Teacher Quality Standard I

Teachers demonstrate mastery of and pedagogical expertise in the content they teach. The elementary teacher is an expert in literacy and mathematics and is knowledgeable in all other content that he or she teaches (e.g., science, social studies, arts, physical education, or world languages). The secondary teacher has knowledge of literacy and mathematics and is an expert in his or her content endorsement area(s).

The key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching rests at the intersection of content and pedagogy.
—L. S. Shulman

> To teach all students according to today's standards, teachers need to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly so they can help students create useful cognitive maps, relate one idea to another, and address misconceptions. Teachers need to see how ideas connect across fields and to everyday life. This kind of understanding provides a foundation for pedagogical content knowledge that enables teachers to make ideas accessible to others. (Shulman, 1987)

Although Shulman's work dates back to the late 1980s, the importance of teacher content knowledge and pedagogical expertise has never been more important than it is now as teachers ensure students are college and career ready for the demands of the 21st century.

Element F

Teachers make instruction and content relevant to students and take actions to connect students' background and contextual knowledge with new information being taught.

Professional practices referenced under each element of the Rubric for Evaluating Colorado Teachers are cumulative. Therefore, for teachers to be proficient in making instruction and content relevant to students they must provide opportunities for students to make connections to prior learning, experiences and culture in a manner that supports student engagement and provides opportunities for students to select tasks that accelerate their learning.

BASIC RATING LEVEL

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES: THE TEACHER:

Selects instructional materials and strategies based on their:

- ***Relevance to students.***

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Instructional methods and strategies that have **relevance** are aligned to the learning objective and to students' interests, culture, and learning preferences.

According to Fisher & Frey (2008), "When the objective is clear and instructional tasks align with it, students can share responsibility for learning and will be motivated to do so."

The pressure to achieve and perform well on high-stakes tests has never been greater. In many classrooms, this has led to the goal of selecting tasks so students will "do well on the test." For some students, especially lower-performing students, this approach can mean they learn concepts in isolation of one another and disconnected to their experiences and culture.

> Administrators and teachers should work together to reframe the purpose of learning in their schools … use language that focuses on mastering knowledge, improving individual performance or seeing the value of schooling for enhancing one's future. (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, What Can We Do? Section 6, para. 2)

When the teacher selects instructional materials and strategies based on their relevance, students connect the "what" and "why" of their learning to future learning, to other disciplines, and/or to life experiences.

- ***Central contexts.***

Instructional materials and strategies that are based on central concepts reflect students' contextual knowledge, which is their background knowledge and skills.

> According to contextual learning theory, learning occurs only when students process new information or knowledge in such a way that it makes sense to them in their own frames of reference (their own inner worlds of memory, experience, and response). The mind naturally seeks meaning in context by searching for relationships that make sense and appear useful. ("Contextual Learning Definition - Center for Occupational Research and Development," 2012)

Refer to these external resources for additional information:

- Article: "5 Hallmarks of Good Homework" by Cathy Vatterott

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http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Five-Hallmarks-of-Good-Homework.aspx

Article describes ways to make homework meaningful and relevant for students.

- Article: "Show Us What Homework's For" by Kathleen Cushman
  http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/Show-Us-What-Homework's-For.aspx

  Article describes how to make homework relevant based on suggestions from students.

- Article: "The Big Wait" by Joseph P. Allen and Claudia Worrell Allen
  http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept10/vol68/num01/The-Big-Wait.aspx

  Article explains how providing teenagers with relevant work can increase their motivation and interest in school.
- Article: "What's Relevant for YouTubers?" by Johanna Mustaccchi
  http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar08/vol65/num06/What's-Relevant-for-YouTubers%C2%A2.aspx

  Article explains how media can be utilized to develop lessons that are culturally relevant and motivating.

- ***Foundational evidence base.***

Instructional materials and strategies that are foundationally evidence-based are those that are selected because they are researched "best practices" and have been proven to have a positive impact on student learning.

When selecting instructional materials and strategies, teachers should align them to the learning objective and needs of their students.

A best practice can only be a best practice when it is used in a purposeful manner to support and enhance student learning. Understanding the *what, how,* and *why* for use of evidence-based materials and strategies can help ensure they are used purposefully.

In the book *Powerful Learning What We Know about Teaching for Understanding* by Linda Darling-Hammond, the author identifies instructional strategies from the research as those that are consistently implemented by highly effective teachers and that result in meaningful learning for students. These include the following:

- Creating meaningful tasks that reflect how knowledge is used in everyday life outside of the classroom.
- Engaging students in active learning so that they apply and test the knowledge they have.
- Drawing connections to students' prior knowledge and experiences.
- Assessing student learning continuously in order to scaffold the learning process step-by-step and teach to students' needs and interests.
- Providing clear learning goals and constant feedback for how students are progressing towards meeting the goals.
- Modeling their own thinking and encouraging students to evaluate and label their thinking.

(Adapted from Darling-Hammond, 2008)

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See also Standard III.

- ***Links lessons to students' prior knowledge.***

Prior knowledge is a composite of what students have learned from both their academic and everyday experiences. Students learn and remember new information best when it is linked to relevant prior knowledge. When the teacher links lessons to prior knowledge, she is able to build on students' familiarity with a topic.

> Previewing activities prepare students for the lesson and establish a connection between new and previously taught content. These activities are particularly useful for students with limited background knowledge (Marzano, 2007).

Examples for how to link lessons to students' prior knowledge:

- Questioning: Questions can be a powerful review activity when they are used to assess student learning from previous lessons. Questions may be used to review vocabulary or previously taught content. Example follows:
  - Teacher: "Yesterday we made inferences about a character's traits. How did we do that? How did we connect text evidence to our schema? What is our schema? Today, we are going to use the same process and infer about what a character may be thinking or feeling."
- Summarizing: A brief summary of previous learning experiences can help students know what to expect and how the lesson activities are connected to previous learning and unit goals. A summary may consist of connecting a series of lessons to unit goals or academic standards for the purpose of viewing how concepts or skills have been scaffolded for student mastery. Examples follow:

  Teacher: "We have been learning about the events that led to the Revolutionary War. We examined the impact of taxes imposed on the colonists by the King and Parliament. We looked at the impact of the Boston Tea Party on the relationship between England and the colonists. Today, we are going to learn about the Boston Massacre and its impact on this relationship."

- ***Encourages and provides opportunities for students to make connections to prior learning.***

As referenced previously, it is important for the teacher to make connections to students' prior learning so they can build on what they already know about a topic or skill. Once the teacher has made these connections, the next step is to encourage students to make these for themselves and for their peers.

Examples for how students can make connections to prior student learning:

- Students may summarize previous learning by:
  - Using their notes to summarize learning over a series of lessons.
  - Reviewing vocabulary and explaining how it has connected to concepts learned.
  - Reviewing key individuals and how they impacted the concepts being taught.
  - Talking with peers to review key concepts previously learned.
- KWL Chart: A KWL chart can be used by the teacher to assess students' thinking by asking what they Know, what they Want to Know and what they Learned. By reflecting on what they already know about a topic, students can use prior learning to make connections to new learning and formulate questions that guide their learning. Example:

  Teacher: "We began our unit on Claude Monet and Impressionism by completing the K and W portions of our chart. Let's review some of things you said you wanted to know about this type of art. Based on the lesson yesterday, what things have you learned? What do you still want to know? As we continue our study of Monet and Impressionism, record questions you have and we will add them to our KWL chart. Your questions can help guide our unit of study."

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