

Feedback to Feed Forward

31 Strategies to Lead Learning

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How can you determine effectiveness of instruction and a teacher's impact on learners?

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Don't be fooled by the low number of strategies in this chapter (only three: #17–#19), as they represent some of the most mentally challenging steps. The work to determine a teacher's effectiveness and impact on students may be such a departure from what you have been doing but will become some of the most important work you will do.

We spend hours debriefing lessons together with leaders, framing their thinking and organizing evidence into cause-and-effect columns on a board. We practice in partners, building feedback statements that begin with frames such as, "Because the teacher . . ." or "As a result of . . ." so leaders can clearly convey these relationships in feedback.

Feedback to teachers is much more powerful when the evaluator focuses on specific evidence regarding the interaction between teachers and students during an observation. The biggest challenge in this regard is to collect as much or more data about what the students are doing during the observed lesson. The next hurdle is to then allow the collected information to guide the discussion

about the actual achievement of student learning outcomes as opposed to the teacher's intended outcomes.

By doing this, I found that I could move the feedback discussion away from a summary of the lesson in terms of teacher practices to a richer more objective conversation about the cause and effect of chosen instructional strategies in the classroom and the subsequent result with students. Teachers have been much more engaged in post-observation discussions using this format because they are able to better understand the true impact of their instruction based on specific student feedback to me during the observation. As a result, the observation becomes a powerful coaching opportunity that allows a teacher to immediately pivot and change practice with his/her current group of students in the current year. —Lisa Carter, Assistant Superintendent

As instructional leaders work to provide support and feedback that will change practices and impact student outcomes, the effort to truly *measure* teacher effectiveness remains a challenge. In Chapters 2 and 3, you explored the necessary first steps of defining and collecting evidence of effective instructional practice, recognizing that the framework provides you with this foundation. In this chapter, we introduce you to the next step of your journey toward becoming a highly impactful instructional leader.

Every day, coaches, evaluators, and administrators visit classrooms and have the rich opportunity to collect real-time data, review student work, and interact with students in the moment. Yet many instructional leaders do not recognize the necessity and/or have the capacity to then *analyze* the evidence they have collected to determine relationships between teacher actions and student learning. This often leads to a summary of events, as opposed to an analysis of effectiveness.


The third standard of effective evidence-based observation and feedback, RVL 1.C, is the focus of this chapter: *Making direct and explicit connections for a teacher, answering how he or she is impacting student engagement and thinking, conducting an examination of the teacher's level of success in moving students toward mastery of a learning target.* In this chapter, you will do the following:

- Recognize the need and goals for analysis of instructional practices.
- Develop strategies required to make the shift from previous coaching and feedback models.
- Understand impacts on engagement and learning based on five focus areas.

Skill Set for Determining Effectiveness

Remember in Chapter 1, we discussed the need to shift from a summary to an analysis. Let's take a close look at how we assess the quality of analysis in feedback using RVL 1.C on the ReVISION Learning Supervisory Continuum (see Figure 4.1).

FIGURE 4.1: RVL STANDARD 1.C

 Evaluator Supervisory Continuum				
Domain 1: Evidence-Based Observation	Beginning	Developing	Proficient	Exceptional
C. Evidence cited in written feedback connects teacher action with student engagement and intended learning outcomes.	Evidence cited in written feedback provides little to no connection between teacher action and learning outcome or impact on students. Evidence cited in written feedback provides little to no connection between teaching practice and performance indicators.	Evidence cited in written feedback provides some connections between teacher action and learning outcome or impact on students but may remain too vague or unsupportive of claim.	Evidence cited in written feedback provides clear and explicit connections between teacher action and impact on student engagement and/or learning process and outcome in support of claim.	The detailed feedback strongly links observed teaching practice/teacher actions to expected student learning objectives, impact on student engagement, learning process, and outcomes.
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Courtesy of ReVISION

To successfully shift from summarizing to analyzing in order to provide high-quality feedback and to meet the “Proficient or “Exceptional” performance levels in RVL 1.C, leaders must master the set of skills found in Table 4.1.

You will notice that the most challenging skill required in this work involves an observer's ability to determine how a teacher is impacting the students or causing particular outcomes based on your collected evidence. Take a minute to review the common challenges you might face (see Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.1 SKILL SET FOR RVL 1.C

Core Skills	Description
Determine Student Engagement Levels	Defining and using evidence to recognize levels of engagement
Determine Teacher Impact on Learning	Identifying factors that impact learning, understanding how students learn, and recognizing the teacher’s role in student success based on the evidence
Determine Teacher Impact on Engagement	Identifying factors that impact student engagement and recognizing the teacher’s role in student levels based on the evidence
Communicate Clear Connections	Citing evidence of overall teacher impact that clearly supports a claim about instruction and promotes growth

TABLE 4.2 RVL 1.C COMMON CHALLENGES

Listed evidence or narrative versus analysis
Lack of evidence to conduct an analysis
Lack of attention to student engagement/understanding/movement toward mastery

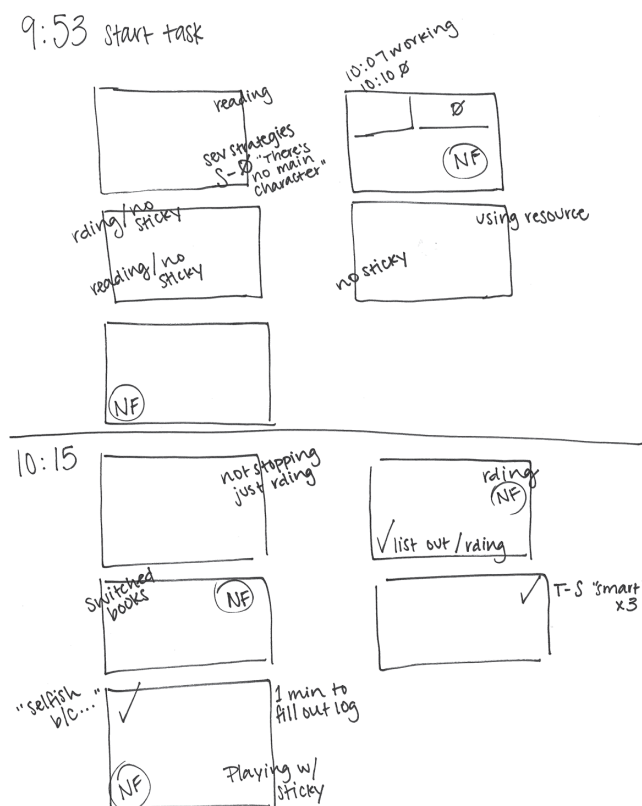
Using Your Evidence to Analyze Effectiveness

An instructional leader can develop a protocol or series of steps aligned to the essential skills in Table 4.1 to establish a process for analyzing evidence. The recommendations outlined in the rest of this chapter should serve as a guide, and though classroom examples are provided, it is important to remember that no two lessons are the same.

Let’s look at an example of a comprehensive evidence-collection method in Figure 4.2 that provides an example of notes captured during an observation of a minilesson and independent work time of a second-grade Reader’s Workshop lesson for determining character traits. This map allowed the observer to track and organize students’ behaviors and actions, the type of books they were reading (NF = nonfiction), the use of resources, and the writing on their stickie notes.

Building on what you learned in Chapter 3, we will now utilize this map further to demonstrate how the observer can review the evidence to conduct an analysis of instructional effectiveness using three strategies.

FIGURE 4.2: EVIDENCE COLLECTION MAP



Strategy 17: Organize your evidence

Remember in Chapter 2, we talked about “tagging” evidence (noting as each piece relates to a specific indicator) as a good place to start. The next step is to work through the bits and pieces of evidence to begin developing an understanding of observed effectiveness that will lead you to create your claim about practice and outcomes. The observer should locate essential evidence that directly relates to student understanding, construction of new learning, and/or engagement. Notice what the observer collected and organized:

Ss left the carpet at 9:53. At 10:07, 10 min after the mini-lesson ended, 0/14 Ss were writing character traits on stickies.

2 were not working but looking at the others. 4 were reading but did not have stickies, 2 others were reading non-fiction books and an additional 1 reading told the evaluator that there were no main characters so she could not complete the task.

1 Ss was using the resource list of possible character traits. T pulled a small group and was working with 4 Ss on a separate task.

At 10:15, T checking on all Ss. 1 more was using the resource list of possible character traits. 3 were reading non-fiction books and 1 had switched to a 2nd book (fiction) without recording anything.

Only 4 of 10 Ss polled could explain to the observer what a character trait was or how to determine traits. 2 Ss had listed a character trait (smart and selfish) and could explain to the observer how he/she supported the choice.

Note how the observer organized the evidence to arrive at a chronological snapshot of the critical teacher and student actions or behaviors.

Strategy 18: Ask questions about what you observed

Often leaders will stop here with the organization of evidence. The aforementioned list would then represent the feedback that would be provided to the teacher. However, it simply narrates witnessed events. Regardless of your rubric, to develop feedback that feeds forward and to move to a deep analysis that will result in an accurate claim/rating, instructional leaders need to next think about what was occurring during the lesson and *why it was occurring*. To do that, they must ask themselves questions, such as the following:

What was causing this to happen?

What happened just before this evidence was recorded?

How was the teacher in direct control of the outcomes?

What was the expectation for what students should be doing? (Think beyond following directions.)

Were they successful? Why were some successful and some not?

As our observer reviews the evidence, taking into consideration the previously listed thinking questions and the expected student learning outcomes, an understanding of the effectiveness of the lesson and the teacher's impact emerges:

- The teacher followed the basic structure of Workshop with a minilesson (i.e., in appropriate duration, with a single targeted strategy, and modeling how to find traits from a story read together) and students set out to work with stickies and self-selected books from their leveled book bags.

- However, a majority of students did not understand the concept of character traits or characterization methods or remember there was an available resource, a list of character traits.
 - Students did not recognize that nonfiction books on sea life, occupations, or dinosaurs lack characters. (Though nonfiction may include characters, such as in a biography or narrative nonfiction, this was not the goal of the learning, nor did students have those books.)
-

Strategy 19: Determine causes of outcomes

The observer is recognizing that though there are strengths in the teacher's practices, the lesson did not set students up for success in determining character traits as they read. Though you may be drawing conclusions by answering the questions from Strategy 18—it is critical to purposefully take steps to determine clear causes of the observed outcomes. Remember from Chapter 3, the observer has to also consider the absence of evidence (i.e., a missing instructional step or an action that *did not* occur) as a potential part of the cause. Notice this is addressed in “Instruction *during* the Minilesson” in the following analysis. The observer made a determination of what did not occur based on what was needed for students to be successful:

Instruction During the Minilesson:

- The teacher did not build on prior learning regarding which books contain characters or the difference between fiction and nonfiction. She did not address how to determine traits through author's characterization methods.
- The teacher modeled using the book's pictures only. After closer analysis of the student responses on the carpet, it was clear they were guessing at emotions only, providing words as to how the character “felt” based on the illustrations or story events.
- The teacher did not clearly give directions as to which books to use. The intent was for students to make selections from the various works of fiction in their bags.
- Students were not reminded of nor did they know to use the resource of character trait words. There was no modeling of the use of that resource.

Small Group Instruction/Independent Work Time:

- The teacher immediately pulled a small group for support in an unrelated skill. Though this is often a suggested practice for differentiation, she did not monitor the other students at any point during the first 15 minutes of independent work to ensure everyone had the correct materials, understood the task, and was beginning to work successfully.

Stop and Think: Reflect on your own process of organizing evidence. What process do you use upon returning to your office with your notes? How similar is it to what we have outlined?

We know this is complex work, so be patient with yourself and recognize that the strategies and steps will take time and practice to master. Move on when you are ready to forge ahead into thinking about further using your evidence.

Understanding What We Are Analyzing

Observers struggle to know what specifically needs to be analyzed after visiting a classroom. Remember, recognizing what it is we need to analyze dictates what we need to collect during an observation. Let's revisit this sample feedback from Chapter 3:

10:36 - 100% students with eyes on teacher

10:42 - Students chorally respond "No" in response to teacher question

10:43 - 100% of students with eyes on teacher

10:45 - 100% of students participate in turn and talk

10:52 - 100% of students with eyes on text reading independently

Though the observer paid close attention to student actions, we have no information beyond these general behavioral observations. As we mentioned, instructional leaders must shift the focus for every observation to two central ideas around which feedback and analysis should revolve: advancing learning and levels of engagement.

Advancing Learning

The goal in classrooms is to always ensure students are advancing in their learning, understanding and applying new concepts, strategies and skills, or applying previously learned concepts in some way. With this in mind, leaders must determine:

1. **If** new learning is actually occurring.
2. **What** the teacher has put in place for scaffolding and gradual release to build a pathway toward the new learning.
3. **How** students are progressing toward mastery of a learning target.

To arrive at accurate conclusions about the learners, observers can ask themselves:

- Where are they in the progression toward the learning target?
- How are they making connections to previous learning and constructing the new learning? Is there a conceptual breakdown or gap causing an inability to build new learning?
- How are we asking them to use or apply their learning? Is the completion of the task demonstrating their understanding and aligned to the learning target?
- How are they set up for success to achieve higher levels? Is there a form of gradual release in place? Are they grappling or is it “too hard” or “too easy?”

Stop and Think: Take a few minutes to revisit or reflect on what was discussed in Chapter 3 regarding learning theory and learning stages. What do we know about how students learn? What evidence do you need to collect to determine whether this is occurring?

Levels of Engagement

In Chapter 2, evidence that could be collected for engagement was explored by first defining terms like *cognitive* or *intellectual engagement*. The next step observers must take is to ascertain the level (or absence) of engagement while also determining what is causing this outcome. Remember, to analyze the level of engagement, leaders must always think beyond “on-task” toward the following:

- The depth of understanding or knowledge the tasks and questions require.
- How students are thinking, applying, and interacting around or with the concepts.
- What their conversations, responses, and questions reveal about the depth of their thinking and understanding.
- How students are connecting with the concepts or strategies as relevant, personal, and applicable outside of the context of the immediate lesson.

Did you notice in the earlier lesson example that the observer did not just determine how many were “working” (had a book selected or were reading) but *how* they were working?

Analyzing Engagement

From Chapter 3, we introduced Schlechty’s (2002) levels of engagement for observable behaviors to provide a thinking frame for evidence collection. The next step is to utilize this concept of levels to analyze critical collected evidence to determine the cause of the outcomes.

Some Possible Causes for Level 1 (the lowest level of engagement or “Rebellion”): Behaviors are often directly tied to the level of rigor or challenge of a given task or questions and can manifest from frustration:

- Learned habits of helplessness
- “Too hard” or “too easy” work or expectations
 - Limited differentiation or personalization and/or scaffolding so students are not working within their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978)
 - Limited resources available or lack of explicit instruction on how to persevere, use supports, or work independently
 - Not enough or too much time to complete tasks

Some Possible Causes for Levels 2, 3, and 4 (“Retreatism,” “Ritual Compliance,” or “Strategic Compliance”):

- Lack of clear daily purpose or criteria for learning
- Lack of relevance; lack of context within a unit, connection to previous learning, cross curricular, or real-world context

- Lack of authenticity in task or audience
- Teacher monitoring for task completion only

During and after a lesson, it is easy to make assumptions about levels of engagement. In the following, notice that after an observer's initial judgment, he arrived at a different conclusion about engagement through analysis of specific evidence from a seventh-grade English language arts lesson about ethical actions:

Assumption: On first appearance, students are working in groups using technology. They are required to use text evidence and are analyzing the ethics of characters' actions against criteria/defining terms they have been given. This is the kickoff to a potentially highly effective lesson with high levels of engagement.

Reality: Students are seated in groups of four with one student designated as a "typist" and only one Chromebook on the table. Scripted student-student interactions reveal that at three of four tables, one student is leading the group and doing all of the talking while one is typing on the Google Doc and not participating. The others are just listening to the one who has taken the lead. The teacher visited each table to see if the document was set up.

(Engagement: one student at Level 5 [highest], one at Level 4, two at Level 3)

Analysis: The teacher was turning the responsibility of learning over to students by encouraging group work.

- However, he did not establish criteria for group roles or individual expectations and accountability up front, so there was no collaboration.
- There was opportunity to do this when the teacher visited each table, but he only determined if they had successfully set up the Google Doc (task oriented) versus how they were working through the task (learning oriented).
- The use of technology did not allow the others to follow the information being recorded nor did it allow them to view other groups' entries at the end.

Some Possible Causes for Schlechty's Level 5 "Engagement"

We should not only seek causes of a *lack* of engagement but also identify those teacher actions that serve to *increase* engagement in classrooms. Some contributing factors include the following:

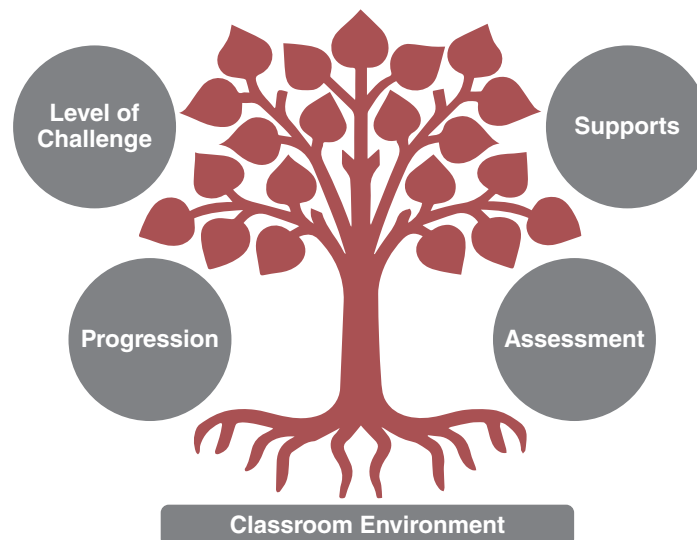
- A clear daily purpose has been communicated and students can articulate the context, future applications, and personal relevance for the day's lesson or have their own daily goals.
- Students are provided opportunities to share in the learning and know-how to work collaboratively with peers to construct new learning.
- Students are set up for success with resources through modeling, think-alouds, options for choices, and feedback reminders.

To change practice, promote reflection in teachers, and create positive outcomes for students, instructional leaders need to become more analytical about the cause-and-effect relationships occurring in a lesson.

Influences on Engagement and Learning

There are many factors that influence student achievement in the classroom. Some of these are not at all within a teacher's control, such as home life or developmental issues. For the purposes of this chapter, we focus on five main areas of instruction (see Figure 4.3) that fall within a teacher's range of control and consistently and directly impact student engagement and understanding. Now more than ever, because of what our students are experiencing in and out of our classrooms that are not in our control, it is critical to provide them

FIGURE 4.3: FOCUS AREAS IMPACTING ENGAGEMENT



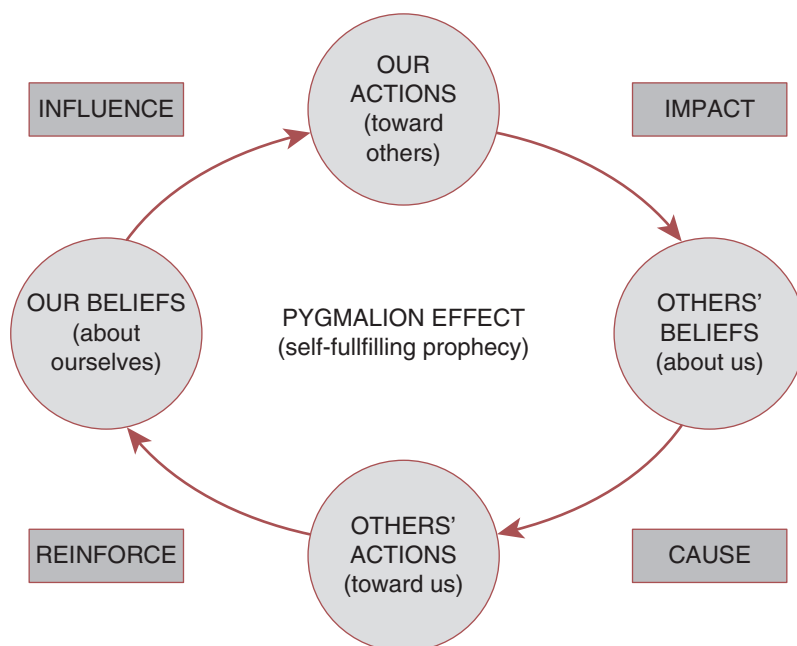
Source: RVL OnLine (2017)

havens where they will feel successful, confident, and challenged, but supported. Creating and implementing lessons that lead to high levels of engagement and learning can achieve this. Leaders need to better understand what impacts engagement and learning to help teachers work toward these goals.

In each focus area explored, suggested observer questions have been provided. We also offer classroom examples, broken down into “What is happening” (or “Evidence”) and “Potential Causes,” to more clearly illustrate how to organize and utilize evidence to determine a teacher’s impact on student outcomes and to help a teacher see these relationships.

Focus Area 1: The Classroom Environment

FIGURE 4.4: PYGMALION EFFECT



Source: Based on Rosenthal & Jacobsen (1968)

Stop and Think: How could a classroom environment positively or negatively impact learning and engagement?

Years ago research confirmed that there was a direct correlation between teachers’ expectations that build student beliefs around self-efficacy and outcomes, which came to be known as the “Pygmalion Effect” (see Figure 4.4;

Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968). Anyone who has taught or witnessed this firsthand can confirm that when a teacher creates a positive classroom climate of high expectations in which academic risks are supported, students will achieve at higher levels and become more independent thinkers and learners. Bandura (1989), through his extensive work, determined that “self-efficacy beliefs affect thought patterns that may be self-aiding or self-hindering” (p. 1175). Carol Dweck (2015), who began her research in the 1960s around learned helplessness, reaffirmed that students’ mindsets—“how they perceive their abilities”—play a key role in their motivation and achievement and found that “if we changed students’ mindsets, we can boost their achievement” (p. 20).

Suggested Focus-Area Questions for Observer Analysis:

- How has the teacher conveyed high expectations? How do the students respond to these?
- What are you hearing and seeing in students’ interactions to demonstrate the teacher has or has not developed students’ social skills and met developmental needs?
- Does the physical layout promote active learning? How are students utilizing the space?
- Is there a positive climate and culture where you observe students persevering, supporting one another, and taking risks? What is the teacher doing to promote this?
- Are there effective and efficient routines and transitions in place that students understand and execute?

When considering why students are or are not engaged or advancing in their learning, before pointing to a particular teaching strategy from an *instructional* indicator or domain of a framework, leaders must determine if a contributing cause is rooted in a *classroom environment* indicator or domain related to expectations and mindsets. Notice in the following sample “Proficient” description, to accurately select a performance level, analysis is required. (You might look to see if you have a similar attribute or indicator.)

“Creates a learning environment in which most students are willing to take intellectual risks” (CSDE, 2014).

Notice that this indicator includes not only teacher actions (“creates a learning environment”) but also the resulting impact on students (“are willing to take intellectual risks”). As a first step, leaders must determine how the teacher has created a space where students will try out ideas, speak up in front

of others, challenge peers' perspectives, and/or offer constructive feedback to each other. For example, observers should review collected quotes of the teacher feedback:

Teacher 1: T-“It’s okay; let’s give Brandon a minute to look through his notes to find it . . . he doesn’t have it yet. [after waiting] . . . Do you want to ‘phone a friend?’”

Teacher 2: T-“Hurry, we are waiting.” [S rushes to answer] “No, that’s not right.”

What effect does each type of feedback have on the student? On classmates? What if you then saw Brandon frown and put his head down? Wait time alone is a strategy that supports deeper thinking, and when coupled with positive feedback, it allows students to feel at ease with struggle, thus often resulting in an increased number of students taking risks. Table 4.3 provides an example of an observer’s organization of evidence from a lesson and the possible causes for the outcomes.

TABLE 4.3 CAUSE AND EFFECT: ENVIRONMENT

Evidence/What Is Happening	Potential Environmental Causes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all Ss are raising hands or participating in turn and talks • The same 5 Ss are shouting out • 3-4 Ss don’t question a quiet partner who just sits and waits during turn and talks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the English language learners who are not raising hands, not yet ready to speak in front of the class • T does not have a protocol for hands or name sticks • There is no wait time • Ss have not been taught social strategies for turn and talk

Observers must be discerning, as the interconnectedness of instructional practice and classroom environment is subtle. Comprehensive evidence collection allows an observer to distinguish between the two. Potentially, the same outcomes in the table could also be caused by students not understanding new vocabulary or concepts. By analyzing student response attempts, questions, or incorrect responses; questioning them when they begin to work independently; and looking at student work in the moment, the observer can better determine root causes and long- and short-term action steps.

Focus Area 2: Level of Challenge

Stop and Think: How could the level of challenge within a lesson positively or negatively impact learning and engagement?

By now, we know teachers cannot successfully increase the level of challenge if foundational elements of a positive learning environment and mindsets for growth are missing. A second area of focus lies in determining if the level of challenge of the learning targets, tasks, and questions are appropriate for the learners.

Before moving too far ahead, it is important to consider what we mean by “level of challenge” to have a yardstick against which to measure or analyze “appropriateness.” In our work, this “level of challenge” has become synonymous with level of rigor and high levels of engagement, or how students are being asked to use the learning. This chapter will scratch the surface of these ideas, so we encourage leaders to utilize our suggested resources as they provide the tools to further measure or define “level of challenge”:

Taxonomies, such as Marzano’s (2000), a revised Bloom’s (Anderson et al., 2001), or Webb’s (1997) Depth of Knowledge framework (1997)

Wagner’s seven survival skills (2008) and Partnership for 21st Century Learning’s (n.d.) skills for the “4 C’s” (for the understanding of essential 21st century skills)

Blackburn’s seven myths about rigor (2012)

Tovani’s (2000) work on the concept of rigorous versus hard (2000)

Suggested Focus-Area Questions for Observer Analysis:

- What are students doing to *construct*, *apply*, or *use* the new learning? How are the teacher’s choices of methods, strategies, questions, and tasks allowing this or preventing this?
- In which stage of learning are students? What would be appropriate challenge for that phase?
- What depth of knowledge must students utilize or apply when answering questions or tackling new tasks?
- Were there varying levels of the demand of the tasks? Was it necessary to build capacity using only recall or lower level questions during the observation or was the lesson predominantly requiring lower level thinking? Were students capable of going further?
- How does student behavior communicate whether the task is hard or rigorous?
- Are students working in their zone of proximal development? How do you know if this is occurring?

Observers may immediately recognize telltale signs of *inappropriate* levels of challenge, such as avoidance behaviors, or of *appropriate* levels, such as vocal “aha” moments. However, leaders often observe lessons that necessitate a closer review of subtle evidence, requiring an analysis of what has been collected related to the behaviors, conversations, and student work that was generated through the tasks.

Achieving this “appropriate level” in lesson planning and instruction has proven difficult for teachers. They have been asked to increase the challenge, align to Common Core State Standards or new standards, utilize new curriculum, personalize instruction, and turn learning over to students for opportunities that promote good struggle or grappling with complex problems or text—and every day teachers are trying!

Yet leaders are experiencing the same levels of change. They have not been able to provide explicit and extensive support for teachers to learn how to execute these shifts toward increased rigor and higher expectations, nor how to ensure all students are successful in the work. Therefore, it is critical for leaders to learn to recognize the difference between that which is rigorous and that which is hard and to build teacher understanding and reflection. Cris Tovani (2000) reminded us, “hard hurts; rigor invigorates. Rigor invites engagement; hard repels it” (pp. 146-147).

Take a minute to look at two classroom examples. Consider whether the evidence points to tasks that are rigorous or ones that are hard.

Example 1—fourth-grade social studies (you encountered this lesson in a Chapter 3 map):

Ss are to work in pairs to locate key facts to summarize a piece of informational text. One partner reads aloud a section and has miscued 10 words in the first few paragraphs. The other partner is a stronger reader but does not assist or correct the miscues.

Example 2—fifth-grade math:

In groups of 3, Ss will apply the use of fractions in distances and travel by creating a hiker’s guide. When asked by the observer, it was discovered in one group, 2 of the 3 Ss were missing foundational fraction understanding and did not know what a “key” for a map was, though one of the steps in the directions was to create a key. The 3rd S was doing all of the work for the group and the other 2 were just watching. The T had purposefully organized Ss into heterogeneous groups but was behind her desk during the group work.

Both classroom examples reveal that the task students were asked to complete met the criteria of “rigorous” in terms of alignment to standards. Each teacher was aware that some might struggle, placing stronger students with those who might find the task challenging. However, there were insurmountable obstacles in both tasks that rendered completion nearly impossible for some. When we put students in a position where they cannot overcome the challenges or obstacles, we have asked them to do something they cannot do, rendering the activity hard or impossible.

As suggested in Chapter 3, leaders must focus attention on evidence collection strategies to ensure a thorough analysis can be conducted of situations like these, using such data as scripted student–student conversations and teacher questions and feedback, photographed student work, and notes from interactions with students. Recognizing hard versus rigorous is a critical step, but it is directly connected to your ability to assess whether students are engaged at high levels and advancing in learning.

As previously recommended, leaders can utilize a foundational tool such as a taxonomy, classifying not only teacher-intended tasks and posed questions but student responses to more clearly discern the levels of cognitive engagement and depths of thinking. This takes time and requires a critical eye.

In Table 4.4, you will find an example of an observer’s organization of evidence from an 11th-grade science lesson. The observer is considering levels of thinking or what we are asking students to do with their knowledge. In pairs, students researched alternative energy and then presented a PowerPoint presentation to the class.

TABLE 4.4 CAUSE AND EFFECT: LEVEL OF CHALLENGE OF TASK

Evidence/What Was Happening	Potential Causes
<p>Ss passively watched until the T said to presenters: “What should they write down?” Ss then copied what they were told to write.</p> <p>3 sets of presenters read from slides, 1 could not answer questions about the topic, though answers were on slides, 1 set mispronounced words/names on slides.</p> <p>Ss were to create a “report” and were not given a purpose beyond “reporting” to classmates. (S-O “It’s just to know.”)</p> <p>In creating the reports, Ss told the observer they used Wikipedia or the first sources they found when they Googled and copied and pasted information.</p>	<p>Purpose was solely to create a report</p> <p>No goals for presenters established beyond a list of required content on slides</p> <p>No requirement for the listeners beyond copying notes</p> <p>No “research” conducted or research guidelines offered</p>

Analysis: Though the students were tasked with researching/using multiple sources, worked collaboratively, and were able to practice speaking and listening skills—all 21st century skills—the resulting level of thinking was low for the presenters and the audience. Creating a factual presentation does not represent a high level of Bloom’s taxonomy, as students simply were reciting what had been copied onto a slide. Because the task was to “report,” presenters included only facts and surface-level pros and cons. Because there was no task for the listeners beyond copying notes from slides or direction to use the information presented, audience members were compliant, either using recall or transcribing what was printed or stated. They did not need to evaluate, debate, or select one suitable alternative over another. Because students were not explicitly taught research skills, note-taking, and summarizing, they simply copied information from the Internet.

Let’s look at Table 4.5 at very different evidence and outcomes from an eighth-grade social studies Socratic Circle that resulted in high levels of thinking and discourse.

TABLE 4.5 CAUSE AND EFFECT: LEVEL OF CHALLENGE OF THINKING

Evidence/What Was Happening	Potential Causes
<p>Ss were actively debating the cause of the economic crisis leading up to the Stock Market Crash of 1929 w/out T intervention or prompting.</p> <p>Ss were using their notes and supported all answers with evidence or reasoning appropriate to each society member’s perspective.</p>	<p>Lesson/unit was designed around rigorous learning targets and high expectations.</p> <p>Ss were given roles as different members of society and had to share from that person’s perspective versus their own.</p> <p>Ss had researched in teams primary documents and leveled informational texts to ensure accuracy.</p> <p>T had been building Ss capacity to engage in Socratics through T-led, guided, and now independent practice.</p>

Did you notice how the “What Was Happening” and “Potential Causes” sections differed from the previous table? By reviewing and referencing Webb’s (1997) Depth of Knowledge framework, you could clearly explain to the teacher the cause-and-effect relationships that resulted in high levels of thinking. It is equally as important to ensure teachers hear when and why they are achieving effective outcomes.

Analysis: The teacher set rigorous expectations requiring students to use multiple texts and evidence and to sustain their own discussion, resulting in high engagement levels for all students. A debate is often classified as a Level 3 Depth of Knowledge task but tips into Level 4 when students must (and did) synthesize multiple sources. It is important to note that another cause lies in

how the teacher set the students up for success. She carefully built student capacity to ensure they were able to work independently at higher levels—our next focus area.

Focus Area 3: Progression

Stop and Think: How could the progression of a lesson or unit positively or negatively impact learning and engagement?

Remember in Chapter 3, we drew your attention to how students learn and any indicators on your rubric related to progression, scaffolding, or the sequence of a lesson. The way in which a teacher designs and executes a lesson and unit progression to ensure success is one of the most critical and difficult elements of instruction. The effectiveness requires deep analysis by the observer. Let's review some related rubric examples to consider what it is an observer should be trying to determine for all lessons:

“Clearly presents instructional content in a logical and purposeful progression and at an appropriate level of challenge to advance learning of all students” (CSDE, 2014).

“Most of the lesson components are organized and delivered to move students toward mastery of the objective” (Newark Public Schools, 2015).

Notice that an instructional leader cannot simply list the lesson components and call it a day if the progression *appears* to make sense as logical. Indicators like these help us define a logical progression as one that (a) is at the appropriate level for all students and (b) advances students. Simply stated, if a logical progression is not followed, assigned tasks or questions asked can become too hard or too easy, and students will not move forward or be able to share in the responsibility.

Suggested Focus-Area Questions for Observer Analysis:

- Are the tasks aligned to the learning, providing a building block approach or pathway so you observe students constructing an understanding or moving toward meeting the target?
- How has the teacher offered opportunities for students to share in the responsibility of the learning? Are the students successful when working on their own?

- How is the teacher monitoring understanding to determine the next steps in a progression? What are students revealing about their readiness?
- How is instructional time impacting students' levels of engagement and understanding? Is the length of the introduction age-appropriate? Are students afforded enough time for tasks and higher levels of challenge? How do you know?
- How is the teacher using scaffolding, connection-making, and building of essential skills to ensure students can work at more challenging levels or with more challenging text/content? How do you know students are successful?

To be able to determine whether the progression is leading students to the desired outcomes, observers must review the student evidence. In this work, consider three key factors:

1. **Use of Time:** Remember from Chapter 3 that you might be capturing time stamps. You can then total the time spent on each component and analyze this against outcomes. Review developmental estimates for how long students should remain seated/focused on a single task (say, for an introduction) and suggestions from experts for strategies like a recommended length for a Reader's Workshop mini-lesson to allow for independent work time. Sometimes student behavior alone will help you recognize quite easily if a task or lesson was "too long" or "too short."
2. **Use of Scaffolding:** You want to analyze how the lesson has been "chunked" based on student outcomes. We can clearly assess whether a teacher is utilizing a suggested gradual release model, such as "I do it.; We do it; You do it Together, and You do it alone" (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Observers can usually spot these chunks as they occur, but understanding the effectiveness of each of these practices can be more elusive.
3. **Integration of Skill-Building/Connection-Making:** Connected to the scaffolding, teachers must ensure that they are building capacity for students to work in their zone of proximal development, even in discovery learning. How are we allowing them to arrive at, conclude, or discover some new understanding? Observers also should pay close attention to a common possibility within the concept of connection-making—that there is something absent from the progression that has contributed to the observed outcomes.

Table 4.6 depicts an observer's thinking about a kindergarten lesson during which students were to sort events from a story by beginning, middle, and end.

The teacher modeled and created a life-sized graphic organizer and involved every student during the introduction. However, the observer wanted to understand why half were struggling to sort on their own at their seats.

TABLE 4.6 CAUSE AND EFFECT: PROGRESSION

Evidence/What Was Happening	Potential Causes
25 min on the carpet 6 min of independent seat time 8/16 were unable to complete the task correctly (of the 8: 4 were sitting and told observer they didn't know how or what to do, 3 were seen going down an incorrect path and the T was helping 1)	Well over the recommended carpet time for this age Not enough time to apply T never defined beginning, middle, and end T modeled but did not think aloud as she sorted

Analysis: Through a quick assessment, the observer can clearly determine that 25 minutes is beyond a recommended introduction time for this age, and of course, six minutes was not enough time to apply a new strategy. The teacher shared responsibility and provided modeling and independent time, allowing students to sort on their own back at their seats with the same story. However, something was still missing in the progression, as evidenced by the lack of student success. If we do not build student capacity by addressing essential skills within the progression, they will not have success applying the new skills when we turn over the learning to them.

Remember the concept of hard versus rigorous? This task just became hard. It was not at the appropriate level of challenge to advance their learning. In the progression, the teacher actually missed defining “beginning,” “middle,” and “end.” They practiced sorting, but she did not go so far as to explain how she knew where to place the card depicting the story event when she was modeling. The observer was able to arrive at this after asking five students—who could not accurately answer—how they knew where to place the events and what it meant to be “in the middle.” It was also determined in this analysis that the teacher turned students loose to work on their own even though her monitoring revealed that not all understood how to sort correctly, which leads us to the fourth focus area: assessment.

Focus Area 4: Assessment Methods

Stop and Think: How could assessment and feedback within a lesson positively or negatively impact learning and engagement?

The process of analyzing assessment and feedback cycles allows a leader to engage in meaningful conversations with teachers to support growth in one of the most impactful areas of instructional practice—one when improved, results in exponential impacts on student outcomes. To provide feedback that advances learning, teachers must skillfully utilize checks for understanding, and as we know, “the most powerful single influence enhancing achievement is feedback” (Hattie & Timperley, 2007, p.104).

As a necessary part of evaluation, to accurately select a performance level and develop a claim about practice, analysis is required to determine the effectiveness of the observed assessments conducted and feedback provided. Leaders cannot simply list assessment methods or determine whether there were checks in place. If you remember, the Dallas rubric sample from Chapter 2 included a “Progressing” description: **Teacher “sometimes checks for academic understanding, but misses several key moments and/or mostly checks for understanding of directions”** (Dallas Independent School District, 2014). An observer must determine what are key moments throughout and also analyze the quality of the checks.


Suggested Focus-Area Questions for Observer Analysis:

- Is the teacher monitoring understanding, learning, and/or movement toward mastering an objective or only toward task completion?
- Is the assessment method measuring what it needs to measure and providing evidence/data for the teacher to use? Is the check truly serving as a “formative” assessment?
- What are the various checks telling us about student understanding and application?
- What is the teacher doing with the information? Were there missed opportunities for adjustments?
- What was the quality of the feedback?
- What are the impacts on students of the adjustments and/or feedback provided?

Completing an analysis of the assessment and feedback cycle is complex work. However, to give leaders a start down the road of this process, this section focuses on two key areas:

1. What the student evidence collected from the teacher’s checks reveals about student understanding and engagement.
2. The effectiveness of the teacher’s action or decision upon collecting that evidence.

FIGURE 4.5: ONGOING ASSESSMENT THINKING MAP



ONGOING ASSESSMENT THINKING MAP

When	What/How	Who?	What they said?	What it tells us?	What the teacher did about it?	Effectiveness of assessment or response?

Courtesy of ReVISION

Our Ongoing Assessment Thinking Map (see Figure 4.5) provides an example of a frame to help leaders organize and analyze evidence after an observation. A completed map can be found at resources.corwin.com/feedforward.

A highly effective planning pathway utilizes a backward design approach with the end in mind. This requires teachers to think first about desired outcomes and then immediately consider what should be sought and utilized as evidence of understanding (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

What does the evidence from the checks reveal?

Consider an example from a sixth-grade English language arts lesson in Table 4.7. The learning target focused on students reviewing text features in informational books—recognizing the purpose of different types through a scavenger hunt so that on the following day, they could create appropriate text features for their own books. There were three observed checks for understanding near the end of the class, so the observer needed to consider the following:

- What is the teacher learning about their understanding and mastery of the learning target?
- How will/could she use the information supplied to make decisions for tomorrow's lesson?

When analyzing the assessment cycle of this lesson, consider whether checks are effectively being used to inform decision making.

Analysis: Though the teacher built in checks throughout and at the end of the lesson, they were not aligned to a specific learning target, and according to Marshall (2011), included “mediocre methods.” Therefore, she was not

TABLE 4.7 CAUSE AND EFFECT: ASSESSMENT EXAMPLE 1

Evidence/What Was Happening	Potential Causes
<p>Check 1: Group wrap up: T- Thumbs up or down: "Is everyone comfortable with text features?" Nearly all have thumbs up after 4 Ss looked around to see if peers had up or down before selecting.</p> <p>Check 2: Group shares/T floated to listen: T directions- "Share with the other group something you learned today." 2 of 4 groups shared facts about the books' topics vs. about the text features.</p> <p>Check 3: 3-2-1 exit slip: "Three things you learned in box 3, two things you find interesting about today's lesson, and one question you still have." 3 Ss were observed writing facts from their informational books.</p>	<p>Check 1: Not everyone put a thumb up, reliability of thumb method of assessing, use of a general question</p> <p>Check 2: Unclear directions/ prompt not aligned to the learning target</p> <p>Check 3: Unclear directions/ prompt not aligned to the learning target</p>

collecting evidence of understanding from all students, nor can she plan or begin the next day with evidence of individual understanding. She does not know who is ready to create purposeful text features.

Was the teacher's decision/adjustment effective?

Every time a teacher leans over a student's shoulder, asks a question, and listens to a response, there is an opportunity to make a decision. Should the teacher:

- Stop the whole class because many need some clarification, extension, or redirection?
- Pull a small group or differentiate individually?
- Provide individualized, specific, and actionable feedback?

First, observers should cite when any of these events do occur but also should notice and cite when any of this *needs to occur*, which requires analysis. Observers must help the teacher see how the shift, strategy, or action did or did not advance understanding. Three types of situations might arise to dictate *something* needs to change.

"If the evidence indicates:

1. Students are misunderstanding the instruction;
2. Students haven't 'gotten it at all' yet—that is, their pace of mastery is slower than anticipated; or
3. Students have already reached the level of understanding the lesson is aiming for and have none of the questions or confusion the teacher has anticipated and planned to address" (Popham, 2008, p. 49).

Teachers have many opportunities to provide not just an instructional shift but individual feedback when any of the aforementioned situations occur. Remember from Chapter 3 that when this is occurring, it is important to collect what the teacher said or did and which students received feedback, and it is imperative to then interact with those students in a way that provides evidence as to the effectiveness of that feedback, thinking: Did it move them forward?

Let's look at another classroom example in Table 4.8 to analyze the teacher's decision making based on assessments at the end of a minilesson. The fourth-grade social studies students were introduced to a new concept in their writing and research: determining an author's viewpoint and citing pros or cons of an issue before forming their own claim or stance. They practiced reading a short article on the carpet and were asked to add one point from the article to the "pro" or "con" column up front.

TABLE 4.8 CAUSE AND EFFECT: ASSESSMENT EXAMPLE 2

Evidence/What Was Happening	Potential Causes
<p>Check 1: Ss began standing adding stickies and returned to their desks to begin work on their own topics.</p> <p>8 Ss did not add stickies and 1/2 of the ones posted were in the wrong column.</p> <p>When asked by the observer, 6/6 Ss struggled to then define or show/give an example of "pros and cons."</p> <p>[The observer read each stickie. The T did not review these before pulling a small group to work on a different task and Ss began working independently on their own research topics.]</p> <p>10 were observed struggling to complete the mirrored task on their own topics (filling out an organizer with two columns while reading a related article).</p> <p>Check 2 (missed opportunity to monitor): T pulled a small group and did not circulate.</p>	<p>Check 1: T did not read or count the stickies that were posted.</p> <p>Check 2: T did not check in or recognize students did not know how to complete the task or locate/determine pros or cons.</p>

Analysis

Of Student Understanding: The teacher built in a check for understanding that could have provided her (and did) with immediate evidence of individual understanding. Not all students completed a stickie, and some of the ones posted were in the correct column. It became an ineffective formative assessment and also revealed an issue with the progression.

Of Effectiveness of Teacher Decision: Because the teacher did not stop and address the missing stickies or misconceptions through a reteach or differentiation, students struggled on their own, so her decision was ineffective.

Of Progression: Remember how closely related the idea of progression and an assessment cycle are when analyzing instruction. There was something missing in the lesson that caused students to place the stickies incorrectly. By speaking to students about why they put stickies in certain places, the observer was able to determine the misconception. This leads to a better understanding not just of the lesson components but potential needs of individual students.

Focus Area 5: Supports

Stop and Think: How could the level of support within a lesson positively or negatively impact learning and engagement?

This section—and final area of focus—connects with the previous four you have explored, but it specifically addresses the supports in place for students during a lesson. By now, you are recognizing that we cannot just provide teachers with a list of resources observed or supports in place or note that students were in fact working in groups, but the determination of:

- How the supports are selected for or by students.
- How students are using the supports.
- The effectiveness and impact of those supports on learning and engagement.

Consider where supports are addressed in your rubric, as they may appear in several indicators and how this sample “Skilled” description requires observer analysis:

The teacher supports the learning needs of students through a variety of strategies, materials, and/or pacing that make learning accessible and challenging for the group. Instructional materials and resources are aligned to the instructional purposes and are appropriate for students’ learning styles and needs, actively engaging students. (Ohio Department of Education, 2015)

Notice in Table 4.9 the connections between this fifth focus area and the other four and how comprehensive analysis will always return you to the evidence you collected from students.

TABLE 4.9 CONNECTIONS TO FOCUS AREA 5

Focus Area	Example of Effective Practice/Outcomes Related to Supports
#1 Environment	Students are willing to use resources provided; they will persevere.
#2 Level of Challenge	Students are working within their zone of proximal development with the help of other students, the teacher, and/or resources.
#3 Progression	Students receive the appropriate support throughout the lesson to ensure success in a gradual release model.
#4 Assessment	Teachers use evidence of understanding and engagement to make decisions as to how best to support student needs.

As the concept of supports for students is a vast topic, in this section only an overview of a thinking process is presented. However, you will find that you consistently apply what you have learned in the previous focus areas when you are determining how a teacher is supporting students. The strategies can be applied to your analysis of any type of instructional support that is in place—or needs to be in place—during a lesson. (Think back to Popham’s list in recognizing a need for a shift in Focus Area 4 and the progression of the lesson in Focus Area 3.)

Suggested Focus-Area Questions for Observer Analysis:

- Were some students struggling to answer, work, think, or discuss at expected higher levels? If so, why?
- Were some struggling with key concepts? If so, what specifically?
- Were some in need of extension or did some finish ahead of others?
- Could some jump into the task while others needed more support or review?
- How were different learning styles/multiple intelligences/varied modalities, readiness, or interests addressed?
- How did groupings/partnering/use of resources support the needs of the learners?
- How were students using peers and/or resources to construct an understanding?

Table 4.10 displays an observer’s thinking about the effectiveness of the supports in place during a math resource room Algebra I lesson. Seven students were working in three stations.

Analysis: Though students were trying to use their notes and the teacher had partnered students, created stations, and was checking in and assisting

TABLE 4.10 CAUSE AND EFFECT: SUPPORTS

Evidence/What Was Happening	Potential Causes
<p>3 Ss are looking at notes in ntbk.</p> <p>Same work for all at each station; Stations 1 and 2: complete worksheets, 3: slips of paper for matching equations to words/Font too small for Ss to read.</p> <p>No direct instruction observed/T only floated and addressed needs as she noticed.</p> <p>[Evidence to show supports are not effective]:</p> <p>5 Ss had incorrect answers on their papers; 1 said, "I'm confused."</p> <p>1 told the observer "It's easy" while just staring at it, but when T checked in, he did not know how to do it.</p> <p>When asked by observer, Ss could not: make connections between the stations (though clearly related), define words in the objective (ex. substitution) or recognize how to use substitution to check answers when solving for variable. 1 Ss needed help from partner to solve $3 + x = 4$.</p> <p>After T spent 3 min w/ 2 boys struggling, they could not explain how to solve the problems.</p>	<p>No direct instruction on concepts, vocabulary, or connections</p> <p>No explanation of the station work</p> <p>No differentiation/personalization</p> <p>Ss not understanding concepts</p> <p>Notes not sufficient to help</p>

as needed, the supports in place did not advance learning about the algebra concepts on the board. The observer spoke to five of the seven and revisited as they switched stations, and it was clear that they did not understand the concepts, based on their responses and incorrect work. Because there was no tailoring to students' needs, the act of floating was not going to meet individual learning needs nor ensure they could master the objective or even complete the worksheets correctly.

Meeting the needs of all students is challenging work for teachers, especially in this situation where students are missing many skills from earlier grades. It is important for teachers to learn to collect detailed evidence from students to ensure lessons are scaffolded at appropriate levels of challenge and to recognize which supports are of most benefit to the students. When the supports are successfully utilized, students are not only advancing in the day's learning but also developing growth mindsets and independence, along with skills to self-monitor and problem solve.

Final Thoughts

RVL 1.C is one of the most challenging standards of the ReVISION Learning Supervisory Continuum, yet it is one of the most critical. No longer can

leaders provide a summary of events to support the teachers they serve. They must conduct a comprehensive analysis of the evidence collected during a lesson to determine teacher effectiveness—shifting the focus of feedback to teaching *and* learning.

In this chapter, you explored only three strategies to move you toward this goal but tackled the most complex steps in the work to support teachers through feedback:

1. Organize your evidence.
2. Ask questions.
3. Determine causes.

As you work to master the core skills required of standard RVL 1.C, to

- determine student engagement levels, and to
- determine teacher impact on learning and engagement,

you have begun the next step—using your analysis to define clear areas of strength and growth on which you and the teacher will build actionable next steps. You will find that through comprehensive analysis of the impact of instruction on the learners, the target areas for improved practice have begun to emerge. Remember, you can access support resources at **resources.corwin.com/feedforward**.

Chapter 5 will provide you with a set of strategies for our next standard—RVL 1.D: *“Feedback contains areas of strengths and areas of growth explicitly connected to the indicator and observed practices/evidence and are developed based on indicator language and the key levers between ratings.”*