

Clear Expectations and Self-Management of Learning: Moving the Principles of Learning from Theory to Practice

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In thinking about the work we have been moving throughout our district, we are extremely proud of the way our teachers have been incorporating Clear Expectations and Self-Management of Learning, two of the Principles of Learning that are inextricably connected. At the onset of our work in New Brunswick Public Schools, we noticed that there was a problem of practice during small group instruction period that was impacting both our teacher-facilitated guided reading, as well as student-led literacy centers during this time. In brief, we recognized that teachers needed support in order to provide explicit instruction of developmentally appropriate reading strategies and guidance on how to create cognitively demanding center tasks that would encourage opportunities for rigorous, independent student learning.

We first focused on refining the use of generalized reading strategies for all students, at all levels. We created a [guided reading planner](#) that asked teachers to not only identify the specific skill or strategy that they were planning to teach, but also to think through the explicit instructional moves that they were going to use in order to do so. This sets up clear expectations not only for the students but also for the teachers. The article "[Principles of Learning for Effort-Based Education](#)" (Resnick and Hall, 2000) states that in order for "teaching and learning environments to create intelligence, they must communicate clear expectations about what students will learn, how they will learn it, and what

qualifies as good work." Providing both teachers and students with clear expectations of what "good" teaching and learning during guided reading should look like, in addition to a bank of resources that enabled them to select and plan appropriate lessons, truly helped everyone to develop a common understanding of both the rationale and the pedagogy required to increase reading proficiency across the district.



We also felt it paramount to address what the rest of the class would be doing independently while the teacher was busy working with the students in guided reading. For the most part, we observed students engaging with tasks that required low levels of cognitive demand—unclear about what they were being asked to do, the purpose of the work, or what the expected outcomes were. The center tasks lacked both clarity of expectations and discouraged self-management of learning. In response, we created a checklist that identified and described the necessary components of small group instruction: planning, organization, relevance, rigor, choice, differentiation, accountability, and feedback. We then collected center tasks that were currently in use in order to analyze them

through this lens. After identifying the places where the tasks fell short, teachers worked together to improve the existing tasks which we used to create a bank of "before and after" [task cards](#) that exemplified the necessary shifts in instruction. Exemplar tasks, which included visual, step-by-step instructions of what to do at each center from start to finish, were created and shared so that teachers across the district

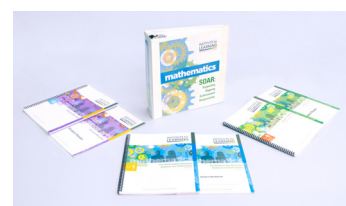
adult supervision," (Hall and Resnick, 2000) which were critical components of successful Self-Management of Learning.

I firmly believe that the root of our success has been grounded in our ability to move teachers from theory to practice. In closing, if we as leaders want teachers to begin to shift their thinking and move from basic to best practice, it is critical that we provide teachers with both the theory behind the Principles of Learning as well as tangible supports that allow them to identify and replicate what they look like in action. ■

Reference:

Resnick, L.B., Hall, M.W., with the Fellows of the Institute for Learning (2012). Principles of Learning for effort-based education. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, Learning Research and Development Center.

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learning. . . work productively and without distraction in a variety of settings—independently, with a partner, or in small groups—without the need for constant