

Qualities of Excellent Classrooms

Purpose

The Qualities of Excellent Classrooms (QEC) is a holistic framework that describes Success Academy's gold standard for teaching and learning. It is also a tool for educators to evaluate the state of teaching and learning across disciplines in a school.

Using the QEC

Before observing or giving feedback, all educators should take time to thoroughly understand the gold standard outlined in the QEC. Principals, assistant principals, and teachers should then use the tool to evaluate their school quality and determine actions to improve it, including through partner observations, planning meetings, training sessions, etc.

The QEC is organized in three sections articulating the primary dimensions of teaching and learning: "Preparation, Reflection, and Study", "Lesson Execution", and "Learning Environment and Community". Each section describes the importance of the dimension, the mindsets and behaviors that lead to success, and descriptors of what quality (Level 4) looks like.

When evaluating the quality of different domains, consider the following approaches:

- **Preparation, Reflection, and Study.** Reflect on planning meetings with the educator and engage in discussions prior to or after a given lesson. Discuss the content of the lesson, the purpose of the lesson within the year at large, the quality of work and student thinking, and the current state of the educator's own instruction. Probe the underlying values and beliefs that inform the educator's responses.
- **Lesson Execution.** Read lesson materials before observing a class. Observe a given lesson in its entirety, or perform two to three 30 minute observations over the course of a week. Pay special attention to the choices the educator makes, the choices students make, and the clarity of thinking and intellectual engagement. Study scholar work during and/or after the lesson to supplement your observation.
- **Learning Environment and Community.** Pay special attention to the overall tone of the culture, the quality of relationships, and the comfort level of students to take risks and navigate failure. Talk to students during or after the observation to supplement your assessment. Probe the underlying values and beliefs that govern the community culture.

Preparation, Reflection, and Study

Quality teaching and learning occurs when educators make intentional choices in service of scholar thinking and mastery. Effective educators understand that their success in lesson execution is dependent on the time they commit outside of the classroom to prepare, reflect, and study. Educators use this time effectively by:

- deepening their scholarly understanding of the content
- studying curriculum to internalize the progression of ideas and student skills
- reflecting on the successes and failures of their own performance
- analyzing scholar work and reflecting on the state of mastery and critical thinking in their room
- planning instructional moves informed by their content expertise and diagnosis of scholar understanding

This ongoing cycle of autonomous study requires educators to adopt a mindset of continuous improvement. By engaging in high level preparation themselves educators become experts in their craft as well as a model for scholars, who apply this mindset to their own learning. Both the educator and the scholars' high levels of preparation will be visible in the classroom.

Take stock of...

Educator Preparation

Teachers reflect high levels of content expertise. They seek out resources and relevant training. Engaging ideas and nuances permeate their materials and questions reflecting deep understanding beyond the material of one lesson.

Teachers have a precise diagnosis of the state of their own instruction. They are constantly reflective of their own practice and seek feedback. They are able to precisely diagnose how and why a goal was or was not achieved.

Teachers have a precise diagnosis of their class and scholar performance. They purposefully study scholar work and associated data to understand how and why a goal was or was not achieved.

Teachers plan lessons intentionally based on their study of classroom outcomes. They use the information gathered to plan intentional choices that meet the needs of their class.

Scholar Work Habits

Scholars are consistently prepared for class and contribute meaningfully from their preparation. Homework is completed at high quality and scholars may complete additional study or research that contributes to their work.

Scholars have their own goals for learning and growth. They have a developmentally appropriate understanding of their strengths and areas for growth.

Scholars value and implement teacher and peer feedback. They grow from implementing feedback and productively look to seek and provide it to their peers.

Scholars are curious about the content. They ask questions that push the class beyond the scope of a particular activity or lesson.

Notes

Lesson Execution

Effective educators understand that their role is not solely to deliver content to scholars, but to use content as a vehicle to facilitate critical thinking. Excellent execution occurs when educators successfully guide scholars to acquire knowledge on their own. Educators do this successfully by:

- listening and seeking to understand scholar thinking throughout the lesson
- making purposeful choices in the moment to deepen student thinking and precision
- exercising patience in the midst of confusion or failure
- anchoring all in-the-moment decisions in a deep understanding of content and learning goals

When an educator successfully orchestrates these elements in concert, a palpable sense of authentic engagement, hard thinking, and transformative learning can be felt amongst all in the classroom.

Take stock of...

Facilitation	Purpose	Intellectual Rigor
<p>Lesson logistics are planned, choreographed and executed seamlessly. Transitions between activities happen with ease, scholars have a level of developmentally appropriate autonomy in the classroom.</p>	<p>Learning goals are clear to all constituents. Everyone knows what they are doing and why. Scholars are so engaged in the content and the teacher moves are so purposeful that this understanding is innate and does not need to be said explicitly.</p>	<p>Content, questions, and tasks promote strong reasoning and the formation of original ideas. Teacher uses curricular materials to strategically challenge scholars throughout the lesson. All supplemental work is meaningful.</p>
<p>Teachers show flexibility to ensure learning goals are met. Teachers are actively seeking to understand scholar thinking and adjust purposefully. This includes intervening and/or exercising restraint, as needed.</p>	<p>Thinking is the focus of the lesson. Lessons are structured around autonomous learning and engagement rather than solely achieving mastery to validate teacher performance.</p>	<p>Scholar engagement, thought, and activity is motivated by the richness and rigor of the content at hand. Scholars derive joy from the experience of stretching their minds. At times, scholars need to persevere through tough thinking to arrive at new understandings.</p>

Notes

Learning Environment and Community

An excellent learning community promotes all learners' ability to engage. Quality learning communities are driven by the deep seated conviction that all children are capable of limitless potential. Educators do this by:

- investing in building strong relationships with and between scholars
- valuing the individual voices, perspectives, and contributions of all scholars
- promoting the physical and psychological safety of all scholars

Educators who intentionally cultivate quality learning environments create spaces of joy and respect that spark scholars' innate curiosity and foster the development of resilient learners.

Take stock of...

Teacher-Scholar Relationships	Learning Community
<p>Teachers invest in forging meaningful relationships with and between scholars. Scholars know their teachers care about them as people and treat their peers with respect.</p>	<p>The physical space is pristine, joyful, and reflects the community that inhabits it. Scholar work and other artifacts of learning permeate the space.</p>
<p>Teachers view scholar voices and ideas as valuable contributions to the learning process. They seek to understand and use scholar ideas above their own to further discourse and class learning. Scholars are viewed as intellectual agents.</p>	<p>Teachers and scholars comport themselves in a respectful and structured manner that allow all to equally participate and learn. All members of the classroom trust that each person is looking out for their mutual psychological and physical safety.</p>
<p>Teachers set high expectations that reflect their belief in the potential of all children. Work product reflects the highest level quality. Scholars are eager to rise to the challenge of high expectations because their teacher believes in them.</p>	<p>Failure is embraced as a valuable learning opportunity. Teachers and scholars view learning as a process, and are comfortable being vulnerable. They adopt a collective mindset of continuous improvement.</p>
	<p>Scholars eagerly engage in discourse to challenge, probe, and support each other's thinking. Scholars feel safe to take risks with their learning and do so frequently in independent, partner, and group work.</p>

Notes
