Using the **FIT Teaching**™ **Framework** for Successful Teacher Evaluations

USING THE FIT TEACHING™ FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESSFUL TEACHER EVALUATIONS

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Teaching is a complicated business. It requires passion and perseverance, expertise and effort. As the U.S. educational landscape transforms with a fresh focus on accountability measures, teachers and supervisors alike are understandably anxious about performance—both how to assess it and how to improve it.

The notions that schools make a difference in student achievement and teachers play a significant role in student learning are well established (Darling-Hammond, 2000). "Among the recent findings is evidence that having a better teacher not only has a substantial impact on students' test scores at the end of the school year, but also increases their chances of attending college and their earnings as adults" (Whitehurst, Chingos, & Lindquist, 2015, para. 1).

Conversely, how best to evaluate teacher practice and support teacher growth is still a controversial topic. The debate rages regarding the use of student achievement data to assess teachers (Baker, et al., 2010; Briggs & Domingue, 2011; Corcoran, 2010; Glazerman, et al., 2010; Schochet & Chiang, 2010; Steele, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2010). However, we are beginning to see some evidence that the use of in-class observation data to drive meaningful conversations about instructional improvement can be valuable in both the desire to assess teacher practice and support professional growth (Darling-Hammond, 2009).

TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS

The Race to the Top legislation created a renewed focus on teacher evaluation; this has become an integral part of the education reform movement in the United States. With that focus, a number of evaluation tools have gained prominence, providing school leaders with a dizzying array of choices in terms of the models themselves, their accompanying implementation tools, and local system design decisions. Most prominent across the United States are

- Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching

- Kim Marshall's Teacher Evaluation Rubrics

- Robert Marzano's Teacher Evaluation Model
- McREL's Teacher Evaluation System
- James Stronge's Teacher Effectiveness Performance Evaluation System

Beyond these five major models, individual districts have developed state-specific criteria, home-grown rubrics, and hybrid approaches—particularly in schools that provide blended and fully online options for their students. All of the models, however, have significant commonalities around teaching expectations. Therefore, embracing a robust approach to instructional design provides teachers and supervisors with guidance for success, whether one is the observer or the observed.

FIT TEACHING (FRAMEWORK FOR INTENTIONAL AND TARGETED TEACHING™)

Enter the FIT Teaching™ framework, a coherent approach designed for schools and districts to ensure that high-quality teaching and learning occurs in every classroom, every day. Based on the work of Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, FIT Teaching is both a tool for teachers to ensure success for every learner, as well as a resource for supervisors to conduct successful observations and evaluations that support instructional growth. Fisher and Frey have developed a clear and thoughtful framework that, when consistently and thoughtfully implemented, results in success for all. Using FIT Teaching, teachers can show continuous growth in a high-stakes evaluation process; more important, students are provided the opportunity to thrive and achieve.

FIT Teaching Part 1: School and Classroom Culture

A healthy school culture is the foundation for learning. Although great instruction may be happening in classrooms, students must feel they can take risks and grow—and that requires a safe and supportive environment. A school without a strong culture at its base is analogous to a sturdy house built atop a bed of sand—one strong wave will knock it right over.

In *How to Create a Culture of Achievement in Your School and Classroom* (2012), Fisher and Frey outline five pillars crucial to a culture that provides the foundation necessary for students to achieve. When considered together, these pillars provide a cohesive approach to foster a positive culture crucial to successful instruction.

Pillar 1: Welcome to our school, where all staff members consider it their duty and privilege to make every student, parent, and visitor feel valued and appreciated.

Pillar 2: Do No Harm establishes school rules that are actually teaching tools that encourage students in their development as moral and ethical citizens.

Pillar 3: Choice Words draws from the work of Peter Johnston (2004) and describes language that helps students see their potential, develop a growth mind-set, and become more resilient.

Pillar 4: It's Never Too Late to Learn operationalizes the core belief that all students can be successful if schools provide them the time and support to build their capacity.

Pillar 5: The Best School in the Universe isn't a boast, but rather a serious commitment by all stakeholders to strive toward making—or remaking—their environment into the best possible place for learning.

With the five pillars in place, schools and classrooms create environments that foster learning. They establish a culture that holds everyone accountable with the highest of expectations while providing the firmest supports. Establishing a high-quality culture is a significant characteristic of the major teacher evaluation models (see Table 1).

FIT Teaching Part 2: Establishing Purpose

Walk into a classroom and interrupt students in the midst of a task. Ask them a simple question: "What are you learning?" Very often they respond with a description of what they are doing but struggle to tell you why they are doing it. This describes the absolute necessity of establishing a purpose for every single lesson, every day.

In *The Purposeful Classroom: How to Structure Lessons with Learning Goals in Mind* (2011), Fisher and Frey describe both the necessity for establishing purpose and the challenge in clarifying it for students. Teachers are familiar with setting short-term learning objectives, which are used to design instruction toward larger goals. Those objectives, however, must be made clear to students in a tangible manner. We must, therefore, state learning purposes in student-friendly language so that students are clear on what will be learned *on a daily basis*. Learning purposes are often confused with tasks to be completed—certainly by students and, at times, by teachers and administrators. Thus, a crucial aspect of lesson design is to question whether or not the purpose meets a learning target rather than completing an assignment.
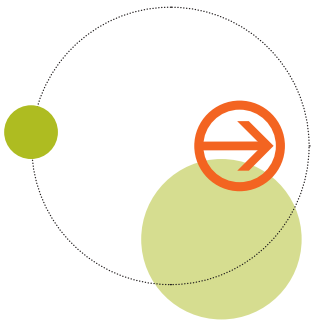
TABLE 1: OVERARCHING THEMES FROM *HOW TO CREATE A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT IN YOUR SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM* RELATED TO TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS

	Danielson	Marshall	Marzano	McREL	Stronge
1: Welcome	Domain 2: Classroom Environment	Domain B: Classroom Management	Domain 1: Classroom Strategies and Behaviors	Standard 2: Respectful Environment Standard	5: Learning Environment
2: Do No Harm	Domain 2: Classroom Environment	Domain B: Classroom Management	Domain 1: Classroom Strategies and Behaviors Standard	2: Respectful Environment Standard	5: Learning Environment
3: Choice Words	Domain 2: Classroom Environment	Domain B: Classroom Management	Domain 1: Classroom Strategies and Behaviors	Standard 2: Respectful Environment Standard	5: Learning Environment
4: It's Never Too Late To Learn	Domain 3: Instruction	Domain C: Delivery of Instruction Domain D: Monitoring, Assessment, and Follow-Up	Domain 1: Classroom Strategies and Behaviors Standard	4: Facilitate Learning	Standard 3: Instructional Delivery Standard 4: Assessment of/ for Learning Standard 7: Student Progress
5: Best School in the Universe	Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities	Domain F: Professional Responsibilities	Domain 4: Collegiality and Professionalism	Standard 1: Leadership	Standard 6: Professionalism

Sources: Danielson, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Marzano, 2011; Williams, 2009; Stronge, 2012

Much has been written about motivation. Daniel Pink's *Drive* (2011) argues that there are three main reasons why we choose to do anything: the desires for autonomy, mastery, and purpose. As teachers set goals for both short- and long-term student learning, these motivators are critical considerations.

Involving students in the learning process provides them with **autonomy**. When making decisions about their learning path (by choosing work partners, content to explore, or a product that demonstrates mastery), students become invested in the experience.

Getting to true **mastery**—the professed goal of education—is often overlooked in schools. Consider a typical instructional progression in which a teacher provides a textbook, delivers lectures, creates activities to be completed, and finishes with an assessment. At the end of that progression, a student receives a grade that informs whether or not a predetermined expectation has been met, and then the class moves on to the next progression.

Mastery learning requires a different mind-set. In her seminal work by the same name (2006), Carol Dweck describes the difference between a fixed mindset (in which one believes ability is innate and unchangeable) and a growth mind-set (founded on a belief that effort and hard work will result in improved abilities). Teachers who believe in a growth mind-set persevere with students until they master critical skills; students with a growth mind-set are likely to keep going, even when challenged by setbacks.

By making learning relevant, the teacher creates **purpose**. Instructional designers often struggle to create activities that mimic real-world experiences or tap into issues that students find meaningful. However, inviting students to analyze their own learning is an important way to make school relevant. By making sense of their individual styles, approaches, and comprehension processes, students make their thinking visible to themselves and thus become integrally involved in their own learning.

By harnessing the power of the motivators that intrinsically drive us, teachers can design instruction that provides students with autonomy, mastery, and, above all, purpose. Purpose in the larger sense creates relevance and authenticity to the work students do in school. Setting clearly articulated daily learning purposes provides students scaffolding to achieve their larger goals.

Setting achievable learning targets for students is an integral component in teachers' work, as defined within multiple evaluation models (see Table 2). When educators embrace the complex work of identifying student purposes for learning *every day*, they markedly shift their own instructional practice.

TABLE 2: OVERARCHING THEMES FROM *THE PURPOSEFUL CLASSROOM* RELATED TO TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS

	Danielson	Marshall	Marzano	McREL	Stronge
Focus on Learning Targets	1c: Setting Instructional Outcomes	A-f: Lessons	1.1: Providing Clear Learning Goals	4B: Plan instruction appropriate for students	7.1: Sets acceptable, measurable and appropriate achievement goals
Content and Language Components	1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy	A-a: Knowledge	2.44: Attention to Established Content Standards	3A: Align instruction with state standards and district curriculum 3B: Know content appropriate to teaching specialty	1.4: Demonstrates an accurate knowledge of subject matter 1.5: Demonstrates skills relevant to the subject
Relevant Purpose	1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students	A-g: Engagement A-e: Anticipation	2.47: Needs of English Language Learners 2.48: Needs of Students Receiving Special Education 2.49: Needs of Students Who Lack Support for Schooling	4A: Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place	1.7: Demonstrates understanding of the age group
Students Own the Purpose	1e: Designing Coherent Instruction	D-d: Self-Assessment	2.42: Effective Scaffolding of Information with Lessons 2.43: Lessons Within Units 1.24: Attention to Established Content Standards	4C: Teachers use a variety of instruction methods	4.2: Provides accurate feedback to learners, families, and staff on assessment results.

Sources: Danielson, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Marzano, 2011; Williams, 2009; Stronge, 2012

FIT Teaching Part 3: Gradual Release of Responsibility

As teachers work to make instruction more relevant and engaging to students, a single concept emerges as essential to their motivation and ultimate success: taking ownership. In fact, many teacher evaluation models highlight student-centeredness or student involvement as the crucial distinction between effective and highly effective teaching practices. It is often the defining difference between a proficient practitioner and a master teacher.

In *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching* (2014), Fisher and Frey outline the essential components of a gradual release of responsibility instructional framework. This approach recognizes that teaching is a recursive process, cycling from a teacher's initial design process, through instruction, student learning and application, to assessing mastery of important concepts and skills. These phases often begin with more teacher "action," but the goal is to deliberately shift the cognitive responsibility from teacher, to teacher-and-students, to the students themselves.

Often termed, *I do, We do, You do*, the notion of "gradual release" may seem familiar. However, a crucial aspect of student collaborative learning is often missing. Considering foundational research by Piaget (1952), Vygotsky (1962, 1978), and Bruner (1967), it is important to understand that, for many students, learning primarily occurs through their interactions with others. Therefore, a more apt description is *I do it, We do it together, You do it together,* and *You do it alone.*

The gradual release of responsibility model incorporated in the FIT Teaching framework relies on a thoughtful implementation of the work of teachers, the work of students, and the collaborative work necessary for deep learning (see Figure 1).
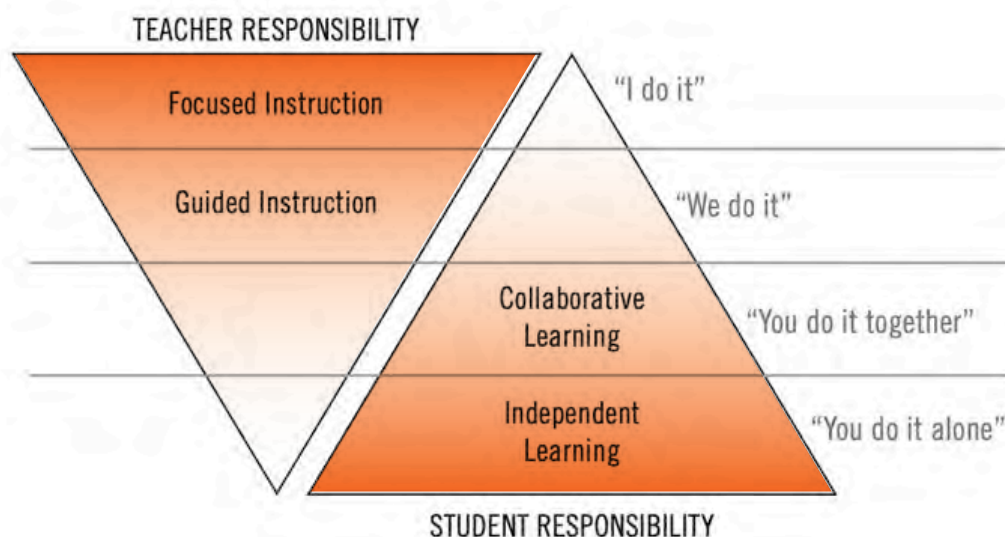
Teachers may choose to reorder the progression depending on the nature of the learning purpose and their instructional approach. Although the four phases are not necessarily linear in nature, all are crucial within a lesson for the students to understand that the cognitive load will shift from the teacher, to themselves.

- **Focused Instruction:** In addition to setting a clear purpose, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide students with information about content and processes.
- **Guided Instruction:** When students are still in the beginning stages of learning, teachers provide support by prompting, cueing, or questioning to scaffold learning for students interacting with new material.

FIGURE 1: ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF THE GRADUAL RELEASE OF RESPONSIBILITY MODEL

Source: From *Better Learning Through Structured Teaching: A Framework for the Gradual Release of Responsibility, 2nd Edition* (p. 3), by D. Fisher and N. Frey, 2014, Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

- **Collaborative Learning:** Once students have been introduced to new material, they need time to think and interact meaningfully with the content and their peers. This is the time to struggle, uncover and discover, clear up misconceptions, and consolidate understandings.

- **Independent Learning:** Once students are ready, they need time to apply the information—content and skills—in new situations. Meaningful learning occurs when students apply new knowledge in a new way, rather than simply regurgitating what was taught.

This four-phase process represents the tangible interactions of teachers and students in their learning environment, whether that's a brick-and-mortar classroom, a blend between virtual and face-to-face, or completely online instruction. These interactions represent critical components of teacher evaluation models (see Table 3).

FIT Teaching Part 4: Formative and Summative Assessments

"Is this going to be on the test?" is possibly the most frequently asked question in classrooms. Embedded in the question is a crucial assumption that the teacher provides information and the student is responsible for demonstrating that they have learned.
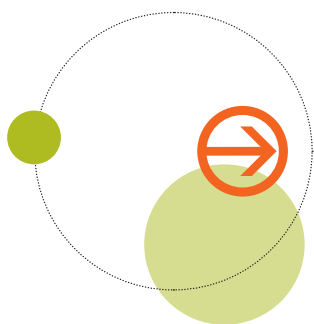
TABLE 3: OVERARCHING THEMES FROM *BETTER LEARNING THROUGH STRUCTURED TEACHING* RELATED TO TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS

	Danielson	Marshall	Marzano	McREL	Stronge
Focused Instruction	2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning 3a: Communicating with Students 3d: Using Assessment in Instruction	C-c: Goals C-e: Clarity D-c: On-the-Spot	1.1: Providing Clear Learning Goals and Scales 1.8: Previewing New Content 1.2: Tracking Student Progress	1A: Teachers lead in their classrooms 4G: Teachers communicate effectively 4H: Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned	3.4: Reinforces learning goals consistently throughout the lesson 3.5: Uses a variety of effective instructional strategies and resources 3.7: Communicates clearly and checks for understanding
Guided Instruction	1e: Designing Coherent Instruction 3c: Engaging Students in Learning 1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students	A-i: Differentiation C-f: Repertoire C-h: Differentiation	1.14: Reviewing Content 1.7: Organizing Students to Interact with New Knowledge 1.15: Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge 1.21: Organizing Students for Cognitively Complex Tasks	4B: Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students 4C: Teachers use a variety of instructional methods	3.2: Builds upon students' existing knowledge and skills 5.8: Maximizes instructional learning time by working with students individually as well as in small groups or whole groups 2.3: Plans for differentiated instruction
Collaborative Learning	1e: Designing Coherent Instruction	A-f: Lessons	1.7: Organizing Students to Interact with New Knowledge 1.15: Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge 1.21: Organizing Students for Cognitively Complex Tasks	4E: Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities	5.8: Maximizes instructional learning time by working with students individually as well as in small groups or whole groups
Independent Learning	3c: Engaging Students in Learning	A-g: Engagement	1.14: Reviewing Content 1.15: Organizing Students to Practice and Deepen Knowledge 1.16: Using Homework 1.19: Practicing Skills, Strategies, and Processes	4C: Teachers use a variety of instructional methods	3.2: Builds upon students' existing knowledge and skills

Sources: Danielson, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Marzano, 2011; Williams, 2009; Stronge, 2012

It is now well established that summative assessment alone is not sufficient to student learning. Dylan Wiliam provides an appropriate analogy:

> ...what would happen if an airline pilot navigated the way that most teachers teach. The pilot would set a course from the starting point (say London) to the destination (say New York). The pilot would then fly on this heading for the calculated time of travel, and then, when that time had elapsed, would land the 'plane at the nearest airport, and upon landing ask "Is this New York?" Worse, even if the 'plane had actually landed in Boston, the pilot would require all the passengers to leave, because he had to get on to his next job.
>
> This would be absurd, and yet, this is how most teachers teach. (Wiliam, 2006, p. 5)

A true system of assessment establishes learning goals, methods to check student understanding along the way, adjustments to instruction as necessary, and a way to provide meaningful feedback for students to participate in the learning process. In *The Formative Assessment Action Plan* (2011), Fisher and Frey introduce the essential components of true assessment within the FIT Teaching framework: Feed-Up, Check for Understanding, Feedback, and Feed-Forward.

Feed-Up: Where am I going? The notion of "feed-up" relies on the simple fact that students require a clear picture of the learning goals if we expect them to strive for mastery. Although goals may be related to constructing content knowledge or acquiring skills, students need orientation from teachers so that they can continuously move toward mastery.

Check for Understanding: Where am I now? Critically different from summative assessment is the need for formative checks that guide instruction and lead teachers to provide feedback. Although teachers can check for understanding in any number of ways, the underlying principle is that they gauge where students are in their learning before receiving a "grade."

Feedback: How am I doing? As Grant Wiggins (1998) proposed, for students to truly understand where they are on the learning continuum, feedback must be timely, specific, understandable, and actionable. Feedback that comes too late in the learning process or is too general to provide students with insight is not useful. Teachers telling students, "good job" may be supportive, but the comment does little to indicate what about the job might be "good." Conversely, feedback that is timely and specific, but unclear to the student, does not help them improve. Students need to know where to make their next learning move.

Feed-Forward: Where am I going next? A natural aspect of learning is struggle. We want students to work within their "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978), wrestling with material that not only isn't too easy, but also isn't too hard. To keep students moving forward, teachers have to be intentional about how they guide instruction. Simply telling students, "That's right!" or "Keep
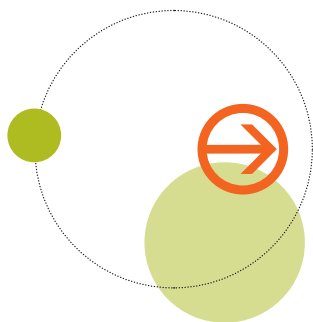
TABLE 4: OVERARCHING THEMES FROM *THE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT ACTION PLAN* RELATED TO TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS

	Danielson	Marshall	Marzano	McREL	Stronge
Feed-Up: Where Am I Going?	3a: Communicating with Students	C-c: Goals	1.1: Providing Clear Learning Goals and Scales	4B: Plan instruction appropriate for students	4.2: Involves students in setting learning goals and monitoring their own progress
Checking for Understanding: Where Am I Now?	3d: Using Assessment in Instruction	Domain D: Monitoring, Assessment, and Follow-Up	1.2: Tracking Student Progress	4H: Use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned	4.6: Uses assessment tools for both formative and summative purposes to inform, guide, and adjust student learning
Feedback: How Am I Doing?	3d: Using Assessment in Instruction	D-c: On-the-Spot	1.3: Celebrating Success 1.18: Examining Errors in Reasoning	4H: Use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned	4.7: Gives constructive and frequent feedback to students on their learning
Feed-Forward: Where Am I Going Next?	3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness	E-f: Homework	1.14: Reviewing Content 1:20: Revising Knowledge	4H: Use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned	4.6: Uses assessment tools for both formative and summative purposes to inform, guide, and adjust student learning

Sources: Danielson, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Marzano, 2011; Williams, 2009; Stronge, 2012

trying!" does not provide them with their next cognitive move. Teachers must, therefore, become skilled at prompting, cueing, or modeling—all depending on what students need for moving forward.

Although feedback is commonly understood as an essential aspect of instruction, it is often confused with general comments or assessment grades. Following a true assessment system, however, is an essential aspect of teacher evaluation models (see Table 4).

FIT Teaching and Professional Collaboration

We shouldn't lose sight that the FIT Teaching framework provides an opportunity for robust collaboration by dedicated educators. Working in isolation is often a frustrating aspect of instruction, but by using a common framework to guide practice, teachers can receive essential support from their colleagues.

Professional collaboration is a vital aspect of teacher evaluation models (see Table 5). Using the FIT Teaching framework provides teachers with both individual guidance and a powerful collaboration tool.

TABLE 5: OVERARCHING THEMES FROM THE *FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT ACTION PLAN* RELATED TO TEACHER EVALUATION MODELS

	Danielson	Marshall	Marzano	McREL	Stronge
Professional Collaboration	4d: Engaging with the Professional Community	D-f: Interims D-i: Analysis F-f: Above-and-beyond F-g: Leadership F-i: Collaboration	4.55: Promoting Positive Interactions with Colleagues 4.58: Mentoring Other Teachers and Sharing Ideas and Strategies	1B: Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school	6.1: Collaborates and communicates effectively within the school community to promote students' well-being and success

Sources: Danielson, 2007; Marshall, 2009; Marzano, 2011; Williams, 2009; Stronge, 2012

Teaching is intellectually demanding; for it to be successful, educators need clear guides based on solid research and tested strategies. Embracing the FIT Teaching framework provides teachers with tools for success in their classrooms, and it provides supervisors with the identifiable instructional moves to look for as they work to support and evaluate practice. Most important, it provides a foundation for success that our students deserve.

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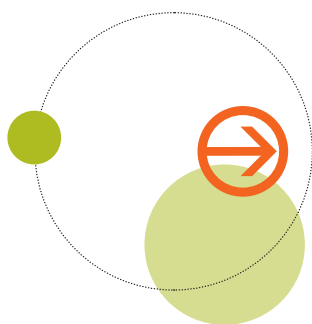
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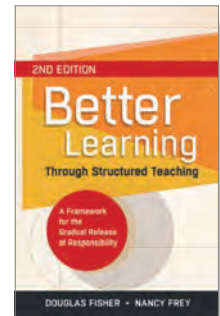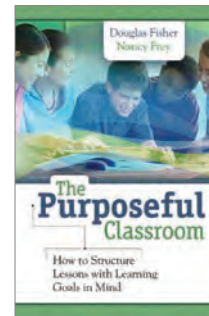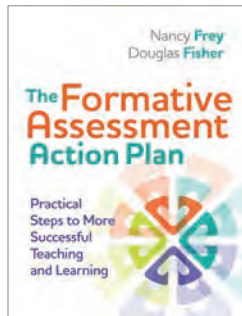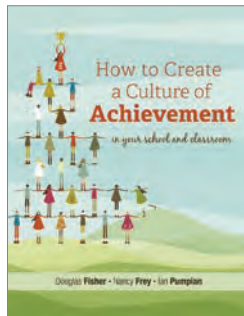
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