Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together

CURRICULUM GUIDE
SECTION 1, MODULE C

Engagement and the 4 Rs

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*in partnership with
many wise youth and adult guides*

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MODULE C
Engagement and the 4 Rs

OBJECTIVE: Explore the framework of Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Shared Responsibility as a foundation for engagement and school transformation.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS

- Engagement in learning is significantly impacted by the rigor, relevance, student- teacher relationship, and shared responsibility in the learning and decision-making process.

- Transformed schools have distinctive qualities.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What is the relationship between engagement in learning and rigor, relevance, relationships, and shared responsibility in learning and decision-making?

ACTIVITY 1
Introduction to the 4 Rs

PURPOSE: Establish Youth and Adult Transforming Schools Together (YATST) participants' understanding of the 4 Rs framework through theory and personal stories that affirm their importance in the learning process.

TIME: 1 hour

MATERIALS:

- 4 Rs Venn Diagram
- Short articles about what experts say regarding Rigor, Relevance, Relationships, and Shared Responsibility — enough copies for each participant.
- Newsprint pages with one of the Rs written at the top and the unfinished sentence, "The reasons this R is important to engagement are…"
- Markers for each of the 4 stations
- 4Rs and the Neuropsychology of Learning handouts

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Create four stations, one for each of the Rs. Put the reading for just one of the Rs on that table — enough copies for each participant. Also put the newsprint paper, including the unfinished sentence, with the name of the R and several markers.

ACTIVITY

Step 1: Split your group into four smaller groups. (If you do this with a large group, make sure no station has more than 12). Have each group go to one of the Rs.

Step 2: Have group members read the expert's description of their station's R. Ask them to underline one sentence or phrase that is most thought-provoking or powerful for them. After the designated reading time of 8–10 minutes, ask that each person be given a maximum of 1 minute to share their phrase and why they chose it. Explain that this is a listening activity for everyone except the person sharing their designated phrase or sentence — not a time for dialogue. Make sure each table designates a time keeper.

Step 3: Next, ask each person at their table to share one story about a time when this R factor influenced a memorable learning experience of their own. It can be about the presence of this R and its positive influence on learning, or its notable absence leading to a negative influence on learning. This chosen event does not need to take place in school. It just has to be a time when the person vividly remembers a learning event that was particularly significant.

Step 4: Ask participants to re-read the expert's description and think about their own personal story. Have the group brainstorm and record on newsprint why this R is important to engagement. What does this quality provide that makes it so important for learning to occur? Why does it matter? How would you explain the importance of this quality of engagement to someone else? Make sure people think about the personal stories they heard, as well as the reading, to create as long and comprehensive a bulleted list as possible.

Step 5: Have each group report out, asking for one or two stories from each group and their lists of the ways this R relates to engagement. If it is a small group, each person might briefly share their personal story.

EXTENSION

See Section 1, Module B, Activity 7: Chalk Talk: How can research about learning help us remodel our schools?

This exercise explores compelling reasons why schools need to change based on what we now know about learning due to breakthroughs in the neuroscience of learning. The silent dialogue Chalk Talk process promotes engagement by all participants as they learn about current research and apply it to their own remodeling efforts. This activity also reinforces the 4 Rs framework, with research clustered by each of the Rs.

Relevance

Connections are made between course content and learners' previous learning, learners' lives, and their goals.

Relationship

Strong student-teacher relationships exist, leading to learning tailored to the individual's goals. The teacher serves as guide and facilitator, rather than "the expert."

Shared Responsibility

Students and teachers both actively participate in the learning process and share in decision-making.

Rigor

High expectations for all leads to challenging curriculum. This helps students master content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and challenging.

What some experts say about *rigor*

Let's start with what it is not. Rigor is not fifty math problems for homework when fewer will achieve mastery. Rigor is not more worksheets for the student who finished the assignment early. Rigor is not using a seventh grade textbook with your high performing sixth grade students. Rigor is not covering more material in a shorter period of time. Rigor is not cold or impersonal. And most of all, rigor is not just for a select group of students.

So, what is rigor? The most concise definition of rigor I've encountered is taken from *Teaching What Matters Most: Standards and Strategies for Raising Student Achievement* by Richard W. Strong, Harvey F. Silver and Matthew J. Perini, ASCD, 2001. According to Strong, Silver, and Perini, "Rigor is the goal of helping students develop the capacity to understand content that is complex, ambiguous, provocative, and personally or emotionally challenging."

Isn't it ironic that this definition of rigor presents the possibility that even an advanced placement course may not be full of rigor? While the curriculum may be complex, time may not be given to allow the content to reveal its ambiguous, provocative, or personally and emotionally challenging nature. And because of this, students are simply memorizing huge chunks of facts, regurgitating them onto an AP exam, and then forgetting them forever. How discouraging it must be for both the teacher and the student to expend so much time and energy and have so little to show for their efforts.

Think about what kind of teaching methods will allow teachers to deliver their curriculum in ways which meet the requirements of rigor set out by Strong and company. Then factor in the skills we must help our students acquire so they may successfully encounter curriculum on this level.

We're talking about instructional delivery methods like project based instruction which use an inquiry model to empower students to seek their own answers to important issues, create models that represent their findings, and explore ways their discoveries can make a positive difference in the world. We're talking about classrooms that find ways to be connected to the world, whether or not they use the latest technologies, to help create those personal and emotional synapses that motivate students to embrace challenging curriculum. We're talking about classrooms where students are taught the strategies they need to attack challenging text, detect bias, gather relevant information, and decide how to put what they've learned to work in a useful way.

—Debbie Shults, excerpted from debbieshultsblog.blogspot.com/2007/09/is-it-rigor-or-is-it-something-else.html

"Rigor is based on a deeply held belief that EVERY child can learn if given the support and resources to do so. . . . There is a brilliant child locked inside every student."

—Marva Collins

What some experts say about relevance

Relevance: Connecting the Curriculum Through Real-World Applications

The number one question on many high school students' minds is, "What's the point of school — why do I have to know this stuff?" When you ask students why they have to learn the material in any given lesson, most will simply roll their eyes and shrug. Too many students who dare to ask this question aloud receive vague answers such as, "You'll need to know this in college" or, more simply, "Because it's going to be on the test." More often, the question is never asked or answered, either by students or by the teachers themselves. Many teachers are covering material that they have been told they should teach — a textbook or curriculum where little or no effort has been made to explain why something is important to learn or how it prepares the students for adult life. Even less frequently are students helped to pursue their own areas of interest through independent reading or research projects. There's not time; there's too much to cover.

Yet it is increasingly clear that many of today's students do not retain knowledge or master skills that appear to have little or no relevance to their lives. Because today's students have less extrinsic motivation to learn, such as fear of authority, their intrinsic motivations to learn must be tapped more than is currently the case in most classrooms.

We need to show students how math concepts apply in the solution of real world problems and how science is used in workplaces. Students need opportunities to discuss how knowledge of history can deepen their understanding of important current issues. They need to see and understand, through job shadowing and internships what skills adults need and how they use them in their daily work. Students also need more opportunities throughout their school years to pursue their own individual areas of interest - in part to experience the satisfaction of learning for its own sake, and in part to gain mastery of the skills and discipline needed to be an independent, lifelong learner.

Relevance, then, is essential for students to understand the purpose of learning and be motivated to achieve rigor. Students in all ability groups, when asked what changes would help them learn more in school, talk about needing opportunities for hands-on and applied learning. This answer is second only to the issue of teacher-student relationships in their discussions of how schools can be improved.

—Tony Wagner, 2006

What some experts say about *relationships*

Respectful Relationships: Finding the Key to Motivation

This brings us to the third R and the most important element in motivating students to want to achieve at high standards, the quality of relationships with their teachers. It has always been true that students tend to learn very little from teachers who they feel are not respectful toward them. They may feel goaded into doing the minimum by a teacher who uses fear and intimidation, but they will never do their best, even in subjects they enjoy. And for today's students, who often have little contact with their parents or other adults, relationships with caring, respectful teachers have become even more important.

Students attending urban, suburban, or rural high schools; students who struggle academically; and students who take advanced courses all say that the one thing that makes the greatest difference in their learning is the quality of their relationships with their teachers. They want teachers who care about teaching and who are challenging and competent, of course, but what they talk about most often is how they are treated by their teachers. Does the teacher see them as individuals, rather than just faces in the crowd? Does the teacher try to know and understand what students may be dealing with at home or in their neighborhood? To what extent does a teacher go out of his or her way to ensure that all students are learning versus just plowing through the chapters? Or does the teacher only pay attention to the "smart" kids? It is increasingly clear to us that, although may of today's students may have diminished fear and respect for formal authority, they have an increased need to connect with adults who can guide and coach them in school and in life.

Research by the Public Agenda Foundation in its study of adolescents' views of school, report the most startling finding is the issue of lack of respect in schools, in general, and particularly between teachers and students. Only four in ten public school students thought most of their teachers treated them with respect. And more than two-thirds of the students surveyed said that they learn "a lot more" from a teacher who treats them with respect, explains lessons carefully, and cares personally about them.

Many teachers also want closer relationships with their students. A growing number understand that, in fact, they cannot motivate a student whom they do not know. The conditions of teaching and learning in most schools - especially secondary schools - make it extremely difficult for teachers to establish the closer relationships with students that many seek.

—*Tony Wagner, 2006*

Administrators, students, staff members, parents, and community share responsibility for creating a safe, caring, ethical and supportive learning environment. . . . and building relationships that are based upon their mutual aspirations and interests.

—*Daniel Baron, 2007*

What some experts say about *responsibility*

Students describe as integral to reinforcing a positive tone in schools whether or not they are provided some input into their own education, that is, whether they experience a sense of ownership. While many students with whom I have spoken feel that their teachers invite and respect their opinions and explain the rationale for different educational practices, many others perceive this quality to be lacking in their schools.

Most students are receptive to parents and teachers establishing rules and limits as long as they feel the adults have listened to and respected their opinion. Some may argue that students only feel listened to when adults agree with them, but I have not discovered this to be the case. From my perspective, problems arise when students sense their voice is not being heard, when they experience rules as arbitrary and imposed with little explanation, and when they perceive that adults are speaking down to them. In such instances, a feeling of ownership is lacking, replaced by resentment and a lack of cooperation.

—Robert Brooks, 2003

When put into practice, student voice at the most basic level can consist of youths sharing their opinions of problems and potential solutions at the most basic level. Partnering with students to identify school problems and possible solutions reminds teachers and administrators that students possess unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate. Students also can raise tough issues that administrators and teachers might not highlight, including examining structural and cultural injustices within schools rather than blaming failing students for not succeeding in schools (Fine, 1991; Mitra, 2001).

Although uncommon, student voice initiatives can entail instances in which young people collaborate with adults to address the problems in their schools and in the broader policy environment. In a youth-adult partnership, specifically, youths and adults together have the potential to contribute to decision-making processes, to learn from one another, and to promote change. A focus on mutual teaching and learning can develop in youth-adult partnerships with the expectation that all parties involved assume a leadership role in some aspects of their shared effort (Camino, 2000).

Such endeavors foster mutual respect and responsibility. Both adults and youths need opportunities to share what they have learned based on their experiences and their beliefs.

Research has found that youth-adult partnerships can 1) contribute to improved educational outcomes and serve as a catalyst for changes in schools which have led to improvements in curriculum and assessment development…2) have also improved classroom practice directly by teachers working with students to co-create curriculum and to engage in dialogues about ways to shape the learning occurring in the classroom…3) improved teacher training…4) increased positive youth development outcomes. Participation can increase youth attachment to schools, which in turn correlates with improved academic outcomes. Youth-adult partnerships can lead to powerful increases in civic engagement of youths, including an increase in the belief of young people that they can make a difference in their lives and in the lives of others.

—Dana Mitra, 2007 (slight editing)

Because we want students to be responsible, we must give them occasions to practice responsibility. Because we want them to act respectfully, we must respect and appreciate them. When we believe in their abilities, students deliver. When we trust them, and they know it, we can allocate our resources of time and energy differently.

—Nelson Beaudoin, 2005

LEARNING & THE BRAIN
Rigor

Rigor is the level of challenge in a learning situation that stretches the learner to move beyond current mastery to new levels of understanding. Many developmental theorists have identified the critical nature of rigor and challenge in the learning process, building on the inherent curiosity of human beings so evident in early childhood. It is clear that the negative neurologic impact of both too much and too little rigor highlights the need to tailor learning experiences to the individual's unique window of required challenge. New research regarding the neuroplasticity of the brain affirms the learning potential of *all* individuals. Once this "growth mindset" is understood, learners seek higher levels of challenge and engagement and can embrace "failure" as integral to learning.

Rigor is a central force in active learning as identified by developmental theorists.

Early developmental theorists such as Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky and John Dewey all identified a critical period in the learning process when the individual is forced to stretch beyond his or her existing experience or schema of the world and enter into a period of "disequilibrium" or the unknown. It is here, in what Vygotsky termed the "proximal zone of development," that the individual actively constructs a new and deeper understanding of concepts and content. (Vygotsky, 1978).

Finding the right level of rigor is key to engage the brain and sustain learning.

We won't take up a task if we don't think we can manage it – but if it's too easy we also don't bother (Cushman, 2013). The neurologic stakes are high for finding the appropriate level of challenge or rigor in a learning situation.

▷ **Too little rigor results in boredom, which is toxic to our brains.** Neurotoxic boredom occurs when a learner experiences sustained boredom; this can create chronic stress. Such stress correlates with changes in the brain that negatively affect cognition, memory, and emotional behavior (Willis, 2013).

▷ **Too much rigor (often accompanied by repeated failure) results in blocking new information and avoidance.** Engaged learners integrate failures as steps in the process of discovery—as opportunities to learn more. But if the level of challenge is too high, the experience of recurring failure can discourage effort. "People will participate in learning activities that have yielded success for them and avoid those that have produced failure" (Sousa, 2006). In the case of repeated failure, the brain begins to literally block incoming information. "The learner resists being part of the unwanted learning experience and resorts to some other cerebral activity to avoid the situation" (Sousa, 2006). This is often is mistaken for laziness or limited ability rather than the brain's response to negative emotions associated with learning. Although it is possible for the frontal lobe to override this emotional response, it requires time and support. Therefore, it is important to reframe "failure" as an essential and welcome aspect of learning when increasing rigor. Otherwise, it will result in fewer engaged students and minimize the risk taking necessary for learning.

Individuals with a growth mindset embrace rigor.

Carol Dweck's research on the mental mindset of the learner provides a means to increase an individual's threshold for challenge and ability to embrace failure in the learning process. (Dweck, 2006). Current research regarding the neuroplasticity of the brain confirms that learning potential relates to use of the brain — the more you use the brain, the stronger it grows (growth mindset). This contrasts with previous theories of intelligence, which asserted inherited intellectual abilities (fixed mindset). The old intellectual models perpetuated a myth that some people are smart and some people are not, which often results in a self-fulfilling prophesy. Individuals "live up or down" to their assumed high or low potential and perform in school and make career choices accordingly.

The mindset research highlights the profound influence of the belief in one's learning potential. Learners take greater risks and have responsibility in the learning process, seeking higher levels of rigor or challenge, when they better understand their control over their intellectual development through effort.

Reframing "failure" as an integral step in the learning process is key to realizing the potential of shifting from a fixed to growth mindset. This has significant implications for changing how we currently assess learning.

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LEARNING & THE BRAIN
Relevance

Relevance means there's a connection between the content under study and the learner's own life, interests, questions, or past learning. Current brain research shows the importance of relevance in an individual's ability to learn and level of engagement, as well as how much learning is retained over time. Teachers must draw out and work with the preexisting understandings that their students bring to them (National Research Council, 2000). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the percentage of students who find school work meaningful, interesting, and important to their later life has steadily decreased from 1983 to 2000 (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005). Educational practices that increase relevance and trigger some emotional connection to the content will predictably enhance engagement and motivation, and increase long term storage of information.

Relevance promotes stronger and longer lasting neural connections.

Strong neural connections are fundamental to learning. The brain literally lays down new neurons as we learn. Brain research reveals that meaningful and contextual examples create more neural connections at the moment of learning. Connecting new information to existing neural connections over time increases the strength of these neural pathways. This in turn enhances long-term retention (Medina, 2008; Bernard, 2010; Sousa, 2006).

Only neural connections that are used are kept; connections that are not used are pruned and discarded (How Youth Learn; Hinton, Fischer, Glennon 2012). Simply put, if you don't use information, you lose it. One way to prevent pruning is to connect new information to existing neural connections and pathways. (Medina, 2008; Bernard, 2010; Cushman, 2013; Toshalis , Nakkula, 2012). This requires building relevance into curriculum choices and supports curriculum choices that allows for depth of study in areas of interest.

Relevance sparks engagement and increases motivation.

The brain is continuously scanning our surroundings to flag things of importance and interest, paying more attention to those events that are perceived to be more important (Medina, 2008). The more value we assign to information, the more motivated we are to "pay attention" (Cushman, 2013).

Motivation increases with relevance, as reported in an extensive review of learning research by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012). When a there is a deep connection between what students are learning and their individual goals, they become intrinsically motivated. This type of motivation, driven by internal rewards and satisfaction rather than by external rewards, is the most effective kind of incentive. (Kohn, A.,1993; Toshalis, Nakkula, 2012).

Relevance increases long-term memory storage of what is learned.

When we're learning new information our brain asks two questions before it moves it into long-term storage: does this make sense and does it have meaning (Sousa, 2006)? In order for information to make sense the learner must be

able to "fit" the information into their existing knowledge about how the world works (Sousa, 2006). They also must perceive that the information has meaning or is relevant to learning. Brain scans have shown that when new learning makes sense and has meaning there is more cerebral activity and more information retention (Maquire et al. 1999).

Relevant learning that is coupled with positive emotions increases the likelihood of long term memory storage.

When learning is relevant, it often triggers feelings. Positive emotions have a direct effect on attention and working memory. We are more likely to remember information if we have an emotional investment in it (Forgas, 2006; Sousa, 2006). When we are in a safe learning environment and are feeling emotionally invested in our learning, our brain releases endorphins and other neurotransmitters that stimulate the frontal lobes of the brain and enhance alertness and memory (Willis, 2009; Sousa, 2006).

Conversely, when we are feeling stressed or unsafe in our learning environment, have negative emotions about the information we are processing, or doubts about our ability to learn, our brain produces cortisol. This hormone activates "a fight or flight" response and frontal lobe activity is reduced because we are focused on dealing with the stress of a situation (Sousa, 2006).

Our emotional state affects our learning. When we're experiencing positive emotions we are more likely to remember new information. However, when we are experiencing stress and negative emotions, our brain's ability process information is compromised. Creating learning environments and developing relationships, which nurture positive emotions will increase the likelihood of new information entering long term memory and improve learning.

Relevance is different for each individual.

We are all born with different genetic makeup and accrue different life experiences. These differences affect what we view as relevant and how we make sense of information (Sousa, 2006). It is therefore important to create diverse educational opportunities, which allow for a wide array of perspectives on what is relevant.

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LEARNING & THE BRAIN
Student-Teacher **Relationships**

Relationships have a direct and powerful impact on learning. Research affirms that learning is enhanced in the context of strong student-teacher relationships that continually reinforce high expectations and a growth mindset. Most important, a safe, caring, and supportive learning environment reduces stress, which impedes learning. Strong relationships also increase the potential to create curriculum that is relevant to the learner and allows for a "metacognitive approach" where the student is continually engaged in on-going self-assessment, reflection and co-constructing learning.

Positive student-teacher relationships build high expectations to promote learning.

Self-expectation regarding academic achievement is the most powerful predictor of student achievement according to researcher John Hattie (2009), who studied 128 major variables impacting learning. There is also a strong documented link between a teacher's expectations of a student and the student's performance (Baksh, 1984; Brophy, 1983; Ormrod, J., 1999). When adults give up on students, students give up on themselves. Conversely, when teachers believe that each and every student is capable of high achievement, a positive learning experience for all students is created. This phenomenon is often called "a self-fulfilling prophecy" or the "Pygmalion effect" and the impact on learning is well documented (Aamodt & Wang, 2010; Baksh, 1984; Brophy, 1983; Ormrod, J., 1999).

Current research by Blackwell, Trzesniewski & Dweck (2007) also supports the importance of reinforcing the capacity of each student's learning potential or "growth mindset." Current brain research has revealed the neuroplasticity of the brain and its ability to grow with use. Dispelling the myth of limited potential has a powerful impact on that growth. Strong student-teacher relationships that continually reinforce high expectations and a growth mindset therefore play a critical role in learning.

Positive student-teacher relationships reduce stress, a barrier to learning.

High levels of stress diminish our ability to learn, physically changing the neurological pathways in our brains, affecting whether or not information is allowed into the brain, and then how information is interpreted. Yet pervasive student stress in schools is well documented. Positive student-teacher relationships can serve as an antidote to this stress, producing conditions that will predictably increase learning.

▷ **What is the neurologic impact of stress?** When the brain first filters information from our eyes, ears, mouth and face in order to decide what information will be allowed to enter the brain, it goes through the reticular activating system (RAS). The RAS is located in the lower back of your brain (brain stem) and is the gateway into the higher thinking brain (prefrontal cortex). When you are feeling stressed, information is re-routed into an area of the brain that reacts instinctively with a "fight or flight" response (Willis, 2009). When that happens, the brain is no longer available for learning, but is rather focusing on managing stress.

High levels of stress physically alter the structure of the brain, developing increased dendrite connections in the lower centers of the brain (fight or flight), while damaging the hippocampus and shriveling dendrite connections in the pre-

frontal cortex (higher thinking brain). This can result in permanent memory deficits and harm higher-order thinking skills (Aamodt & Wang, 2010; Willis, 2013; Willis, 2009; Medina, 2008).

▷ **How pervasive is stress in the school setting?** According to a 2010 survey by the American Psychological Association, forty-three percent of 13- to 14 year-olds report that they feel stressed every single day (Cushman, 2013; Center for the Developing Child, 2014). By ages 15 to 17 that number rises to fifty-nine percent (Cushman, 2013; Center for the Developing Child, 2014). These numbers suggest that significant proportions of students are experiencing high levels of stress, with a negative impact on their learning.

▷ **What is the solution?** Stable and nurturing relationships between youth and adults is one of the most effective methods to soften, prevent, or reverse the damaging neurologic effects of stress (Center on the Developing Child, 2014; Cushman, 2013). Teachers can foster a sense of safety and well-being by supporting students as they risk trying any new learning challenge.

Positive student-teacher relationships promote relevance in learning.

Relevance promotes engaged learning (see "Relevance" overview). Toshalis & Nakkula (2012) studied key factors affecting engagement and highlighted the point that "motivating students to apply themselves in the classroom requires knowing them, their beliefs, their anxieties and their backgrounds - and customizing approaches that are responsive to each." Positive student-teacher relationships provide the foundation for knowing and understanding students; that knowledge becomes essential to developing relevance in their learning experience.

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LEARNING & THE BRAIN
Shared **Responsibility**

Shared responsibility lies at the interface of rigor, relevance, and strong student-teacher relationships. This fourth R brings integrity to the other three key attributes of engaging learning. Two findings within current research highlight the importance of students and teachers sharing responsibility in learning. First, it is critical that the learner takes an active role in the learning process. The phrase "the person who is doing the work is the person who is learning" best captures this neurologically validated fact. The students become more active as they assume increased responsibility for learning and the teacher's role shifts to that of guide. Second, effective learning depends on the individual's understanding his or her own learning process. Once the ability to reflect on one's own learning is mastered, the teacher and student can then continually shape the learning context based on these insights. This is referred to as "meta-cognition" or "visible learning," which sparks both engagement and content mastery. The nature of learning requires a dynamic partnership where students and teachers engage in a continuous loop of reflection and co-construction. This fourth R becomes the way to optimize rigor, relevance, and strong student-teacher relationships.
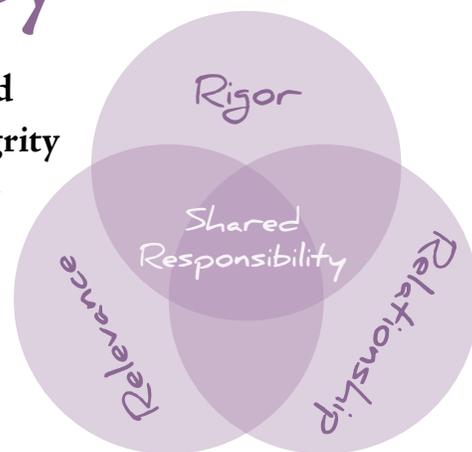
Learning must be active

Shared responsibility requires a partnership in learning, moving the role of students along a continuum from passive to active participants in their education. When students become active participants in their learning, research has affirmed that their brains are better able to process, retain, and transfer their learning to new situations (National Research Council, 2000; Weinberger 2008; Winer & Schreiner, 2011). "In the brain, the mental manipulation required to construct understanding fuels the neuroplasticity that yields durable, long-term memory " (Willis, 2014).

The act of struggling to solve a problem is directly related to the amount that is learned and its durability (Brown, Roediger & McDaniel, 2014). When students share responsibility in their learning, they are more likely to perform better academically, have a more positive self-concept, sustain better relationships with their peers, have a greater sense of responsibility, and demonstrate higher rates of college graduation (Zelden & Collura, 2010).

Learning is enhanced through meta-cognition, or the ability to reflect on one's own learning within a student-teacher partnership.

Researcher John Hattie (2012) conducted an extensive meta-analysis of key variables affecting learning and concluded that "the remarkable feature of the evidence is that the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become

learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers" (Hattie, 2012). Others describe this capacity of being a "learner of learning" as meta-cognition.

When students develop the skills to predict and self-assess their learning on an on-going basis, teachers can be highly effective guides or "activators," continually calibrating the level of challenge and relevance based on their strong relationship to the learner. "It is the feedback to the teacher about what students can and cannot do that is more powerful than feedback to the students, and it necessitates a different way of interacting and respecting students" (Hattie, 2009). Current research highlights the importance of active learning by means of an ongoing student teacher partnership (National Research Council, 2000).

Motivation is increased through learner-directed goal setting, coupled with continuous and timely feedback within a student-teacher partnership.

A positive physiologic response to learning is created when learning includes learner-directed goal setting and continuous student-teacher feedback, in the context of a learning partnership. Dopamine is triggered when individuals receive feedback that they are en route to attaining a goal and when they successfully reach that goal (Willis, 2014). This produces an experience of pleasure, reduced stress, and increased motivation and perseverance. A commitment to partnership in learning builds a positive association with learning through this continuous activation of the dopamine reward system, seeding a life-long desire and capacity for learning.

Student motivation and engagement are enhanced with increased levels of responsibility and control over their learning.

Students are more likely to be motivated and engaged in an activity when they feel they have a voice in how the activity is carried out and how it concludes (Eccles & Wigfield 2002; Hinton et al. 2012). Intrinsic motivation is fostered when students share in the responsibility of co-creating their educational experience. "Fostering student voice—empowering youth to express their opinions and influence their educational experiences so that they feel they have a stake in the outcomes—is one of the most powerful tools schools have to increase learning." This important finding arose from an extensive literature review conducted by Toshalis and Nakkula (2012) to identify ways to increase motivation and engagement.

SOURCES

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ACTIVITY 2

The 4 Rs: What They Look and Sound Like

PURPOSE: The following are supplemental resources to deepen participants' understanding of the 4 Rs by reviewing videos and other materials to discern what these concepts look and sound like in practice.

TIME: 20 minutes minimum

MATERIALS

- Web access
- Computer, LCD, speakers
- Copies of the 4 Rs grid for each person
- Resources (see below)

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Look to make connections to student experiences that are similar to or brought up by the examples that they watch or read about.

RESOURCES

Facilitators should preview these options and choose the one(s) that best fits for their audience. These are just some resources that highlight the 4Rs. You likely have some of your own that could be used. Please share those with us at UP for Learning so that we may share them with others. We are always looking for new, interesting resources, particularly those that highlight the 4Rs, youth-adult partnership, and youth voice. We will eagerly share what we find.

History You Can Touch

www.whatkidscando.org/featurestories/2009/06_history_touch/index.html
Article

This article tells about a charter school that focuses on history. The audio and photos may no longer work, but the brief article highlights Rigor and Relevance.

Lights the Fire of Project Learning

www.edutopia.org/maine-project-learning-rigorous-real-world-relevance-video
Video: 5 min 29 sec

This video provides an overview of students studying homelessness in their community. This high school had 100%

of students in the first graduating class be accepted to college (75% to four-year schools) and exceeded state averages on all core subject and SAT standardized testing. It is an Expeditionary Learning school. This video shows clear Relevance connection as well as Relationships and Rigor.

Freedom Writers

Film

This is a feature-length movie. If you have the time, the examples of the 4 Rs are abundant! People of all ages are moved by this story of a young teacher (played by Hilary Swank) inspiring her students in a newly integrated high school.

Relationships (advisories)

www.teachingchannel.org/videos/student-advisor-relationship-edv

Video: 3 min

This video looks at building student-advisor relationships at Minnesota New Country School. They work to understand each student as a whole student, academically and personally. The goal is for teachers to help guide students from where they are to where they want to be. Through creating connections that lead to a trusting partnership, teachers help students recognize their goals on the way to adulthood.

Rigor, relevance, and shared responsibility

www.teachingchannel.org/videos/teacher-teams-nvps

Video: 11 min 20 sec

This "teaching as a team sport" video features the organization New Visions For Public Schools and Bronx Latin School. Collaboration among teachers is essential to providing the support they need to help students achieve their greatest success. Understanding how learners learn and how to apply that understanding helps teachers create deeper learning experiences. Ultimately, experiences that emphasize constructing an argument, stating it, and defending it demonstrate deeper learning.

Watch Out TED Talks: Here Comes a New Generation

blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/2014/01/watch-out-ted-talks-here-comes-a-new-generation

Article

This piece connects to Rigor and Relevance, introducing the idea of TED-Ed clubs for schools. It's designed to spark the question of what makes a great presentation, both content and how you present. Students discuss the qualities of a great idea, research their topics, identify good and bad habits in presentations, give feedback to one another and ultimately give a TED-style talk, captured on video.

ACTIVITY

Step 1: Ask participants to preview the video or audio piece you have chosen (or read the complementary article). Pass out the 4 Rs grid and ask them to be thinking about what evidence they see of any one of the 4 Rs in the chosen piece. Inform them that they will have time afterwards to work with another person to build and share their observations.

Step 2: Give 2 minutes at the close of the viewing/reading to let each individual note what they saw as evidence of any one of the Rs. Then have them join with a partner and review lists.

Step 3: Ask the full group for examples for each R, starting with one R and having each group just give one example. Ask them to only share new and different examples as you do these rounds.

Alternate Option: Make a large 4-quadrant grid out of masking tape on the floor. Label each quadrant with one of the Rs. Ask the group to choose the one moment or piece of evidence in the video that was most vivid or memorable as evidence of an R. Ask them to physically go to that part of the quadrant and then share their stories.

RELEVANCE	RIGOR
Connections are made between course content and previous learning, learners' lives, and their goals.	High expectations for all leads to challenging curriculum. This helps students master content that is complex, provocative, and challenging.
RELATIONSHIP	Shared RESPONSIBILITY
Strong student-teacher relationships exist, leading to learning tailored to the student's goals. The teacher serves as guide and facilitator, rather than "the expert."	Students and teachers both actively participate in the learning process and share in decisio- making.

ACTIVITY 3

'Profiles of a Student': Applying the 4 Rs

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative protocol, www.schoolreforminitiative.org, by Gene Thompson-Grove

PURPOSE: This activity is another means to introduce the 4 Rs through personal stories. Providing the profiles of students will not only trigger memories, but also highlight the need to personalize learning due to the diversity in any one classroom. This activity will work well with multi-generation gatherings. The instructions assume that both youth and adults are present, but could be facilitated for a youth-only or adult-only audience.

TIME: 45 minutes

MATERIALS

- Copies of the "Profiles of a Student" options for each participant
- Newsprint paper (have 9 pieces available)
- 9 markers

ACTIVITY

Step 1: Instruct participants to read the student profiles and identify the one that most accurately describes who they are as a current student or who they were as a high school student in the past. If several fit (this will be true for many), ask that they choose the one that is currently affecting them the most, or did affect them the most. Adults might consider the one that now seems most significant as you look back at the high school experience. *(5 minutes)*

Step 2: Instruct participants to find the people who chose the same profile as them without using the number of the student profile, instead only asking participants questions related to that profile. *(5 minutes)*

Step 3: Keep people in their like-profile groups. Ask them to choose a facilitator/timer and a recorder/reporter.

Step 4: Have groups talk about their school experiences together. What is/was it like to be this kind of student? Each person in the group should have an opportunity to talk uninterrupted for 1 minute. *(about 10 minutes)*

Step 5: Ask participants to think about the 4 Rs and how they play a role in who the student in the profile is and what this student needs. Ask groups to make a 4 Rs grid on the newsprint. The recorder should take notes on which Rs they might need more of to be fully engaged in learning. *(10 minutes)*

Step 6: Have each group briefly share their profile and 4 Rs analysis. *(10 minutes)*

Reflection Questions:

- What strikes you as you listen to the experiences and needs of others?
- How does this activity help you understand the 4 Rs?

Profiles of a Student

STUDENT 1

You are life smart, but not school smart. You would do almost anything to not look stupid in school. You are the class clown, or the loud political protester, or the persistent talker — on the edge of being a "behavior problem." You don't mind being sent to the office instead of having to give an oral presentation — and you know just how to get sent there. Everyone at the office knows you well and greets you with affection, as they know you as "really, a nice kid." The things you are really good at seem to have little place in school.

STUDENT 2

You are a good but unremarkable student. You have figured out what each of your teachers wants, and you do exactly that — on time, and completely. You are a committed student, but take few risks, and so seldom challenge yourself to higher levels of learning. You are one of those kids people talk about — the quiet kid whose work always falls within the "norm." Because you complete your work, get As and Bs, and are never any trouble, you are often overlooked.

STUDENT 3

You love learning. You can't get enough of it. You actually look up those books that your teachers mention in passing and independently figure out alternative math theorems — just for fun. Your only beef with school is the busy work you have to do and those classes you have to take with kids who just don't seem to care about learning.

STUDENT 4

Who are you, anyway? It often takes teachers a full semester to remember your name, and you often feel invisible. This is either because you like it that way (i.e., you sit in the back and hide behind textbooks, hats, whatever — happily forgoing a few percentage points to keep from going public, and doing decent but unremarkable work to keep a low profile), or, this is because you feel disenfranchised and disempowered, for all kinds of reasons. You watch the "in" students with a mixture of envy and disdain. You know more about certain subjects than they do, but most teachers don't know that.

STUDENT 5

In your mind, there is no way you can succeed in school. You have been a "remedial" student from before your memory kicked in. You read slowly, and seldom get a passing grade on an in-class essay. You do have strengths, but no one seems to notice or value those. You wonder if life after high school will feel like more of the same.

STUDENT 6

You are a finely tuned teacher-pleasing machine. You know exactly what you need to do to maximize your grade and you do it (no matter what) and then some. You are organized, disciplined and focused — on your homework, on getting good grades, and on your extra curricular activities, which will look good on your transcript when you apply to college. Your teachers know you will always volunteer for anything they ask — and you often do.

STUDENT 7

You are an efficiency hound to leave time for other things in your life — the lowest passing grade possible for the least amount of work is your mantra. Why pass a class with a 78% when you can pass with a 69.2% and a good sob story? You know all the tricks: make up tests, rewrites, re-dos, extra credit points, parental pressure, coach pressure, group work (with the right partners). You put more effort into beating the game than learning.

STUDENT 8

You have a creative mind, love the arts (drawing, music, and/or drama) and believe that most of the significant ideas in life can't be expressed by talking or writing, which is all anyone seems to want to do in school. You have a hard time staying focused in most of your required classes. You are happy with yourself, but often feel like you are "marching to a different drummer."

STUDENT 9

Who said academics and classes and grades are the most important things about school? As far as you are concerned, your classes are the places where you get to see your friends, and sometimes, frankly, they seem to interrupt what's really important — like talking to your friends, and going to games, and participating in what they call the "extracurricular" activities. These activities don't seem "extra" to you at all, but instead are "central" to what school is really all about.

ACTIVITY 4
4 Rs Bingo

PURPOSE: This is an ice-breaker sort of activity to begin the discussion about the 4 Rs through personal experiences. It is a great way to start a class or community meeting.

TIME: 15–20 minutes

MATERIALS

+ Bingo card for each person
+ A writing implement for each person

ACTIVITY

Step 1: Pass out the bingo cards, one per person. Explain that their job is to get as many "Bingos" as possible by seeking out individuals who have experienced any one of the blocks, or in some instances, share a characteristic or quality with you. Have that person initial that block when you have finished talking. You can only go to a person for their signature on ONE block. Then you need to move on to find another person. Reiterate that they are to get as many "bingos" as possible — do not stop at one!

Step 2: Let folks mingle and seek signatures/bingos for 10–15 minutes.

Step 3: Circle up and ask for a few memorable stories (short) that might have been sparked by this activity (either one's own story or one heard from others).

Step 4: If you have already introduced the 4 Rs, reflect on the most powerful stories you heard or personally recounted, identifying which R it represented. If you have not already introduced the 4 Rs, explain that the stories that were explored all represent aspects of engagement captured by the 4 Rs framework. Then, move to Activity 1: Introduction to the 4 Rs.

4 Rs Bingo Card

Has been involved in making a decision about classroom curriculum or instruction. Describe.	Licks an ice cream cone the same way you do (bottom to top, spiral, left to right, etc).	Had a learning experience that changed their life in a memorable way. What was it?	Had an unforgettable moment as a teacher (of students, siblings, peers, babysitting, etc). What was it?	Had someone in their school life who believed in them when they didn't believe in themselves. Tell a story about that person.
When you draw a circle in the air with your finger, this person goes the same direction you do.	Had a teacher in their life who had high expectations for them. Tell a story about this person and what it was like to be in their class.	Plays a musical instrument. Which one?	Set a goal for themselves that felt unreachable, but then they reached it. Tell a story about this goal and how you succeeded.	Is actively engaged in learning something. What is it?
Had a teacher who did not have high expectations for them (no names please). Describe the situation and the impact of low expectations.	Has used technology in a learning experience thatw as key to their understanding if teh lesson or sharing their learning with others. When? Describe!	A Gimme!	Taps the same foot you do when listening to music.	Studied something in school that was so relevant to their life that they will never forget the experience. What did you study?
Gives a spontaneous wink with the same eye you use.	Has felt like they would be able to master some material/concept if only they were taught in a different way or had more time. When was that? What happened?	When you put pants on, this person puts the same leg on first that you do.	Can name three ways that students in their school have a voice in decision making. What afe they?	Has a dream about how their school could be transformed to be more engaging. Describe one change that you think would be key to this transformation.
Had a time when they were learning and made a mistake(or many mistakes) that led them to the right answer. Talk about this experience.	Has a unique skill or talent. Describe/demonstrate it!	Had a moment in school when they felt really creative when solving a problem or creating something. Describe what you were doing and the way (s) you were creative.	Can roll their tongue. Demonstration required!	Had a momoent when they were learning something and felt that they would never get it, but someone saw their struggle and helped them through it. Tell this story.

ACTIVITY 5
Document Analysis with the 4 Rs

PURPOSE: This protocol invites group members to act as "anthropologists," examining a substantive document or artifact such as the school's program of studies and/or its student handbook, the school website, the school's mission and vision statement, even a poster, bulletin board, or video to gain perspective on school culture. The process helps uncover aspects of the school's values, customs, and habits that may be taken for granted, overlooked, or avoided. By focusing on the 4 Rs (rigor, relevance, relationships, and shared responsibility), participants explore the guiding question "How can we continue to improve teaching and learning at our school?"

TIME: 75 minutes

MATERIALS

- Copy of the definition of each R from the 4 Rs chart or 4 Rs Venn diagram from the YATST brochure and Activity 1

- Fish Bowl protocol, located after this activity (from schoolreforminitiative.org; go to Protocols & Resources, choose Protocols Alphabetical List, and then Modeling the Consultancy Protocol Using an Interactive Fishbowl)

FACILITATOR NOTES

- This can be done multiple times, each time for a different document or artifact.

- Form two discussion groups of equal number members (Team 1 and Team 2) with a facilitator for each one. The protocol uses a fishbowl format: Team 1 members participate in the discussion while the Team 2 members watch, listen, and take notes silently. All participants read/review the document/artifact. Read as objectively as possible, as if you are seeing it for the first time. At the end, the Team 2 members move to the center to share reflections.

ACTIVITY

Step 1: Statement of Goals: What are we doing? (2 minutes). Facilitator reviews the protocol and states the goal for the session—to help the Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST) team gain perspective on their school culture so they can continue to improve teaching and learning. Facilitator hands out copies of the document/artifact to all participants.

Step 2: Descriptive Observation: What do we see here? (10 minutes). All participants review the document/artifact and take notes individually to record what they see. (5 minutes) This should be an objective description, without interpretation or judgment. Even if it's a familiar document, describe it as if you'd never seen it. Record all the factual information you can in your first five minutes of "meeting" this document/artifact. For example: "Red cover with black & white photo of large flat-roof building in trees"… "About 1 inch thick"…"Photos of students on page 2."

In rounds, Team 1 members report observations, without repeats. Team 2 members listen and take notes on any surprises and other points as they wish. (5 minutes)

Step 3: **Analysis with Four Rs: What's going on here? What evidence of the Four Rs can we see in this document? (35 minutes).** Continuing in the fishbowl format, all participants read and take notes individually to record evidence related to one R or look for all four. Participants can look for all Rs or one R in particular that they choose or Rs can be evenly divided among the group. (15 minutes)

Team 1 reports on its findings to the whole group. Team 2 listens and takes notes on what Team 1 reports. (10 minutes)

Team 2 reports on out on what they heard as observations and analysis by Team 1, providing reflection on what was heard and sharing surprises and other thoughts that were prompted by the analysis by Team 1. (10 minutes)

Step 4: **Team Reflection & Response (25 minutes).** Facilitator opens with rounds on two questions:

   • What surprised you? (5 minutes)

   • Which R evidence seemed most important to you and why? (10 minutes)

Discuss the guiding question: **"Based on this analysis [of the document/artifact you have chosen to examine], how can we continue to improve teaching and learning at our school?"** (10 minutes)

Step 5: Debrief (3 minutes). Facilitator leads discussion about the process: Did this protocol help you gain new perspectives? How could the process be improved? What other documents/artifacts might we examine?

This protocol, as Artifact Analysis, was designed by the Critical Friends Group coaches at Richmond Middle School, Dresden Interstate School District, Hanover, NH-Norwich, VT: Carla Balch, Jay Davis, and Maura Hart, 1999-2000; adapted by Martha Rich & Helen Beattie of UP for Learning for the Collaborative Peer Review pilot project at Leland & Gray, Mill River Union, and Otter Valley High Schools, Vermont, 2014.

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community and facilitated by a skilled facilitator. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for facilitation, please visit the School Reform Initiative website at www.schoolreforminitiative.org.

Modeling the Counsultancy Protocol
Using an Interactive Fishbowl

Developed by Pete Bermudez.

Purpose
To identify and analyze the key elements of the Consultancy Protocol and practice the skills that contribute to its success.

Time
60-90 minutes

Facilitation
- Fishbowl Facilitator- facilitates consultancy in the fishbowl
- Meta-facilitator- Sets up process, provides rationale, observes group interaction and helps participants "dissect" process as it unfolds.
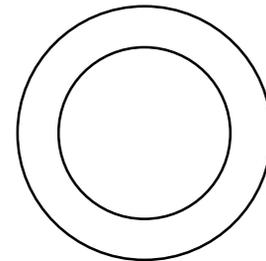
Materials
1. Consultancy Dilemmas
2. Framing Consultancy Dilemmas and Consultancy Questions
3. Consultancy Protocol
4. Pocket Guide to Probing Questions
5. Note cards (for writing probing questions)

Structure
Set up interactive fishbowl by placing 4-6 chairs in an inner circle surrounded by an outer circle of chairs.
Leave enough space between the chairs to enable participants to step in and out of the inner circle.

Process
1. Participants write a consultancy dilemma and a framing question for feedback. This may be done at home the night before or on site immediately before modeling the consultancy process.

2. Review the three types of questions that are part of the process — framing, clarifying, and probing. You may want to refer participants to "Framing Consultancy Dilemmas and Consultancy Questions" and "Pocket Guide to Probing Questions." Ask participants to explain the major differences between the three types of questions and how they are used in the context of the Consultancy Protocol.

3. Review the steps of the Consultancy Protocol and ask participants to sit in the outer circle surrounding the empty chairs that represent the interactive fishbowl. Participants should take the handouts (see in step 2) with them for reference during the exercise.

4. Ask for a volunteer to present her/his dilemma and ask the individual to sit in the interactive fishbowl along with the fishbowl facilitator. (It is recommended that the fishbowl facilitator have an opportunity to consult with the presenter prior to the consultancy).

5. The meta-facilitator briefly explains the process that will be used during the interactive fishbowl:
   a. Everyone listens actively
   b. Any member of the group may ask one clarifying question by taking a seat in the fishbowl, asking the question, noting the answer, and exiting the fishbowl to allow others to ask clarifying questions.
   c. Any member of the group may ask a probing question by writing the question down on a note card, taking a seat in the fishbowl, reading the question to the presenter, and giving her/him the note card before exiting the fishbowl. At the completion of the probing questions round, the presenter will briefly reflect on all of the probing questions that were asked and comment on those that she/he felt were most probing.
   d. Any member of the group can request a "process check"

6. The fishbowl facilitator then initiates the consultancy process.

7. At the completion of step 3 (probing questions) of the consultancy, the meta-facilitator will pause and check for understanding of the major differences between framing, clarifying, and probing questions.

8. Starting with step 4, the presenter will move outside the outer circle and the fishbowl facilitator initiates the feedback discussion with the whole group while the presenter takes notes.

9. The presenter rejoins the outer circle and responds to the feedback.

10. The fishbowl facilitator leads the debrief of the consultancy process joined by the meta-facilitator.

ACTIVITY 6
'Learning in the Zone' Game

PURPOSE: This game is designed to help participants understand learning experiences and their relationship to high levels of Rigor and Relevance.

TIME: At least 30 minutes of playing time.

MATERIALS

- Learning in the Zone game board
- Learning Zone prompts made into cards

FACILITATOR NOTES

- Create the game cards by cutting out the prompts and indicating the corresponding zone color on the reverse side.
- This game should create rich dialogue about learning experiences and their relationship to Rigor and Relevance. Allow conversations to occur, encouraging them with questions as needed. Disagreement is OK, though, as the facilitator, you should act as a mediator so that all dialogue and any disagreement can be a learning opportunity.

ACTIVITY

Step 1: Divide the group into teams. Shuffle the deck of cards keeping the written side up and place the pile on the YATST logo in the middle of the board.

Step 2: One team at a time draws a card, looking only at the written side. After reading the scenario out loud, the team decides which learning zone this represents.

Step 3: After making their choice the team turns the card over to see if the color matches their choice. If it does, the team earns one point. If it does not, the team can earn half a point by explaining why it goes in the category indicated.

Step 4: Place each card that has been used in a separate pile. The team with the most points can be declared "Learning in the Zone Masters."

LEVEL OF RELEVANCE

+

–

D ZONE

Learning experiences are high in challenge and require unique solutions to often unpredictable problems.

B ZONE

Learning experiences provide definite opportunities for learners to apply knowledge, typically to real world problems.

C ZONE

Learning experiences are often complex and required learners to devise solutions, which can lead to deeper understandings of concepts and knowledge.

A ZONE

Learning experiences focus on recall or discovery of basic knowledge.

LEARNING IN THE ZONE

YATST

RIGOR · RESPONSIBILITY · RELATIONSHIP · RELEVANCE

LEVEL OF MENTAL RIGOR

+

–

Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together

A Zone: Learning experiences focus on recall or discovery of basic knowledge.

Most classrooms are set up in a classic lecture format and most teaching is done through lectures.

There is little to no in-depth inquiry, student collaboration, or application of learning to real world problems.

Interdisciplinary work rarely occurs.

Students are passive recipients of whatever content is delivered.

Students' individual interests and abilities are not incorporated into instruction or curriculum.

There is subtle and not-so-subtle tracking.

Students do not find their learning challenging and their motivation is limited.

Traditional tests and quizzes are the primary tool used to assess learning.

Grading is believed to reflect learning — low or failing grades mean a student is unable or unwilling to learn.

B Zone: Learning experiences provide definite opportunities for learners to apply knowledge, typically to real world problems.

Innovative learning strategies such as project-based learning and students as teachers are occasionally mixed into teaching.

Community-based educational opportunities are discussed, possibly developed, but rarely implemented.

Students are beginning to be challenged to have high expectations for themselves and understand the importance of this.

Students are sometimes asked to solve complex problems on their own.

Levels of classroom challenge vary, but teachers are working to meet the needs of more learners.

C Zone: Learning experiences are often complex and require learners to devise solutions, which can lead to deeper understandings of concepts and knowledge.

There is a rising feeling among students that their learning experiences are relevant to their lives and future.

Personalized learning is driving new ways to help individuals take responsibility for their learning based on their goals and interests.

Learners are often asked to revise/rewrite until demonstrating mastery.

Exhibitions as a way to demonstrate learning sometimes occur.

D Zone: Learning experiences are high in challenge and require unique solutions to often unpredictable problems.

Each learner has a vision of their goals and can talk about their plan to reach these goals.

Teachers recognize that innovative strategies yield deeper learning and mastery, and, with the support of fellow teachers and administrators, take risks to make learning relevant.

Integration of multiple content areas when exploring a topic is the norm.

Students and teachers are partners in learning.

There are varied ways that student interests are regularly inventoried and incorporated into their learning.

Students find their classes challenging and value the time required of them to learn independently.

Students are challenged to work on complex problems that they must figure out on their own or in small groups.

Creativity in learning is highly valued.

There are multiple pathways to graduation and each student charts their own course of study with high expectations that matches their interests and goals.

Class options are not limited by grade and content area and are highly rigorous and relevant.

Mistakes or "failures" are valued as critical learning opportunities.

There is a formal feedback system in all classes between students and teachers, which includes students assessing their roles as learners.

ACTIVITY 7
YATST School Site Visit

PURPOSE: For members of Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together (YATST), site visits to other member schools are an exciting way to enable your team to learn from another schoo,l as well as develop a new critical lens with which to view your own school. Well-planned and thoughtfully coordinated visits are powerful learning experiences and make significant contributions to advancing school improvement and youth-adult partnerships across the state. When a site visit is conducted in the spirit of thoughtful reflection and sharing, it creates a mutually beneficial learning experience for both the visiting and host school.

TIME: Time will be needed for attention to pre-planning, the actual site visit, and reflection following the visit. Both the host team and the visiting team should plan for adequate time.

MATERIALS

+ Copy of the Guiding Principles for Site Visits (below)

+ Copy of the 4 Rs chart (see Activity 2)

+ Agenda with three columns labeled: "What we did," "So what?" and "Now what?" OR a "Wows and Wonders" chart for note taking

FACILITATOR NOTES

+ One of the many benefits of hosting a site visit is that it allows all participants to express their vision for school and how they, in their individual roles, fit into the larger, long-term vision. Sharing practices and accomplishments can be very rewarding experiences for educators and students, since it requires reflection about what is, and is not, working. Having students participate in this process empowers them and illustrates their key role in increasing their achievement and educational outcomes, while also reminding everyone else what this school site visit is all about.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SITE VISITS

The following guiding principles will help keep a site visit focused, efficient, and productive:

+ A willingness to remain open and receptive to new ideas, and to challenge personal beliefs, assumptions, perceptions, and practices.

+ An appropriate and respectful attitude, and a collaborative environment in which it is safe to question and discover.

+ An openness to forging new relationships and a belief that every individual and school has valuable lessons to impart.

+ Keeping in mind that the site visit's purpose is to learn, not to evaluate, judge, or criticize the host school and its practices.

Questions to Consider and Discuss with Your Team and YATST Host School

- What are our essential questions and goals for the visit? (Make sure you provide these to the host school in advance to guide the development of the site visit activities.) Your questions could relate to gathering information on the 4 Rs or specifically relate to your own YATST actions and/or your host team's priorities. Or team members could gather "Wows" and "Wonders" throughout their visit.

- What do we want to observe?

- Whom do we want to interview or speak with?

- How is the school similar to ours? Does its size or student demographics mirror ours?

- Is the host school able to provide time for host YATST team members to participate in site-visit activities?

- Will classrooms be open for observation during the site visit? Are the teachers informed of the purpose of the visit, ready to welcome observers in their classrooms, and open to discussing their work?

- How will you as a YATST visiting team record your observations and questions?

    - You could use the 4 Rs chart.

    - An agenda with three columns labeled: "What we did," "So what?" and "Now what?"

    - A "Wows" and "Wonders" chart.

YATST Host Team Preparation

- Let your school and community know about the visit, especially the teachers whose classes will be observed.

- Plan and share a schedule of the activities that the visitors will be involved with prior to the visit so you can address any questions beforehand.

- Discuss the classroom visits with the teachers beforehand so that you can share your hopes and expectations for the visit and they can share theirs with you, and so there is an opportunity for teachers to ask questions that they might have.

- Make time in the schedule to have the YATST host and visiting teams join at the beginning of the visit for introductions to the school, an opportunity for introductions or an ice-breaker, an overview of the schedule for the day, an opportunity to address questions, and a school tour. Be sure to review the Guiding Principles (above) at the start of the visit.

- Likewise, make time in the schedule to have the YATST host and visiting teams come together for a debrief of the day, an opportunity to answer questions, and a chance to make next steps and say goodbye.

Reflection on the Experience

- Reflection on the site visit is when the experience turns into learning. The debriefing process can help the visiting YATST team to have a deeper understanding of the visit but also inform their own work. For visiting teams, connections can be made to the work you have already done in your YATST teams including Why Schools Need To Change? How Schools Can Change? and How YATST Does Its Work.

- Prior to the debrief, review the Guiding Principles of the visit once again (above).

- Ask participants to share observations from their day (perhaps what they recorded). Ask them to resist drawing conclusions and strive to make observation statements.

- Depending on time, move to analysis and sharing questions that students generate as a result of their experiences throughout the day.

- As a facilitator move participants to deeper thought by simply asking "Why?" if an opportunity arises that you feel could benefit from deeper reflection.

- Ask participants to make connections between their own YATST priorities and what they observed.

- Generate ideas for next steps and be sure to write a thank you to your YATST host team and school.