Writing to Learn: Writing to learn is a strategy through which students can develop their ideas, their critical thinking ability and their writing skills. Writing to learn enables students to experiment every day with written language and increase their fluency and mastery of written conventions. Writing to learn can also be used as formative assessment and as a way to scaffold mid- and high-stakes writing assignments and tests.

Literacy Groups: Literacy groups provide students with a collaborative structure for understanding a variety of texts and engaging in a higher level of discourse. Group roles traditionally drive literacy groups by giving each student a role to play and a defined purpose within the group. The specific roles or discussion guidelines may vary for different content areas, lengths of texts, or student level of sophistication using this strategy, but the purpose of literacy groups is to raise student engagement with texts by creating a structure within which they may do so.

Questioning: Questioning challenges students and teachers to use good questions as a way to open conversations and further intellectual inquiry. Effective questioning (by the teacher and by students) deepens classroom conversations and the level of discourse students apply to their work. Teachers use this strategy to create opportunities for students to investigate and analyze their thinking as well as the thinking of their peers and the authors that they read in each of their classes.

Scaffolding: Scaffolding helps students to connect prior knowledge and experience with new information. Teachers use this strategy to connect students with previous learning in a content area as well as with previous learning in an earlier grade. Scaffolding also helps facilitate thinking about a text by asking students to draw on their subjective experience and prior learning to make connections to new materials and ideas.

Classroom Talk: Classroom talk creates the space for students to articulate their thinking and strengthen their voice. Classroom talk takes place in pairs, in collaborative group work and as a whole class. As students become accustomed to talking in class, the teacher serves as a facilitator to engage students in higher levels of discourse. Classroom talk opens the space for questioning, effective scaffolding and successful collaborative group work and literacy groups.

** This Common Instructional Framework was first implemented school-wide at University Park Campus School in Worcester, MA.*

Collaborative Group Work

Key Principles and Goals

Definition

Collaborative group work involves bringing students together in small groups for the common purpose of engaging in learning. Effective group work is well planned and strategic. Students are grouped intentionally with each student held accountable for contributing to the group work. Activities are designed so that students with diverse skill levels are supported as well as challenged by their peers. Collaborative group work uses questioning, scaffolding and classroom talk and acts as the core of literacy groups.

Collaborative Group Work will

- allow students to practice using language specific to content areas.
- provide specific time to share and listen to new ideas.
- help students try out new language, process information, and get feedback.
- allow for both teacher-student and student-student interaction to occur.
- change the teacher role to one of an active facilitator.

Teachers will

- establish collaborative group work as a strategy for students to learn and work with others as they are acquiring new knowledge and skills that prepare them for college and the 21st century.
- scaffold students into collaborative group work by having them work in pairs and then small groups while increasing the complexity of the task.
- establish rules and expectations for groups, listen and observe as groups work, redirect students if necessary and push students to deepen their conversations.
- embed collaborative group work in lesson plans and vary group configurations, length of time in groups and group activities.
- make each group responsible for creating a product that reflects their learning.

Students will

- work together to develop problem solving, critical thinking and communications skills.
- be responsible for completing their share of work within the group.
- take risks, challenge themselves, and realize that making mistakes is part of the learning process.
- develop a commitment to their own learning and the learning of others.
- clarify their own thinking and understand content in a more rich, critical and connected way.

Collaborative Group Work...

- Allows students to practice using language specific to content areas
- Provides specific time to share and listen to new ideas
- Helps students try out new language, process information, and get feedback
- Allows for both teacher-student and student-student interaction to occur
- Changes the teacher role to one of an active facilitator
- Uses the teacher voice to scaffold, question, synthesize, and model

Getting Started...

- Give explicit instructions about group work requirements
- Set ground rules for how students will work in groups
- Use the “rule of feet” to facilitate group work
- Use data to plan both group configuration and learning objectives
- Debrief group work process and products
- Use protocols to set up group work roles and procedures

Ultimately, it...

- Should be a meaningful and purposeful part of lesson planning
- Can vary according to student needs
- Can be used across all content areas and grade levels
- Should be rigorous and relevant
- Must be more than the arrangement of furniture in a classroom
- Can be used to access both individual and group knowledge
- Gives students opportunities to find their voices and engage their peers

Writing to Learn

Key Principles and Goals

Definitions

Writing to learn is a strategy through which students can develop their ideas, their critical thinking abilities and their writing skills. Writing to learn enables students to experiment every day with written language and to increase their fluency and mastery of written conventions. Writing to learn can also be used as formative assessment and as a way to scaffold mid- and high-stakes writing assignments and tests.

Writing to Learn will

- help students to think aloud, reflect on content and activate student voice.
- develop expressive language skills and fluency.
- help students to process information.
- engage all students with course content.
- lead to the improvement of high-stakes writing.

Teachers will

- use writing to learn to engage students in the subject area.
- begin with low-stakes writing that demonstrates good thinking and is not assessed for grammar, spelling or punctuation to scaffold to mid- and high-stakes writing.
- emphasize the importance of writing to learn as integral to strengthening students' ability to write, clearly articulate their thoughts, as well as reflect.
- embed writing to learn in lesson plans and in collaborative group work.
- utilize writing to learn as a formative assessment tool.

Students will

- engage in writing-to-learn activities across the curriculum.
- write in a thoughtful manner, focusing more on content and less on spelling and grammar.
- become familiar with a variety of writing-to-learn activities and protocols.
- use skills developed in writing-to-learn activities when engaging in mid- and high-stakes assignments.
- develop critical thinking skills through writing-to-learn activities.

Writing to Learn...

- Helps students to “think out loud” and reflect on content
- Develops expressive language skills and fluency
- Helps students to process information
- Engages all students with the subject at hand
- Activates student voice
- Leads to improving the quality of high-stakes writing
- Produces lots of generative writing
- Takes between eight and ten minutes to execute

Getting Started...

- Use daily across all content areas
- Use as an entrance or exit ticket or anytime during the lesson
- Make it a non-threatening, low-stakes activity
- Focus on having all students write by giving two parameters for assessment (+/-, A/F, Proficient/Developing, Pass/Fail, etc.)
- Use as a frontloading activity to drive group discussion
- Use as a formative assessment to assist with the next steps in planning
- Don't penalize for spelling and grammar errors; it's the thinking that counts

Ultimately, it...

- Continues to make student writing clear and personal
- Helps the facilitator understand what students know and don't know
- Should be included as an integral part of daily lesson planning
- Develops critical thinking skills
- Scaffolds to high-stakes writing assignments

Literacy Groups

Key Principles and Goals

Definition

Literacy groups provide students with a collaborative structure for understanding a variety of texts and engaging in a higher level of discourse. Group roles traditionally drive literacy groups by giving each student a role to play and a defined purpose within the group. The specific roles or discussion guidelines may vary for different content areas, lengths of texts, or student level of sophistication using this strategy, but the purpose of literacy groups is to raise student engagement with texts by creating a structure within which they may do so.

Literacy Groups will

- generate a focused group discussion around a text.
- encourage students to read and interact with each other around a text.
- enable struggling readers to successfully interact with texts.
- enable all readers to engage more deeply with texts.
- offer opportunities for students to read and learn from multiple and varied texts.

Teachers will

- establish literacy groups as a strategy for students to analyze texts from multiple perspectives and to learn from others.
- scaffold students into literacy groups by consistently practicing the literacy group roles and using them to discuss texts across the curriculum.
- establish rules and expectations for groups, listen and observe as groups work, redirect students if necessary and push students to deepen their conversations.
- make each group responsible for creating a product that reflects their learning.
- use a variety of texts in literacy groups (newspaper articles, lyrics, poetry, book reviews, journals, etc.).

Students will

- become familiar with and use all of the literacy group roles.
- develop a greater ability to read and analyze texts.
- collaborate while reading and discussing challenging texts.
- develop a sense of independence, responsibility and ownership for their learning within the group.
- rely on one another for their learning rather than relying solely upon the teacher.

Literacy Groups...

- Generate group discussion around a text
- Encourage students to read
- Invite readers to interact with one another
- Create active structure for group work
- Enable struggling readers to successfully interact with texts
- Enable all readers to engage more deeply with texts
- Offer opportunities for students to read from multiple and varied texts

Getting Started...

- Give students clearly defined roles for discussion
- Model student role responsibilities
- Choose group members wisely when initiating literacy groups
- Provide role sheets and suggested questions
- Employ the “rule of feet” and motivate, question, and observe as a facilitator
- Use across all content areas
- Model thinking aloud, questioning, and developing a reader’s inner dialogue
- Model using post-its or highlighters to annotate text

Ultimately, they...

- Support collaboration and cooperation among students
- Support the development of multiple perspectives
- Make readers out of students
- Become sophisticated practice when used consistently
- Engage students in critical thinking and reflection
- Support scaffolding for texts and for content
- Develop independence, responsibility, and ownership
- Require teacher/facilitator ongoing supervision and support

Questioning

Key Principles and Goals

Definition

Questioning challenges students and teachers to use good questions as a way to open conversations and further intellectual inquiry. Effective questioning (by the teacher and by students) deepens classroom conversations and the level of discourse students apply to their work. Teachers use this strategy to create opportunities for students to investigate and analyze their thinking as well as the thinking of their peers and the authors that they read in each of their classes.

Questioning will

- help students practice thinking out loud.
- provide a way for students to engage with content and each other.
- empower students to develop college-level discussion skills.
- improve listening and speaking skills.
- promote student-to-student and teacher-student interaction.

Teachers will

- keep questioning focused and on topic.
- use wait time and pacing to encourage all students to engage.
- ask questions of varying difficulty from basic remembering to higher levels of critical thinking like evaluating and creating.
- encourage student-to-student questioning as well as student-to-teacher questioning.
- use questioning as a formative assessment to gauge where students are in their understanding of the topic.

Students will

- learn from each other's questions to construct new knowledge.
- engage in questioning at various levels of increasing difficulty.
- make connections to prior knowledge and experience.
- work collaboratively to develop higher-level questions.
- become active and reflective listeners and speakers.

Questioning...

- Helps students practice thinking out loud
- Provides a way for students to engage with content and each other
- Empowers students to develop college-level discussion skills
- Improves listening and speaking skills
- Promotes student-to-student interaction

Getting Started...

- Tie questions to the student, the text, and the world
- Use a variety of formats to engage all students in answering questions
- Encourage student-to-student questions by allowing think time after a student answers a question
- Set protocols for classroom questioning that give opportunities for all students to ask and answer
- Model question generating and thinking aloud
- Encourage follow-up questions and feedback
- Assist students who struggle with a question by using rephrasing, prompting, and cueing methods
- Make questions succinct by using a simple format and the fewest number of words
- Make questions clear so students can translate them into their own language
- Encourage students to build off of other students' questions and answers
- Prepare quality questions that help students think about, internalize, and utilize information productively
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand a student question

Ultimately, it...

- Encourages critical thinking skills
- Can be used across content areas and grade levels
- Affects how students learn
- Creates opportunities to connect learning with real life experiences and prior knowledge
- Can create a culture of respect for all perspectives
- Helps students and teachers become active listeners

Scaffolding

Key Principles and Goals

Definition

Scaffolding helps students to connect prior knowledge and experience with new information. Teachers use this strategy to connect students with previous learning in a content area as well as with previous learning in an earlier grade. Scaffolding also helps facilitate thinking about a text by asking students to draw on their subjective experience and prior learning to make connections to new materials and ideas.

Scaffolding will

- support students before, during and after learning new content or skills.
- help struggling readers engage in the text.
- build college readiness by teaching strategies such as annotating text, etc.
- put ideas and concepts in context.
- assist students with making connections to texts either through life experience or previous readings.

Teachers will

- establish scaffolding as a way to support students with diverse needs and abilities as they acquire new knowledge and information.
- use protocols and strategies (questioning, writing to learn, graphic organizers, etc.) to help students connect their prior knowledge and experience with new content and skills.
- use scaffolding to put ideas and concepts into context and assist students with reading difficult texts.
- teach students how to scaffold learning for themselves by explicitly describing a scaffolding activity as they are using it in the classroom (e.g., a pre-reading strategy, comprehension strategy, etc.).
- embed scaffolding in lesson plans and use it daily to support student learning.

Students will

- better understand what they are reading and learning.
- make connections between their prior knowledge and experience and new content and skills.
- build confidence as they access more challenging material.
- develop metacognition skills.
- become skilled and purposeful readers.

Scaffolding...

- Supports student learning before, during, and after learning new content or skills
- Gives students a road map to follow when they read difficult text material
- Helps struggling readers to engage in text
- Builds college readiness by teaching procedures such as annotating text, using post-its effectively, etc.
- Puts ideas and concepts in context
- Fills in learning gaps
- Can take many forms such as graphic organizers, KWL charts, brainstorming, etc.
- Assists students with making connections to texts either through life experience or previous readings

Getting Started...

- Be consistent about explicitly making connections between prior knowledge and experience and new material
- Think out loud as you model a scaffolding technique to ensure student participation
- Vary scaffolding activities to give students a number of ways they can access difficult material
- Use prediction to anticipate what will happen next in a text
- Highlight the major points of a text before doing the reading
- Anticipate possible questions to ask about the text

Ultimately, it...

- Assists students with understanding what they're reading
- Promotes and propels rigorous discourse
- Offers all students an opportunity to be successful readers
- Develops metacognition skills
- Bridges the gap between what students already know and what they need to learn
- Builds student confidence as they develop more tools for accessing new and/or difficult materials

Classroom Talk

Key Principles and Goals

Definition

Classroom talk creates the space for students to articulate their thinking and strengthen their voice. Classroom talk takes place in pairs, in collaborative group work and as a whole class. As students become accustomed to talking in class, the teacher serves as a facilitator to engage students in higher levels of discourse. Classroom talk opens the space for questioning, effective scaffolding and successful collaborative group work and literacy groups.

Classroom Talk will

- actively engage all students.
- promote both speaking and listening skills.
- promote collaborative group work and questioning.
- help students develop confidence, articulate their ideas and develop a voice.
- support students in sharing information and ideas with one another.

Teachers will

- keep classroom talk focused and on topic.
- establish clear and explicit rules and expectations for classroom talk.
- listen and respond to what they hear as classroom talk is taking place.
- use protocols and instructional strategies that support effective classroom talk.
- emphasize that all voices, opinions and ideas must be respected and valued.

Students will

- develop a confident voice and become comfortable speaking in the classroom.
- learn to be active listeners and reflective speakers.
- engage in meaningful conversations across the curriculum.
- build strong student-student and student-teacher relationships.
- acquire the ability to use content-specific vocabulary.

Classroom Talk...

- Actively engages all students
- Supports sharing information and knowledge with one another
- Promotes and practices both speaking and listening skills
- Helps speakers articulate their ideas and develop voice
- Assists with question generation
- Promotes group work and collaboration
- Requires active facilitation and listening skills

Getting Started...

- Confine conversation to the assigned task
- Start by pairing students
- Use low-stakes writing activities to help generate discussion
- Arrange classroom seating to maximize discourse
- Ask for clarification
- Respect the speaker's point of view
- Practice developing wait time before contributing to conversation and help students to also do this
- Summarize key points of the conversation before the lesson ends

Ultimately, it...

- Develops reasoning skills, social skills, and self-confidence
- Helps students learn more effectively by talking about content
- Helps students acquire a vocabulary that supports content acquisition
- Builds relationships among students and teachers