THE
TEACHER CLARITY
PLAYBOOK

A HANDS-ON GUIDE TO CREATING
LEARNING INTENTIONS AND SUCCESS CRITERIA
FOR ORGANIZED, EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

SECOND EDITION

INCLUDES 75% NEW MATERIAL
• RESEARCH
• EXAMPLES
• CLASSROOM VIDEOS

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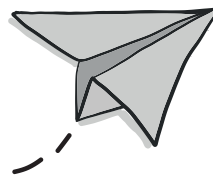
Fisher & Frey

GRADES K-12

Thank you

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CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from The Teacher Clarity Playbook, Grades K-12.

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CORWIN

INTRODUCTION

Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.

This statement, popularized by Brené Brown, speaks to the focus of this book. Being clear in what we want students to know and to be able to do is the right thing—the kind thing—we can do to support student learning.

When we are unclear, teaching suffers.

And when we are unclear, student learning suffers.

When learning is organized and intentional, and when students know what they are learning, great things can happen. When students don't know what they are learning, don't care about their learning, and have no idea if they are learning, great things are unlikely to happen.

Enter *teacher clarity*. Rosenshine and Furst (1971) identified eleven general categories of teacher behavior that accelerated learning. They noted that teacher clarity topped the list in terms of impact on students' learning. The components of teacher clarity they identified include these:

1. The clarity of the presentation is apparent to the students.

2. The points the teacher makes are clear and easy to understand.

3. The teacher explains concepts clearly and answers questions intelligently.

4. The lesson is organized.

Later, Fendick (1990) defined teacher clarity as "a measure of the clarity of communication between teachers and students in both directions" (p. 10) and further described it across four dimensions:

1. **Clarity of organization,** such that lesson tasks, assignments, and activities are linked to the learning intentions as well as assessments of and for learning

2. **Clarity of explanation,** such that information is relevant, accurate, and comprehensible to students (The explanations have to develop students' understanding of the content expressed in the learning intentions.)

3. **Clarity of examples and guided practice,** such that the lesson includes information that is illustrative and illuminating as students gradually move to independence, making progress with less support from the teacher

4. **Clarity of assessment of student learning,** such that teachers are regularly seeking out and acting upon the feedback they receive from students, especially through their verbal and written responses, that aligns with the success criteria

Teacher clarity has an effect size of 0.85 (visiblelearningmetax.com). Effect sizes are statistical measures that allow educators to determine how powerful a specific influence is on learning. John Hattie has assembled the largest educational research database in history and has calculated effect sizes on more than 350 influences on learning. The average effect size in his database is 0.40. Teacher clarity, with an effect size of 0.85, is likely to significantly influence learning. In addition, when students know what they are learning, there is a 60 percent increase in positive emotions and well-being (Verso Learning, 2018, www.versolearning.com).

A major part of teacher clarity is understanding what students need to learn and identifying how they will know they learned it. To get there, teachers must analyze standards and plan meaningful instruction and assessments. But planning should be focused on impact, not on instruction. Yes, teams of teachers can talk about how they will engage students in meaningful learning, but they must focus on the impact of those activities on learning. In doing so, they clarify their expectations. And expectations also have a powerful impact on students' learning.

TEACHER EXPECTATIONS

Teacher expectations have a powerful influence on student achievement, with an effect size of 0.58 (visiblelearningmetax.com). In large part, teachers get what they expect; teachers with low expectations are particularly successful at getting what they expect. Teacher expectations for students tend to vary by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. However, these can be disrupted by focusing on specific strategies for resetting expectations. These strategies include linking teaching goals to uniformly high standards, flexible and responsive teaching, and assessment that informs both students and teachers (Rubie-Davies & Rosenthal, 2016).

Establishing and communicating learning intentions are important ways that teachers share their expectations with students. By comparing learning intentions with grade-level expectations, or with expectations in other schools and districts, educators can get a sense of the intentions' appropriateness, and they can identify the expectations they have for their own students.

Analyzing the success criteria is another way teachers can determine the expectations they have for students. A given learning intention could have multiple success criteria. Some may be at the surface level of learning, while others are at deeper levels of learning. The success criteria communicate the level of performance that

students are expected to meet, and they allow teams of teachers to talk about the learning expected of students.

In addition, the experiences that teachers plan and the assessments they use also communicate the expectations they have for students. Teachers with low expectations tend to talk a lot to students (averaging about 80 percent of the minutes each week), and they tend to assess students at the basic skill level. Teachers with higher expectations tend to talk less (averaging about 55 percent of the minutes each week), and they tend to assess students at deeper levels of understanding.

All these elements—learning intentions, success criteria, meaningful experiences, and assessments—are components of teacher clarity, and each can be used to foster students' learning. Let's start with a discussion about the expectations teachers have for students' learning.

TEACHER COLLABORATION IS VITAL FOR RAISING EXPECTATIONS

One way to improve teacher clarity is to approach the task in the company of others. You may be using this playbook as a team. In that case, you probably have collaboration baked into your professional learning processes. One common structure for fostering teacher collaboration to improve the quality of learning has been the formation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs usually involve small groups of educators who have come together to support each other's learning for the purpose of improving student achievement. These teams use the five PLC+ questions to keep a relentless focus on student learning outcomes and explain why the impact of PLCs is powerful (Fisher et al., 2019):

- Where are we going?
- Where are we now?
- How do we move learning forward?
- What did we learn today?
- Who benefited and who did not?

These discussions can result in improved instruction as well as better outcomes for students (e.g., Lai et al., 2014). In collaborative teams, teachers identify learning intentions and discuss ideas for instruction. They meet to review student work and figure out if their efforts have been fruitful. They also talk about students who need additional instruction or intervention to be successful. In other words, teacher clarity is the *what*, and the PLC+ process is the *how*. Teams use PLC+ processes to continually improve the clarity of the learning experiences for students.

Teams answer each of the five questions as they engage in teacher clarity work. Figure 1 provides an overview of the modules of teacher clarity linked with the PLC+ questions. You'll notice that the modules do not line up in order; planning instruction and assessment opportunities are recursive, and teams typically talk about all four questions in an integrated way.

FIGURE 1   PLC+ Questions and Teacher Clarity

PLC QUESTION	TEACHER CLARITY MODULE	DESCRIPTION
Where are we going?	• Module 1: Identifying Concepts and Skills • Module 2: Sequencing Learning Progressions • Module 3: Crafting and Sharing Learning Intentions • Module 4: Constructing and Sharing Success Criteria	In these modules, teachers or teams of teachers are analyzing the standards to determine what students need to know. They are sequencing learning such that it is logical and allows for both content and language to develop.
Where are we now?	• Module 5: Including Language Expectations in Success Criteria • Module 6: Determining the Relevance of the Learning	In these modules, teachers identify the relevance of the learning expectations to ensure that students are engaged and motivated. In addition, teachers consider the ways in which language contributes to students' successful learning.
How do we move learning forward?	• Module 8: Creating Meaningful Learning Experiences	In this module, teachers design meaningful learning experiences aligned with the gradual release of responsibility.
What did we learn today? Who benefited and who did not?	• Module 7: Designing Assessment Opportunities • Module 9: Establishing Mastery of Standards	In these modules, teachers collect and analyze evidence of students' learning to monitor progress and determine mastery of the standards. They can use this information to monitor progress through instruction and intervention.

Meaningful teacher collaboration builds collective teacher efficacy and collective responsibility for learning, which is a constellation of attitudes and beliefs about the efforts of a school to affect student learning (Goddard et al., 2000). More to the point, teachers with a high collective efficacy believe that "teachers in this school can get through to the most difficult students" (Goddard et al., 2000, p. 480). Importantly, perceptions are based on experiences. When teachers experience success collaborating with peers and those collaborations improve teaching and learning, they notice. These accumulated data points become the collective efficacy that researchers note is so powerful. With an effect size of 1.34, collective teacher efficacy is high on Hattie's list of influences on student achievement, more than tripling the speed of learning.

USING THIS PLAYBOOK

It is great if you can use this playbook as part of your collaboration with other educators, but you might be using this playbook on your own. In that case, never fear! We have taken steps to ensure that our discussions provide examples, suggestions, and prompts to guide your thinking—just as if you were working with colleagues. In the back of the book and on the companion website for this book (resources .corwin.com/TCP2e), you will find sample answers for the Guided Practice phase of each step in the process. These are not absolutes, but they do represent our thinking as we worked with experienced elementary and secondary teachers to develop these examples. You may have answers that differ from the ones we furnished; all we ask is that you are able to justify your responses in ways that are consistent with high expectations for student learning. In turn, we hope you will remain open to our responses. After all, reading involves engaging in silent dialogues with authors.

THE MODULES

Each of the nine learning modules in this playbook is designed to move you systematically through a process that begins and ends with the standards, from analysis through assessment. Our intent is not to introduce you to a process that you must implement in a lockstep way, but rather to build a habit of mind for how it is that you systematically and efficiently analyze standards, build curriculum, teach, and assess. In other words, this process can mobilize the impact of teacher clarity in your classroom. A flowchart for the nine modules can be found in Figure 2.
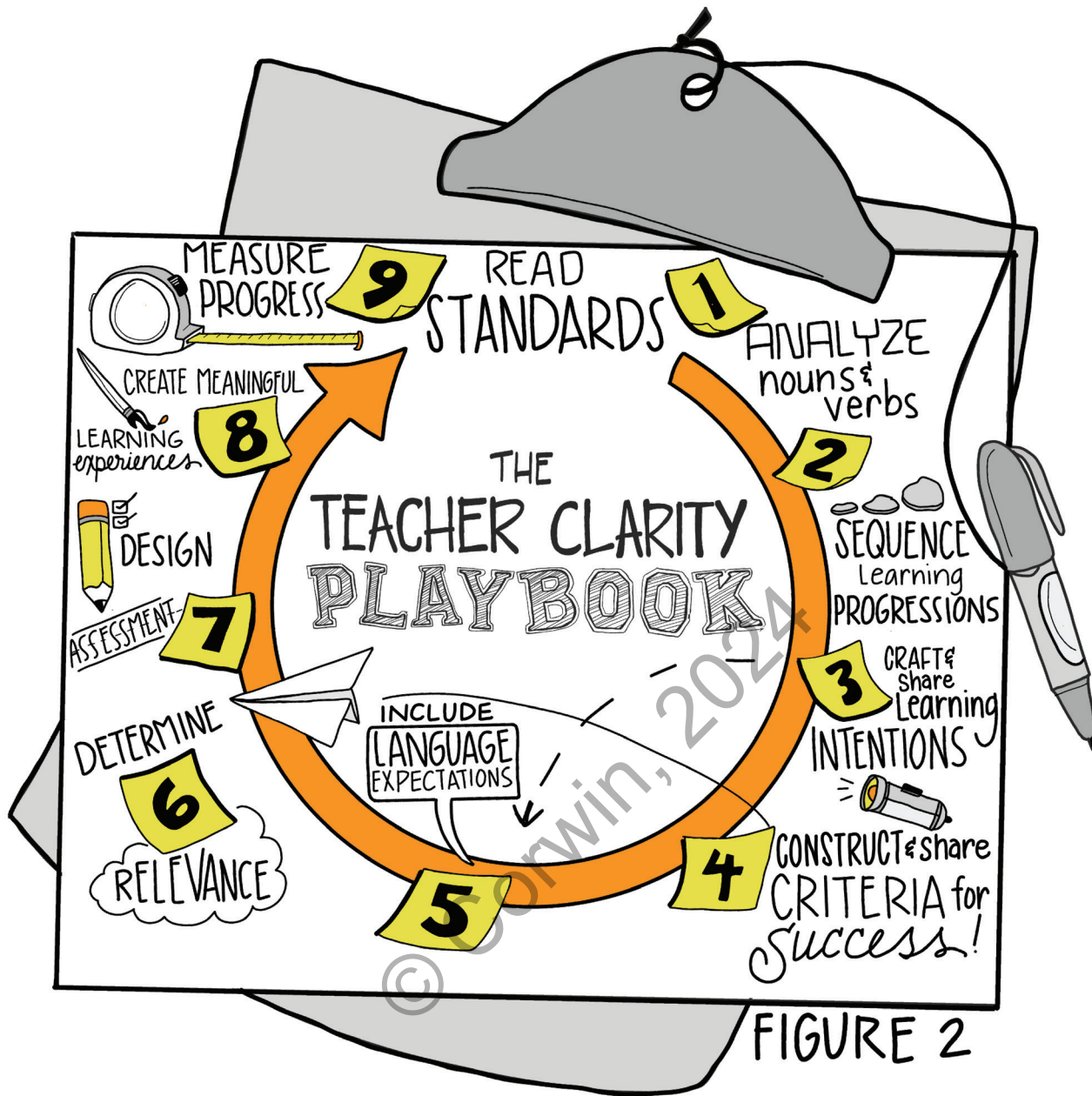
FIGURE 2

THE LEARNING PROCESS

Each module utilizes a modified version of the gradual release of responsibility instructional framework (Fisher & Frey, 2021). Each begins with an explanation of the core concepts of the module to establish the purpose for learning and provide direct explanation. The module then continues with modeling how the process is applied through four examples:

- First-grade English language arts
- Third-grade mathematics
- Eighth-/Ninth-grade algebra
- Ninth-/Tenth-grade English language arts

In addition, there are modeled examples available online.

We integrate examples from the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and from social studies standards in the Guided Practice sections. Although some will resonate more with you than others, depending on your own professional interests, we encourage you to engage with all the examples so you can see a pattern across grade and content areas.

The Guided Practice section is for you to write on—and to discuss with your team, if possible. We have suggested answers in the back of the book to help you, but, as noted earlier, they should not be interpreted too narrowly as the *only* correct response. Each module ends with a section called Independent Practice, where you apply the same process to a grade level and subject area you have selected. Although that practice involves independent learning, ideally you will also be able to continue these discussions with colleagues.

OUR HOPE

We really do believe that teacher clarity is important—so critical, in fact, we are convinced it is key to the Visible Learning® story. We don't promise that it is easy work, but we do promise that if you see this through to the classroom, you will detect a notable positive change in how you and your students talk about learning. What could be better than that?

NOTES