CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENT SCORING MANUAL:
Middle School

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Introduction

The classroom assignment rating scales described here were developed for use in the evaluation of the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project (LAAMP), and the Local District Accountability Program implemented by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Support for the development of this work was provided by the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), the Stuart Foundation, and the Program Evaluation and Research Branch of LAUSD. The purpose of this manual is twofold: first, to document our work so far, and second, to serve as a training guide for researchers and practitioners who might be interested in applying this framework. This manual also is intended to be a source of information for ways to describe the quality of learning opportunities afforded to students as well as guide teachers’ attention toward these areas to improve teaching and learning.

The criteria used for investigating the quality of language arts assignments were based on research focusing on effective instructional practices. We focused on language arts because enhancing students’ literacy skills was a goal shared across the schools that were part of LAAMP’s reform effort, and many other reform efforts as well. We hope that this framework will be adapted and used by teachers in other subject areas and grade levels as well.

Different types of language arts assignments were collected in elementary, middle and high school classrooms. Teachers completed a one-page cover sheet for each assignment detailing their learning goals and grading criteria, and submitted copies of their rubrics (if they used one) and four samples of student work they considered to be of medium and high quality. The quality of the assignments then was assessed using 4-point scales (1 = poor, 4 = exemplary) to rate the following six dimensions:
• Cognitive challenge
• Clarity of the goals for student learning
• Clarity of the grading criteria
• Alignment of learning goals and task
• Alignment of learning goals and grading criteria
• Overall quality of the assignment

This manual describes each of the dimensions and provides anchor assignments to illustrate each of the scale points for “typical” reading comprehension assignments, and “typical” writing assignments with rough and final drafts for the seventh grade. It is important to note that this manual is a work in progress. It is likely that the descriptors and anchor papers will be revised based on the data we collect from a broader range of schools in the future.

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The purpose of this dimension is to describe the degree to which students have the opportunity to apply complex thinking skills (i.e., to think critically, predict, interpret, evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information) and engage with core academic content material when completing the assignment task. Specifically, this dimension considers the opportunity students have to construct or transform knowledge as opposed to recalling, describing, or identifying basic information. Additionally, the degree to which students have the opportunity to elaborate and extend their ideas through extended writing in a genre is considered. To receive a high score on this dimension the assignment task would require students to engage with substantive, academic content material and to engage with subtle nuances of the text and overarching or larger significance of the work (i.e., connection to ideas beyond the events in the story). Students also would be required to write extensively on a topic (i.e., to compose a multi-paragraph composition).
This writing assignment was a follow-up to the reading of *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. Students wrote a speculative essay in which they predicted the effects of the main character (Jonas) leaving his community. The students were to consider how long the character was in training; the kinds of memories he received; the social environment of the community; and the fact that another character (the Giver) was there to help the community members. They also were to consider the immediate, short-term effects of Jonas leaving the community as well as the more permanent, long-term effects.

*The Giver* is a grade-appropriate substantive text with complex characters, relationships, and themes. This task was scored a 4 for cognitive challenge because students were required to transform and construct knowledge based on events that transpired in the story. In order to successfully complete the assignment, students needed to have a deep understanding of the story's themes and events, beyond a surface level recounting of the plot. This assignment also received a high score because students were required to use evidence from the text to support their predictions and to cite the appropriate page numbers from the text.
In The Giver, by Lois Lowry, the story revolves around a boy named Jonas. He is a Receiver, someone who holds memories, but rebels later and escaping from his community. By Jonas, a receiver, leaving his community, his memories would go back to the community, changing the people completely.

The changes would start the day after Jonas leaves. Searchers would try to pursue Jonas as he was getting away. As he would be getting farther and farther away from the community his memories would be transmitted back to the community, just like they did when Rosemary, a previous Receiver did (page 104, paragraph 2). The people would be frightened at first. They would not understand what they were seeing. Some of the people would be scared, others would be perplexed or upset. They would mostly react with these emotions because when a similar situation occurred before, they responded somewhat in a similar way (page 104, paragraph 4). As said on page 161 in the fifth paragraph, The Giver would help them. Even after the people calmed down, many would want changes to be made.

People wouldn’t just forget about the memories, they wouldn’t be able to. The memories would overwhelm the community (page 144 paragraph five). The people would probably be curious about the memories and would want to know more, because this would all be new to them. People would want changes in the community. Some would want to bring back color, others might petition to have the right to choose their own spouse and job. People would start rebelling, not accepting the rules that they have anymore.

Decades later, the community would be changed completely. The community would seem as if they never had black and white (page 95, paragraph seven), or "sameness" (page 84 paragraph one). People would now be able to choose their own job and spouse. There would no longer be "family units" (page eight paragraph two) or the "House of the Old" (page 27, paragraph four). Release would no longer be legal (pages 147-151). They would now have many rights because of this. However, it
In conclusion, Jonas’ leaving of the community would have quite an impact on the community. The people would go from a world of black and white to a world of vivid greens, reds, yellows, and other beautiful colors. People would now have the freedom to make many choices, even if they were the wrong choices.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 4 for Cognitive Challenge

For this reading comprehension assignment students wrote a five-paragraph essay based on A Man for All Seasons, written by Sir Thomas More. They were asked to choose from seven essay writing topics. These included the following choices:

a. Normally the weapons of our heroes in both fact and fiction are the conventional ones: firearms, swords, etc. Write a paper in which you discuss weapons of Sir Thomas More which arm him against the efforts and schemes of Henry and his regime.

b. Many of society’s heroes are characterized by their tremendous physical strength, romantic appeal, and/or valor in battle. Write a paper which focuses upon the idea that Sir Thomas More slew no “dragons,” and was certainly not a romantic figure who appealed to fair maidens throughout England.

c. The Common Man states, “I’m just a plain simple man and just want to keep out of trouble.” Discuss to what extent his philosophy has permeated modern life. In what ways has it proven detrimental to both the individual and society?

This assignment was scored a 4 because it provided students with the opportunity to engage with substantive content material. Students also were required to apply higher-order thinking skills, such as making connections between past and present times, and critically analyze qualities of the character (e.g., More’s weapons, heroic qualities, etc.) that drew on their knowledge of the text and likely furthered their understanding of the material. Finally, the five-paragraph essay format allowed students to provide fairly substantive responses to these topics.
A Man for All Seasons: Sire Thomas More's Weapons

Sir Thomas More was educated. He knew how to get out of some difficult situations, but mainly he followed his conscience (which in the end cost him his life). Sir Thomas More had a wife, Alice More, and a daughter, Margaret More (who married William Roper). Sir Thomas More was also good friends with King Henry VIII, but later on they became enemies. When Sir Thomas More got in difficult situations he would use weapons to try to get himself out of it. These weapons aren't swords, daggers, or catapults, but he used weapons that he carried around with him always. He used the weapons of "silence," topic changing and his conscience.

The last time Sir Thomas More used the weapon of "silence" it cost him his life. King Henry VIII wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon (because she gave him no male heir) and then he wanted to marry Anne. He also wanted people to agree with him on doing this. Everybody agreed except Sir Thomas More. He wouldn't tell anybody why he didn't agree either. So since he did those two things his head was cut off.

He also didn't give direct answers. He would either answer questions with something completely different, or change the topic of the conversation. Most of the time he got away with it, other times he didn't.

During the time Sir Thomas More was not agreeing with the oath he believed he was doing the right thing, following his conscience and God. He believed that his conscience and God over-powered what King Henry VIII wanted and did. And no matter what he didn't give up on what he believed in. Even right before he was put to death he had a chance to agree with what King Henry VIII wanted, but he simply refused. He wouldn't give in.

These are some of the weapons he used: "silence," changing topics and not giving up. This man really dedicated his life to God. Too bad King Henry VIII was selfish, maybe Sir Thomas More could have lived. If I was Sir Thomas More I would have probably done the same thing only I think I would have given in at some point.
Assignment task requires students to construct and transform knowledge, and this is evident in students’ work. However, students may engage with surface-level details more than less obvious meanings or nuances of a text. Students also may be required to use evidence to support a position, but that evidence may not be well-supported or elaborated. Assignment task also requires students to engage with grade-appropriate academic content material and write extended responses on a topic.

**WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Cognitive Challenge**

For this writing assignment, students read the book *Beowulf: A New Telling*, by Robert Nye, a retelling of the medieval Anglo-Saxon poem geared to a young adult level. After reading the novel, students were asked to write a five-paragraph essay in which they described Beowulf’s leadership qualities.

This writing assignment scored a 3 for cognitive challenge because it required students to read a grade-appropriate, substantive text and write a five-paragraph essay that went beyond summarizing the story or recalling basic facts. Instead, students identified what they considered to be Beowulf’s leadership qualities and provided some support for their opinions with examples from the text. This assignment did not score a 4 for cognitive challenge, however, because students only engaged with the surface level features of the story and provided little evidence from the text to support their assertions. This assignment would have received a higher score if students, for example, had been required to provide a rationale for why these qualities made Beowulf a good leader.
Beowulf, A New Telling

Beowulf is a good man. He has many qualities. Beowulf is brave, calm, strong, a good fighter, he is not greedy or ambitious, and he is calm and patient.

Beowulf has many ways to show his strongness. First, he has powerful wrists. With his wrist he tore out Grendel’s arm. Beowulf killed Grendel’s mother—she and cut off Grendel’s head. Beowulf is a good fighter because he killed all the monsters that came to him.

Beowulf is very brave. For this people admire his leadership. He was brave in the story because he had lots of bees and even though they stung him and nearly left or made him blind and when he got older he had hives and hives of bees out in the field. For that thing he did I think that makes him brave.

Beowulf has several other leadership qualities. For example he was not greedy or ambitious. He was not greedy because he gave up all of the gifts that King Ethgar Queen Wealtheow gave to him for defeating Grendel. For example he gave away his gold, his collar, and his horses all to the king.

Lastly Beowulf was a smart person because he made a plan to use his bees to defeat and trick the fire drake. All together I think that Beowulf has good leadership qualities and would make a great leader.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 3 for Cognitive Challenge

This reading comprehension assignment was part of a unit on the Middle Ages. For this assignment students answered the following questions based on their reading of the novel, *The Door in the Wall*, by Marguerite de Angeli:

a. Brother Luke’s name is Chaucer. Why is Luke an appropriate name for him?

b. Why does Brother Luke say to Robin, “We shall divide the days into teaching thy mind and teaching thy hands, then weariness shall not give thee discouragement”? 
c. Explain the following statement by Brother Luke, “For reading is another door in the wall.”

d. Why is Robin content when he is chiseling and whittling on the cross?

e. What were some of the responsibilities of the Monks in the Middle Ages? How did their work contribute to modern times?

This assignment was given a 3 for the level of cognitive challenge since some, but not all, of the questions required students to go beyond the recall of facts or summarizing information in the story (e.g., “Brother Luke’s name is Chaucer. Why is Luke an appropriate name for him?”), and to apply analytical skills such as connecting the responsibilities of the monks to modern times. Because students were only required to write fairly short (two- to four-sentence) responses, this assignment also was not scored a 4 for cognitive challenge.

Student Work

The Door in the Wall

Luke is an appropriate name for Brother Luke’s name because he has taken a vow to be a monk, and to serve his lord wherever he is most needed. He has taken the name of Luke because he is the physician in the Gospel.

I think he is encouraging him to study and learn new things and not be so pushy. Also, that he shouldn’t blow up over little things.

He said that because Robin can’t walk right now, but Brother Luke is trying to say that he doesn’t know if Robin is going to walk or not, and he should learn how to be skillful in many ways and teach his mind to go wherever he wants. Whether the legs will not carry him or carry him. For reading is another door in the wall.

He is content because he is doing something instead of sitting down and not doing anything. Also because he is happy learning new crafts. He takes his mind off his problems.

Some of the responsibilities that monks in the Middle Ages was to take care of the sick people, to feel homeless, to honor their gods, etc. Their work contributed to modern way of life in the way that people still honor God. They made places were people can stay and be cared for such as hospitals and clinics. Also now people do a lot of charity drives of good and clothing, etc. to give to people who do not have any. Also they kept the English language alive.
Assignment task requires students to summarize straightforward information, infer simple main idea, or apply the appropriate format for a given genre, and this is evident in students’ work. Students may be required to provide reasons for their position but are not required to support their positions with evidence. This is evident as well in students’ work. Assignment task may not require students to engage with grade-appropriate academic content material, or write extended responses.

WRITING Assignment Scored a 2 for Cognitive Challenge

For this writing assignment students were to read a play, *The Governess*, and write a description of one of the characters. This assignment required students to engage with substantive content material. This assignment was scored a 2 for cognitive challenge, however, because the task required students to summarize straightforward information only. Students were not required to analyze themes from the play, or make comparisons between characters. The following is an excerpt from student work considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for the class for this assignment.

**Student Work**

*The Governess*

Julia is a very hard working servant. She keeps the house clean and spotless. At times she is very quarrelable [sic], because she thought she was getting paid more money. She can be naïve because the mistress gives her ten rubles instead of eighty. The mistress was being cruel to Julia, but Julia still thanks her. The mistress was being cruel, but she was teaching a lesson. Julia is afraid to speak up to the mistress because she is afraid to lose her job.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 2 for Cognitive Challenge

For this reading comprehension assignment students were required to answer the following questions based on watching the movie and reading the book, *Summer of the Monkeys*, by Wilson Rawls:

a. Is Jay Berry Lee a likable person? Explain his positive and negative qualities using specific actions of his in the book and film.

b. How would you describe Daisy Lee’s personality in the book and film? Do you like her? Why or why not?
c. If you lived in rural Oklahoma during the 1890s what do you think you’d do with your summers? Be specific.

d. Did you like the overall story of *Summer of the Monkeys*? Explain why or why not as specifically as possible including details from the book and film.

This assignment was considered to be a 2 for the level of cognitive challenge because students were essentially required to summarize facts from the story and provide their own opinion. While they were asked to provide facts to back up their opinions, they were not required to use these facts to argue a controversial point or persuade a reader. The following is an example of student work for this assignment.

**Student Work**

**Summer of the Monkeys**

Yes, he is because he is not mean; he doesn’t dislike his sister and he is adventurous. He is also likable because he doesn’t give up. He wanted the money for catching the monkeys to get a pony, but used it to pay Daisy’s operation which was more important than the pony he wanted.

She is nice if you give her something in return. She is not dumb and she acts more grown-up than Jay. No, I don’t like her because she is a snitch and she hardly ever agrees with Jay.

I would ride a horse all summer to different places and hunt for animals, different kinds of animals. I would work some times. I would try to look for fun stuff to do. I would throw rocks at bee hives.

Yes, because he did give up on getting the monkeys. After he got the money he used it to pay Daisy’s operation so she won’t be crippled anymore and feel free. Jay is adventurous and he likes having fun. He has a lot of courage and that is why I like *Summer of the Monkeys*. 
Assignment task requires students to recall very basic information or definitions (e.g., What color was the character’s car? Where did the character go after he left the store? etc.); or to write on a topic with no structure or focus. This is evident in students’ work. Assignment task may not require students to engage with grade-appropriate content material, or write extended responses.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 1 for Cognitive Challenge

For this writing assignment students were required to write a short essay about something they treasured. This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because students were not required to engage in any complex thinking, and students did not engage with content material. The following is an excerpt from a student’s essay considered by the teacher to be of medium quality for this assignment.

**Student Work**

**My Treasures**

Well my treasure is my mom because she’s my mom. But my biggest treasure is my sisters and my one brother. This is my biggest treasure because if something would happened to my family, I would be very sad because I care a lot for my family...Well my second treasure is my dad because he doesn't live with me and I miss him. I feel sad because he doesn’t visit me no more. When I think about other people that have dads I feel sad because I don’t my dad with me. My forth treasure is money because whenever I have money I spent it all in one day. I don’t know why but I just like doing that. My last treasure is happiness for my family because I want my family to be happy through-out the years that are coming.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 1 for Cognitive Challenge

For this reading comprehension assignment students read the novel, *Bunnicula* by Deborah and James Howe and answered the following questions:

a. What did Mrs. Monroe and her family find next in the kitchen?
b. What did Peter think caused the vegetables to change and what was his solution?
c. Name two things Chester did to show the Monroes that he thought Bunnicula was a vampire.

d. What awful odor did Harold smell and why was it in the air?

e. What happened to Chester after the Monroes got a whiff of him?

f. Why did Chester try using a “steak” to kill Bunnicula? What should he have been using instead?

This assignment was considered to be a 1 for level of cognitive challenge because students were required only to recall basic facts about the events in the story. Also, these questions were printed on a worksheet that provided space for only one sentence responses. Furthermore, Bunnicula is a very simple story and could be considered a below-grade-level text. The following is an example of student work for this assignment.

**Student Work**

**Bunnicula**

a) What did Mrs. Monroe and her family find next in the kitchen?

Mrs. Monroe and her family found a variety of white vegetables.

b) What did Peter think caused the vegetables to change and what was his solution?

Peter said the vegetables changed because of DDT and said to buy organic vegetables.

c) Name two things Chester did to show the Monroes that he thought Bunnicula was a vampire?

Chester pretended to be dead and wore a cape like a vampire.

d) What awful odor did Harold smell and why was it in the air?

Harold smelled garlic because Chester was wearing it.

e) What happened to Chester after the Monroes got a whiff of him?

Mrs. Monroe gave Chester a bath which he hated.

f) Why did Chester try using a “steak” to kill Bunnicula? What should he have been using instead?

Chester thought he was using the right type of steak he should have been using a stick type of stake.
The purpose of this dimension is to describe how clearly a teacher articulates the specific skills, concepts, or content knowledge students are to gain from completing the assignment. The primary purpose of this dimension is to describe the degree to which an assignment could be considered a purposeful, goal-driven activity focused on student learning. An assignment given a high score on this dimension had to have goals that were very clear, detailed, and specific as to what students were to learn from completing the assignment. It also would allow for assessment of whether or not students had achieved these goals.
The teacher’s goals are very focused on student learning. Goals are very clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment. Additionally, all of the goals are elaborated.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of the Goals

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of the Goals

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
The teacher’s goals mostly are focused on student learning. Goals are mostly clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of the Goals

For this writing assignment, students were required to research a historical figure from the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, or Age of Exploration and to complete a three-page research paper. The teacher’s stated goals were the following:

- Students will learn to gather information (research) from multiple sources, select the best sources, organize an outline, create a thesis for their research topic, compose their first draft, rewrite their second draft, and draw a conclusion about the person they were researching. Students also will learn to distinguish relevant from irrelevant details. In short, they will learn the process of writing a research paper.

This assignment scored a 3 for this dimension because the goals were clearly and explicitly stated. The overall goal of writing a research paper was explained in detail. Students were not only to learn how to select appropriate resources and organize that information, but they were to learn how to make sense of the information by creating a thesis; by writing and revising; and at the end, by drawing a conclusion. With the exception of the goal that students would learn to distinguish relevant from irrelevant details, however, most of the goals were activity-focused (e.g., students were to compose their first draft and rewrite their second draft). For this reason, the goals for this assignment were not given a higher score.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of the Goals

For this reading comprehension assignment, students were asked to write about how the character of Scrooge in Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* changed from the beginning of the story to the end. The teacher’s goals were the following:

- Pulling out characteristic traits from actions, dialogue, thoughts. Supporting with concrete details from source. Understanding and describing dynamic characters.

This set of goals was specific in terms of the aspects of reading comprehension that the teacher wanted the students to develop (i.e., character analysis). The goals were not sufficiently elaborate or specific enough, however, to be scored a 4.
The teacher’s goals are somewhat focused on student learning. Goals are somewhat clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of the Goals

This writing assignment required students to view a 30-minute episode of a movie and then write a summary of what they saw. The teacher’s goals for this assignment were as follows:

I expected students to be able to retell the sequence of events with a partner and then to write a brief summary of the story.

This assignment was given a 2 for this dimension because the goals mostly were framed in terms of activities in which students were to engage. The purpose of these activities (i.e., what students were to learn) was not addressed.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of the Goals

In this reading comprehension assignment, students answered comprehension questions about a poem from their textbooks. The teacher’s goals for this assignment were as follows:

We have been discussing the basic elements of poetry. This assignment is to determine if students are able to read a poem and answer basic questions about it.

The clarity of the goals for this assignment was scored a 2 because they were very broadly stated (i.e., at the level of “reading comprehension”). The teacher did not specify what aspects of the poem she wanted the students to understand, or what skills she wanted them to develop as a result of completing the assignment.
The teacher’s goals are not focused on student learning and are not clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of the Goals

For this writing assignment, students were asked to write a one-page essay illustrating their understanding of a quote posted in the classroom on a weekly basis. The teacher’s stated goals for this assignment were as follows:

*To gain insight from the wisdom of others, and to be able to interact and respond to a statement.*

This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because the stated goals were not very clear, and they did not specify what students were to learn from completing the task. It was not clear how the teacher expected students to benefit from “the wisdom of others,” or what the teacher meant by having students “interact” with a statement. While the task essentially required students to interpret a quote and make a connection between the quote and their own experience, this was not explicitly stated in the goal.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of the Goals

This assignment asked students to write two pages in response to a text they had read. The assignment was not specific about what the text should be other than “anything that their parents would not object to them reading.” The goals as stated by the teacher were as follows:

*The main goal is for the students to have a personal interaction with the text.*

This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because the teacher did not clarify what she meant by a “personal interaction with the text.” It is not clear from this statement what she wanted the students to learn as a result of reading the text, or what type of skills she might have wanted them to develop as a result of the writing assignment.
The purpose for this dimension is to assess the quality of the grading criteria for the assignment in terms of their specificity, elaborateness, and potential for helping students improve their performance. How clearly each aspect of the grading criteria is defined is considered in the rating, as well as how much detail is provided for each of the criteria. An assignment given a high score for this dimension would have grading criteria that clearly detailed the guidelines for success and provided a great deal of information to students on what they needed to do to successfully complete the task.
The teacher’s grading criteria are very clear, explicit and elaborated. The teacher uses a rubric that is very detailed and provides specific information to help students improve their performance.

**WRITING**  Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.

**READING COMPREHENSION**  Assignment Scored a 4 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment the teacher provided students with a fairly detailed description of the elements that should be addressed in their essay. The criteria for this assignment were:

| Content          | • Essay is written clearly so that it is easily understood.  
|                  | • Essay uses information and is explained well.  
|                  | • Essay includes sufficient details. |
| Organization     | • Essay has a good introduction and conclusion.  
|                  | • Ideas are connected between paragraphs and among sentences. |
| Conventions      | • Essay uses interesting words with exact meanings.  
|                  | • Uses different kinds of sentences.  
|                  | • No run-on sentences or fragments.  
|                  | • Uses proper punctuation.  
|                  | • Words spelled correctly. |
| Style            | • Essay is interesting to read because writer uses humor, surprise, excitement or is original.  
|                  | • Essay shows awareness of audience. |

The above criteria scored a low 3 for clarity of grading because it was more a list of dimensions rather than a true rubric. The dimensions were organized into categories, but unlike a rubric, there was no hierarchy of dimensions within categories to help identify what constituted a high- or low-scoring essay. The criteria could have scored a more solid 3 had the dimensions been more elaborated. For example, under the organization category, there could have been a brief description of what was meant by a “good introduction and conclusion.”
READING COMPREHENSION  Assignment Scored a 3 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

This assignment required students to work in literary circles, with each student in a small group having a different role (e.g., passage picker, vocabulary enricher, illustrator). The teacher provided students with a rubric similar to the following one for each of the six roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summarizer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Written in complete sentences in paragraph form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At least five key ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Characters included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Setting included. Neatly written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Few, if any spelling or grammar errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At least four key ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Characters included.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Neatly written.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- May have a few spelling/grammar errors.</td>
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<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At least three key ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Characters included.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Setting included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neatly written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At least two key ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Characters, setting may be missing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Many errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2/1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Very incomplete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Must redo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This set of grading criteria received a score of 3 because it was fairly detailed and elaborate. However, it was not as explicit as it could have been in terms of the skills or knowledge that students were to develop. For example, because the rubric included only short phrases like, “characters included,” it was not clear precisely what the teacher might be looking for in a student’s response. Also, there were some inconsistencies between scale-points. For example, to receive a 4 on the rubric above, students needed to include both characters and setting, but only characters needed to be included to receive a 5.
Writing: Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students were required to write an essay describing their goals for the New Year. The teacher’s assessment criteria for this assignment were as follows:

- Students were mainly graded upon their five paragraph essay format.
- Five paragraphs/thesis/supporting sentences/introduction/body and concluding paragraphs.

The teacher’s criteria for determining high- and average-quality student work were based on the students’ “understanding of the essay format and their ability to communicate their thoughts effectively.” This assignment was scored a 2 because the scoring dimensions were not clearly defined for students in terms of the elements that would make an excellent, good, fair, or poor thesis, introduction, etc. Additionally, it was not clear what the teacher’s criteria were for determining whether or not students had communicated their thoughts effectively.

Reading Comprehension: Assignment Scored a 2 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this reading assignment students were asked to answer reading comprehension questions about a novel they had chosen to read. The teacher specified the following grading criteria:

- Spelling accuracy
- Complete sentences
- Accuracy of answer
- Tense agreement

This list of criteria gave some information about what was expected from a student’s response, but it was not elaborated upon or developed enough to receive a score higher than a 2. For example, it was not clear how the teacher intended to assess degrees of accuracy in the students’ responses.
The teacher’s grading criteria are unclear and unspecified. The grading criteria do not help students in improving their performance.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment students were to write an essay based on a book they read in class. The teacher’s stated grading criteria for this task were as follows:

> I was looking for thoroughness and creativity.

This assignment was scored a 1 for this dimension because the teacher did not define what her criteria were for assessing “thoroughness” or “creativity.” It was not clear from her stated criteria what students needed to include in their essay to successfully complete the task.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 1 for Clarity of Grading Criteria

For this assignment students were asked to write a one-page summary of a quote. The teacher’s grading criteria for this task were as follows:

> No rubric was used. I grade on a curve: 1. Did they complete the assignment? 2. Is it coherent?

This assignment received a score of 1 for this dimension since the stated grading criteria did not clarify what the teacher looked for in students’ responses. Beyond completing the assignment, it was not clear how the teacher defined and intended to assess the coherence of students’ written work.
Alignment of Learning Goals and Task

This dimension focuses on the degree to which a teacher’s stated learning goals are reflected in the design of the assignment tasks students are asked to complete. Specifically, this dimension attempts to capture how well the assignment appears to promote the achievement of the teacher’s goals for student learning. An assignment given a high score on this dimension would involve tasks and goals that overlapped completely.
There is exact alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals for students and what the task requires students to do. The task fully supports the instructional goals. The tasks and goals overlap completely—neither one calls for something not included in the other.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this writing assignment, students had to write a research paper on the creative accomplishment of an inventor, artist, writer, composer, or scientist. Students were to identify the person’s most creative works, summarize the person’s life history, and show how they reflected the times in which they lived. The teacher’s stated learning goals for this assignment were as follows:

- I want students to know that creativity comes in many forms, that creativity is not only in product, but in process as well, and to be able to put the creative contributions of artists and scientists in the context of the historical period in which they lived. I also want students to be able to outline prior to writing; use resources effectively, i.e., encyclopedias, newspapers, books, magazines, and CD encyclopedias to gather pertinent information; use quotation marks correctly and paraphrase correctly; summarize gathered information; write a research report with a clear focus; organize writing coherently; elaborate statements with facts, examples, and details; word process; and revise for clarity.

This assignment was scored a 4 for this dimension because the teacher’s goals were articulated in detail and overlapped completely with the requirements of the task. What the teacher wanted the students to gain from completing the assignment overlapped completely with what the students were asked to do.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Task

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this writing assignment, students were required to complete a three-page research paper about a historical figure from the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, or the Age of Exploration. The teacher’s stated goals for the assignment were as follows:

Students were to gather information (research) from multiple sources, select the best sources, organize an outline, create a thesis for their research topic, compose their first draft, and rewrite their second draft. Finally, they are to draw a conclusion about their person. In short, they learn the process of writing a research paper.

There is good alignment between the teacher’s stated goals of having students learn the process of writing a research paper and the task itself. This assignment was not given a 4, however, because many of the goals were stated as activities. The specific concepts students were to learn through researching an important person from these times were not explained. For this reason, this assignment was considered to reflect good, but not exemplary, alignment between the teacher’s learning goals and the assignment task.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this assignment students were asked to read a newspaper article about a recommendation made by a group of scientists that fishing be curtailed because of its harmful effects on marine ecosystems. The students were required to analyze and make notes about the article with respect to problem, cause, consequences, and solutions. The teacher's goals were as follows:

I want students to develop the ability to analyze a newspaper article for problem, cause and effect.
This task was scored a 3 for this dimension because the teacher’s learning goal aligned well with the task. It was clear how students could develop their ability to read critically for cause and effect by completing this task. The teacher also provided a template that allowed students to take notes and focus on the problem, cause, consequences, and solutions stated in the article. The teacher’s goal was not very elaborated, however, so the alignment was at a less specific level than would be required to receive a 4 for this dimension.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Task

For this assignment, students were presented with a quote and were asked to use a word-processing program to write a one-page essay describing “what the quote means.” The teacher’s goals for the assignment were:

- Written expression of thoughts, critical thinking, use of technology, understanding of the quote.

Some of the teacher’s goals, while not very elaborated, were aligned with the requirements of the task. Students needed to use technology by typing their essay on a computer and were to express their understanding of the quote in writing. Less clear, however, was how students were to apply critical-thinking skills to complete this task beyond providing an explanation of the quote’s meaning. For this reason, this assignment was considered to illustrate only some alignment between the teacher’s stated goals and the task.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Task

This assignment asked students to read an article about the sinking of the Titanic and then summarize it. The learning goals for the assignment were as follows:

- Improve reading level, and increase comprehension.

The assignment itself provided very little information to students about how to discriminate between important and unimportant points in the article to help them summarize the article, nor was it apparent that their understanding of the article was assisted in any way. While summarizing the events in the story might support a basic understanding of the article, it was not exactly clear how the teacher intended the assignment to increase comprehension or the reading level of the student. For this reason, this task was considered to be only somewhat aligned with the teacher’s learning goals.
There is very little or no alignment between the teacher’s stated goals and what the task requires students to do. The task does not support the instructional goals.

**WRITING Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Task**

For this assignment students were to write essays based on a book they had studied in class. Students were either to compare and contrast four characters in the book; write about two of the major themes in the book; or write an essay from the point of view of one of the characters. The teacher’s goals for this assignment were that students:

- Use their creativity in the context of writing about a specific theme in the book.

This assignment was given a low score for this dimension since the requirements of the task—that students apply higher-order thinking skills and analyze the characters—were not reflected in the teacher’s goals. The teacher mentioned students using creativity in their writing only. Furthermore, while the teacher mentioned “writing about a specific theme” in her goals, some of the essay topics did not require students to write about themes in the book at all (e.g., writing from the perspective of one of the characters). For this reason, this assignment was given a low score for this dimension.

**READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Task**

For this task students read an adapted version of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* and then created a storyboard on which they illustrated and wrote a short caption for eight important events in the story. The following were the teacher’s stated learning goals for this assignment:

- Students will be able to identify important events in a play, put events from the play in chronological order, (and) identify a quote.

At first glance there might appear to be an alignment between the goals and what the task required of students. Upon closer inspection of the student work, however, all of the captions and events chosen by the students were identical. It appeared that the teacher provided the captions (and thus the order of events) to the students, and so all the assignment actually required of students was to illustrate the captions. While completing this assignment might help students remember the most important events in the story, the assignment did not appear to give them the opportunity to practice the skill of identifying and summarizing important events from a text, and then put those events in chronological order. The portion of the assignment that appeared to be generated by students was in the creation of basic illustrations (at the level of stick figures) for each of the captions. Drawing pictures was not part of the teacher’s learning goals for the assignment, however. For these reasons, this assignment was given a low score for this dimension.
This dimension is intended to describe the degree to which a teacher’s grading criteria support the learning goals, i.e., the degree to which a teacher assesses students on the skills and concepts they are intended to learn through the completion of the assignment. Also considered in this rating is whether or not the grading criteria include extraneous dimensions that do not support the learning goals, as well as the appropriateness of the criteria for supporting the learning goals. An assignment given a high score on this dimension had to involve grading criteria and goals that overlapped completely.
There is exact alignment between the teacher’s stated learning goals for students and the stated grading criteria.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students were to write an essay describing the contributions of a famous artist or scientist.

The teacher’s goals for this assignment were as follows:

I want students to know that creativity comes in many forms, that creativity is not only in product, but in process as well, and to be able to put the creative contributions of artists and scientists in the context of the historical period in which they lived. I also want students to be able to outline prior to writing; use resources effectively, i.e., encyclopedias, newspapers, books, magazines, and CD encyclopedias, to gather pertinent information; use quotation marks correctly and paraphrase correctly; summarize gathered information; write a research report with a clear focus; organize writing coherently; elaborate statements with facts, examples, and details; word process; and revise for clarity.

The teacher used a rubric to assess student work. The criteria for what an “A” paper would include are stated below:

| A | • An overview of the person’s life, including the important moments.  
• Important achievements.  
• What prompted the person to do what s/he did?  
• How the person reflected his/her times.  
• Contains conclusion which stated the writer’s feelings about the subject of the report.  
• A bibliography of sources.  
• Focuses on topic with a clear thesis aimed at describing the person’s life, creative accomplishments, and why the person was important.  
• Supports statements with facts, examples, and details.  
• Word processed. |
This assignment was scored a 4 for this dimension because both the goals and the grading criteria were clearly stated and elaborated. There is a direct correspondence between what the teacher wanted students to know and be able to do and what the teacher looked for when scoring the papers. For example, one goal was for students to “write a research report with a clear focus.” This goal corresponds to a point in the rubric: “Focused on topic with a clear thesis aimed at describing the person’s life, creative accomplishments, and why the person was important.”

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 4 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
The teacher’s stated learning goals and the stated grading criteria are mostly aligned.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this writing assignment, students wrote a letter applying for a job from the perspective of a character in a book they had read as a class (*Johnny Tremain*, by Ester Forbes). The teacher’s stated goals for the assignment were as follows:

- Letter writing skills, details from novel *Johnny Tremain*, voice of Johnny, editing, proofreading.

The teacher used the following rubric to assess students’ work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Johnny Tremain Business Letter Rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excellent letter form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include your experience as a silversmith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include at least three talents and personal strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include knowledge of available positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excellent punctuation, grammar, spelling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rough draft and peer editing paper included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least three paragraphs with an introductory and closing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Excellent language, transitions are used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Correct letter form is used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include experience as a silversmith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include at least two talents and personal strengths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include some knowledge of available positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Punctuation, grammar and spelling have few errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least three paragraphs with an introductory statement and closing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language flows for the most part; some transitions are used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rough draft and peer editing paper included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Correct letter form is used, but may have included ZIP code or incorrect date.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Included experience as a silversmith.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least one talent and one personal strength is included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Include knowledge of current positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Punctuation, grammar errors are noted but does not interfere with the meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least two paragraphs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language is clear but transitions and sentence variety needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rough draft and at least one peer edit included.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall this assignment was considered to illustrate good alignment between the learning goals and the grading criteria the teacher used to assess student work. The goals for the assignment tended to be broadly stated, however, and not all the teacher’s goals were reflected in the grading criteria. For example, one of the four goals was “voice of Johnny,” yet nothing was included in the grading criteria that addressed whether or not students accomplished this successfully. For this reason, this assignment was not given a 4 for this dimension.

**READING COMPREHENSION  Assignment Scored a 3 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria**

For this reading comprehension assignment students participated in literary circles in which they worked in small groups to analyze and discuss the novel, *Farewell to Manzanar*, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston. Students adopted different roles within the groups, such as the “vocabulary enricher,” “summarizer,” “passage picker,” “connector,” and “illustrator,” and completed work based on their role. The teacher’s stated learning goals for this assignment were that students:

*Choose passages that give them insight into character, theme, plot, vocabulary and would lead to enriched discussion.*

To assess students’ work, the teacher used rubrics that were specifically tailored to each of the roles. The following is an example of the rubric used to assess the work created by students who were in the “summarizer” role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Johnny Tremain Business Letter Rubric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multiple errors in the letter form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experience as silversmith included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talent as silversmith or personal strength included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge of current positions probably not included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• At least one paragraph. Numerous punctuation, grammar errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sentences are short and choppy with no transitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rough draft and peer editing sheet may be included.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **2**                                |
| • Letter form is nearly nonexistent.|
| • Experience as silversmith may be mentioned.|
| • Experiences or personal strengths may be listed.|
| • No knowledge of current positions included.|
| • A paragraph included with errors that make reading difficult.|
| • Sentences are choppy and mostly listing is done.|
| • Rough draft and peer editing paper not included.|

| **1**                                |
| • Don’t even go there!               |
This assignment was given a 3 for this dimension in part because the rubrics were tailored to each of the roles adopted by students. Also, while not elaborated, the rubric clearly specified what students were to include in their summaries (e.g., the number of key ideas, inclusion of characters and setting, etc.). The teacher's goals were not very specific, however, and the rubric was not extremely elaborated. For this reason this assignment was given a 3 instead of a 4 for this dimension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summarizer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Written in complete sentences in paragraph form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At least five key ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Characters included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Setting included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neatly written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Few, if any, spelling or grammar errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- At least four key ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Characters included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Neatly written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- May have a few spelling/grammar errors.</td>
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</tr>
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<td>- At least three key ideas.</td>
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<td>- At least two key ideas.</td>
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<td>- Characters, setting may be missing.</td>
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<td>- Many errors.</td>
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<td>2/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Very incomplete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Must redo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WRITING Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this assignment students wrote a five-paragraph essay describing their goals for the New Year. The teacher’s goals for the assignment were as follows:

Students need to show understanding of the writing process; students need to show understanding of five-paragraph essay format; students need to be able to communicate ideas in writing.

The teacher’s grading criteria for the assignment were as follows:

Students were mainly graded upon their five-paragraph essay format. Five paragraphs, thesis, supporting sentences, introduction, body, and concluding paragraph. Determination of high versus medium papers was based upon students’ understanding of the essay format and their ability to communicate their thoughts effectively.

This assignment was considered to illustrate only some alignment between the teacher’s goals and the grading criteria. The goals were quite broad and focused on the students’ adherence to the essay format. The teacher’s grading criteria also were quite broad and mainly focused on whether or not students had adhered to the essay format. While the task and the grading criteria showed some alignment, this assignment received a 2 on this dimension because this alignment occurred only at a very general level.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 2 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this reading comprehension assignment students were to analyze an article from the Los Angeles Times describing an environmental problem. The teacher’s learning goals for the assignment were that students develop the ability to:

Analyze a newspaper article for problem, cause, and effect.

The grading criteria for the assignment were that students:

Articulate each aspect—problem, cause, etc., clearly.
This assignment was given a 2 for the alignment of the learning goals and grading criteria. The grading criteria specified that students be able to identify the problem and its cause and effect in a clear manner. How the teacher intended to judge the relative clarity of the students’ responses was not defined. Because the relationship between these two dimensions was fairly general and broad, the teacher’s goals and grading criteria were determined to be only somewhat aligned.
There is very little or no alignment between the teacher’s stated goals and what the task requires students to do. The task does not support the instructional goals.

**WRITING** Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

In this assignment students were asked to write a business letter in which the students requested something from a company or individual. The teacher’s stated learning goals were as follows:

> Audience awareness, use of proper business language, business letter format.

The teacher’s stated grading criteria were:

> High [papers] would follow the format and show awareness of audience (“Waz up” is appropriate for a fun letter to Leonardo DiCaprio). Middle [papers] didn’t follow format so well, but were nonetheless thorough.

This assignment was given a low score for this dimension because the grading criteria did not match the teacher’s goals. The teacher’s goal for the assignment was that students learn to write a business letter that used “proper business language” and that followed a “business letter format.” The grading criteria and the actual assessment of student work, however, allowed for students to write “fun” letters and use slang. The teacher’s original goal that students learn to write a business letter was not carried through in the assessment of student work.

**READING COMPREHENSION** Assignment Scored a 1 for Alignment of Goals and Grading Criteria

For this reading comprehension assignment students responded to a set of questions based on the novel, *Slake’s Limbo*, by Felice Holman. The learning goals for this assignment were that students:

> Be able to differentiate important details from unimportant, to draw connections to their own experiences, and to be able to predict.

The teacher’s stated grading criteria were:

> The assignment was assessed by whether the students gave a correct answer or were thoughtful in the application process.
This assignment was given a 1 for the alignment of the learning goals and the grading criteria since none of the teacher’s goals were explicitly considered or included in the grading criteria. It was not clear from this description how the teacher intended to assess the quality of students’ efforts to differentiate between important and not important facts, or to make connections between the events in the novel and their own experience. It also was not clear what criteria the teacher intended to use to assess whether or not students had made plausible predictions, or provided “thoughtful” responses.
Overall Quality of Assignment

This dimension is intended to provide a holistic rating of the quality of the assignment based on its level of cognitive challenge, the clarity of the goals for student learning, the clarity of the grading criteria, the alignment of the learning goals and the assignment task, and the alignment of the learning goals and the grading criteria.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 4 for Overall Quality of Assignment

This writing assignment was a follow-up to the reading of The Giver, by Lois Lowry. Students wrote a speculative essay in which they predicted the effects of the main character (Jonas) leaving his community. The students were to consider how long the character was in training; the kinds of memories he had received; the social environment of the community; and the fact that another character (the Giver) was there to help the community members. They also were to consider the immediate, short-term effects of Jonas leaving the community as well as the more permanent, long-term effects.

The Giver is a grade-appropriate substantive text with complex characters, relationships and themes. This task was scored a 4 for cognitive challenge because students were required to transform and construct knowledge based on events that transpired in the story. In order to successfully complete the assignment, students needed to have a deep understanding of the story’s themes and events, beyond a surface level recounting of the plot. This assignment also received a high score because students were required to use evidence from the text to support their predictions and to cite the appropriate page numbers from the text.

The teacher’s goals for the assignment were that they practice speculative essay format, and learn to use specific, concrete details from the novel as evidence to support their ideas. This goal further was supported by the teacher’s requirement that students cite page numbers in the novel. The teacher used a 6-point rubric to grade the assignment. To receive the highest score of a 6, students were to:

- show a clear understanding of the situation, describing it fully,
- make creative connections between the situation and the causes or effects,
- include plausible causes or effects; teach the reader something new, and
- use fully developed supporting detail.

This assignment received a score of 4 overall because students were required to engage with substantive content material and apply higher-order thinking skills. The teacher’s goals were clear in terms of what students were to learn by completing the assignment, and these goals (specifically using supporting detail) were reflected in the grading criteria.
The grading criteria also were fairly elaborated, though more detail could have been provided in terms of defining some of the dimensions (e.g., how it would be determined that students had made a creative connection).

**Student Work**

**Jonas’ Community**

In *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry, the story revolves around a boy named Jonas. He is a Receiver, someone who holds memories, but rebels later and escapes from his community. By Jonas, a receiver, leaving his community, his memories would go back to the community, changing the people completely.

The changes would start the day after Jonas leaves. Searchers would try to pursue Jonas as he was getting away. As he would be getting farther and farther away from the community his memories would be transmitted back to the community, just like they did when Rosemary, a previous Receiver did (page 104, paragraph 2). The people would be frightened at first. They would not understand what they were seeing. Some of the people would be scared, others would be perplexed or upset. They would mostly react with those emotions because when a similar situation occurred before, they responded somewhat in a similar way (page 104, paragraph 4). As said on page 161 in the fifth paragraph, "The Giver would help them." Even after the people calmed down, many would want changes to be made.

People wouldn’t just forget about the memories, they wouldn’t be able to. The memories would overwhelm the community (page 144 paragraph five). The people would probably be curious about the memories and would want to know more, because this would all be new to them. People would want changes in the community. Some would want to bring back color, others might petition to have the right to choose their own spouse and job. People would start rebelling, not accepting the rules that they have anymore.

Decades later, the community would be changed completely. The community would seem as if they never had black and white (page 95, paragraph seven), or "sameness" (page 84 paragraph one). People would now be able to chose their own job and spouse. There would no
longer be "family units" (page eight paragraph two) or the "House of the Old" (page 27, paragraph four). Release would no longer be legal (pages 147-151). They would now have many rights because of this. However, it would still be a community with rules, necessary to maintain order.

In conclusion, Jonas’ leaving of the community would have quite an impact on the community. The people would go from a world of black and white to a world of vivid greens, reds, yellows, and other beautiful colors. People would now have the freedom to make many choices, even if they were the wrong choices.

READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 4 for Overall Quality of Assignment

No assignment to illustrate this scale point for this dimension is available at this time.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 3 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this writing assignment, students read the book *Beowulf: A New Telling*, by Robert Nye, a retelling of the medieval Anglo-Saxon poem geared to a young adult level. After reading the novel, students were asked to write a five-paragraph essay in which they described Beowulf’s leadership qualities.

This writing assignment scored a 3 for cognitive challenge because it required students to read a grade-appropriate, substantive text and write a five-paragraph essay that went beyond summarizing the story or recalling basic facts. Instead, students identified what they considered to be Beowulf’s leadership qualities and provided some support for their opinions with examples from the text. This assignment did not score a 4 for cognitive challenge, however, because students only engaged with the surface level features of the story and provided little evidence from the text to support their assertions. This assignment would have received a higher score if students, for example, had been required to provide a rationale for why these qualities made Beowulf a good leader, and/or had explored the underlying meaning or symbolism of the text.

The teacher’s goals for this assignment were as follows:

“I did not want the students to summarize the story. I wanted them to do something more complex by identifying the theme from the story and supporting their answers using examples from the story.”

The goals for this assignment were aligned with the task, and were scored a 3 since they were clearly stated and focused on student learning, but were not very detailed or elaborated.

To assess students’ work, the teacher used a 4-point rubric that was detailed and elaborated. There were some inconsistencies in the teacher’s criteria, however, which is why the rubric was not scored a 4. For example, supporting ideas with examples was only mentioned in the third scale-point. Additionally, these criteria were not fully aligned with the teacher’s goals that focused on identifying a theme and supporting ideas with evidence from the story. The teacher’s grading criteria were as follows:
Beowulf is a good man. He has many qualities. Beowulf is brave, calm, strong, a good fighter, he is not greedy or ambitious, and he is calm and patient.

Beowulf has many ways to show his strength. First, he has powerful wrists. With his wrist he tore out Grendel’s arm. Beowulf killed Grendel’s mother—THE and cut off Grendel’s head. Beowulf is a good fighter because he killed all the monsters that came to him.

Beowulf is very brave. For this his people admire his leadership. He was brave in the story because he had lots of bees and even though they stung him and nearly left or made him blind and when he got older he had hives and hives of bees out in the field. For that thing he did I think that makes him brave.

Beowulf has several other leadership qualities. For example he was not greedy or ambitious. He was not
READING COMPREHENSION  Assignment Scored a 3 for Overall Quality of Assignment

This assignment asked students to work in literature circles to analyze different books, including, Farewell to Manzanar, by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston; Dragon Wings, by Jillian Sawyer; and Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry, by Mildred D. Taylor. Each literary circle had students take one of the following roles: vocabulary enricher, summarizer, passage picker, illustrator, literary luminary, discussion director, connector, or character director.

This was a cognitively demanding assignment in that it required the students, in some roles, to move beyond literal reading comprehension and into reading for figurative meaning. For example, a passage picker was required to select passages from the book and then comment on their symbolism, sensory description, character or plot development, etc. However, the extent of this challenge was limited by the fact that not all students were challenged in the same way. For example, the illustrator did not have a very cognitively challenging task. Also, the students who were required to analyze passages were asked to do so in a sentence or two for a number of passages that they selected. Because only some of the students were required to write or analyze extensively, the cognitive challenge of this assignment was scored a 3.

The teacher stated the goals of this assignment as follows:

Choosing passages that gave them insight into character, theme, plot, vocabulary, and would lead to enriched discussions.

These goals were clear and explicit about the type of reading comprehension that the teacher intended the students to develop. She wanted them to understand specifically, character, theme, plot, and vocabulary in the books they read.

To assess the assignment, the teacher used a number of rubrics similar to the following:
This set of grading criteria received a score of 3 because it was fairly detailed and elaborate. However, it was not very explicit in terms of the skills or knowledge that students were to develop, and there were some inconsistencies between scale points. For these reasons we did not consider this rubric to be a 4.

The alignment between the goals and the task was also a 3. Completing any of these tasks and then sharing the findings among the group in their literary circles clearly helped promote the specific reading comprehension goals outlined by the teacher. However, because for this particular assignment students were only asked to carry out one of the roles, any one student’s learning was limited to the role he or she was assigned.
The alignment between the goals and the grading criteria is also a 3. The teacher described in great detail her criteria for each of the roles. These criteria aligned well with her goals, though there was some variation among the different roles. For example, the literary luminary’s role and grading criteria directly related to the goals of understanding character, theme, and plot. The grading criteria and the goals for the role of the illustrator, in contrast, did not overlap as well.

In summary, we considered this assignment to be a 3 overall because at least some of the roles students assumed required students to analyze their texts for figurative meaning and make meaningful connections. The goals of the task were clearly defined in terms of the type of reading comprehension students were to gain, and the grading criteria were well defined and detailed, though not very elaborated. Additionally, the task was well aligned with both the goals the teacher stated and the grading criteria, for most of the roles at least.

**Student Work**

**Connector**

When Jeanne talked about Bill and Frances moving to New Jersey, it reminded me of what many families, in particular my own. My mother came over to the U.S. from Mexico, in hope for a better life and greater opportunities. Just as Bill and Frances, my mother sacrificed many things, such as her family, education, home and prized possessions. She left at the age of 16 with only the clothes on her back, and traveled by foot to the border that cuts off California from the U.S. from Mexico.

When my mother arrived in California, she stayed in many homes with her friends who had left Mexico for the same reasons. She did this until she reached Sacramento where her two older sisters were staying. There, they promised her a job and an education which she never received and ended up just doing chores around the house. My mother soon got a message that her grandmother, who she was closer to than her own mom, had died. She wanted to go to Mexico to attend her grandmother’s funeral but didn’t have enough money or time (in Mexico the dead are buried the next day after their death). My mother was always regretful of that situation…
Assignment Scored a 2 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this writing assignment students were to write a five-paragraph essay on the following topic:

What are the three things you would change about our school? How could you make this school a better place? Think of some real and practical ideas—anything goes!

The teacher’s stated learning goals for this task were as follows:

Students were to write, revise and do a final draft of a five-paragraph essay.

The teacher’s criteria for grading were:

Is the format correct? Revision? Ideas supported? Use of grammar, sentence structure?

This assignment mostly focused on students applying the format of a five-paragraph essay. While this is a very important skill to develop and practice, students were not required to engage with content material to complete this task, or construct a persuasive argument. The teacher’s goals for the assignment were stated as activities, and it was not clear what she wanted students to learn from the assignment beyond practicing applying the five-paragraph essay format. The grading criteria were a list of questions that were not elaborated upon. No information was provided on how the relative quality of student work would be assessed. Because the goals and the grading criteria were stated so broadly, they were aligned, but only at a very general level. For these reasons, this assignment was considered to be a 2 for overall quality.
How could we change this school?

I think we could change this school by raising some money. When we raise enough money we can use the money to get new lunch. Also to have a bigger gym. Also a swimming pool inside the gym and outside. This is what our school needs.

Our lunch would be McDonalds, Burger King, Taco Bell, Carl's Jr. The Green Burrito or Pizza Hut. For dessert we would have ice cream, cake, doughnuts or cookies. We would be able to choose what we wanted. It would be nice and yummy.

We also need a bigger gym. If we had a bigger gym there would be more seats. Then more people can come and watch. Also we might feel more proud. A bigger gym would be better.

We can also have a pool. Then we can practice and have a swimming team. Also in the summer we can come and swim. In the winter we can use the inside pool. It would be lots of fun to have a pool for winter and summer.

I think we could do this by raising money. If we raise enough money we can build a better gym. We can also have two pools. Even a better lunch. I think every middle and elementary school needs this. We need this so we can feel more proud.
READING COMPREHENSION Assignment Scored a 2 for Overall Quality of Assignment

This assignment required students to complete a worksheet designed by the teacher in order to gain insight on the character of Lemon Brown from the book, *The Treasure of Lemon Brown* by Walter Dean Myers. The worksheet was a grid on which they wrote notes on the attributes of the main characters. The exact directions on the chart that students were asked to fill out were as follows: “Using the story, look for information that tells what kind of a person Lemon Brown is. Find passages that describe him physically, show his own words or actions and that show what other people say and do about him. From those passages, infer or guess what Lemon Brown’s true personality is like.”

The assignment was moderately cognitively demanding in that students were asked to go beyond summary and make inferences. However, students were not held accountable for writing analyses, only choosing passages that revealed certain characteristics of the main character, as evidenced by the work that the teacher considered to be high level and medium level. While there is some inference involved in selecting the passages, the task did not require students to write out their explanations and make their inferences explicit. Therefore, the task received a 2 for cognitive challenge because students were only being asked to search for evidence of the things that characterized Lemon Brown, but not to write about this evidence.

The teacher’s learning goals for this assignment were as follows:

**Inference from reading, taking passages from reading.**

These goals were straightforward, but broadly stated. Additionally, one of the stated goals was framed as an activity (“taking passages from reading”). To receive a higher score (3 or 4), the goals would have needed to be more specific about the skills or concepts students were to learn as a result of completing the assignment.

The assignment was graded by the teacher using the following rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 Full Accomplishment</th>
<th>2 Substantial Accomplishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• You have 3 appropriate quotations for each column heading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You have discussed how that passage reveals something about Lemon’s true character.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Your responses to the passage are insightful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You have 2-3 appropriate quotations for each column heading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• You have discussed how that passage reveals something about Lemon’s true character.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Your responses to the passage are general.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At first glance this rubric would appear to provide a description of the range of achievement students could attain. Potentially this could give more information to students about how to complete the task successfully than would usually be provided by a simple list of criteria (i.e., most of the grading criteria for the assignments scored a 2 for this dimension). A closer look at this rubric, however, indicated that the criteria within each scale point were still not very clearly defined. For example, it was not clear how the teacher intended to differentiate between “insightful” versus “general” responses. Placing these characteristics in a rubric did not make the grading criteria any clearer.

There was some alignment between the goals and the task, but since the goals were stated so broadly, the highest this alignment could be scored was a 2.

Similarly, the alignment between the goals and the grading criteria was also scored a 2 because both the goals and the grading criteria were stated broadly and aligned at only a general level.

In summary, this assignment was given an overall score of 2 because it was only moderately challenging. The goals were clear but generally stated, and the grading criteria essentially consisted of broadly defined characteristics. There was some alignment between the task and its goals and between the task and the stated grading criteria, but this alignment occurred at a general level.
Student Work

Lemon Brown

Physical description
"He was an old man." He is probably wrinkled and weak.
"His black heavily wrinkled face was surrounded by a halo of wrinkled white hair." This means that he has very long hair, gray hair.

His thoughts, speech and actions
"Ain't you got no home? You ain't one of the bad boys looking for my treasure is you." He is trying to figure out if Greg has a home or if he's homeless. Also he is very protective of his stuff and is very uneducated.

Other people's thoughts, speech and actions
"Sweet Lemon?" Greg asked. Greg's trying to say that he had a weird nickname back then. This also means that people admired him for who he was.
WRITING Assignment Scored a 1 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this writing assignment, students watched a video, “Legend of the Desert Bigfoot,” and took notes. The next day, they wrote a summary of the movie and answered the following questions:

1. What did the people of the town think the Bigfoot was?
2. In what part of the United States do you think the story took place?
3. What did Mr. Plummer do wrong? Name two things.
4. What is the main conflict in the story?
5. How is the conflict resolved?
6. How would you rate this story/video on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being excellent)? Why do you rate it thus?

The teacher’s stated goals for the assignment were as follows:

- Good note taking skills, connections from movie to notes to answering questions.

The teacher’s stated grading criteria were as follows:

- Students received credit for taking notes, and received a grade for answering questions accurately.

This assignment was scored a 1 for overall quality. Students were required to provide one sentence of factual information in response to the questions, and the content of the video was not very challenging. The teacher’s goals for the assignment were broadly stated and were unclear as to what students were to gain from completing the assignment beyond practicing their note-taking skills. The grading criteria only addressed whether or not students took notes and did not assess the quality of their note taking, though the teacher collected students’ notes along with their writing assignment. The assessment of this task, therefore, would not provide students with information about how they could improve their note-taking abilities—an important skill for students to develop and the primary learning goal for the assignment. Students also were graded for answering questions correctly, though the criteria for relative levels of success (an “A” paper versus a “B” paper for example) were not made explicit to the students.
LEGEND OF THE DESERT BIGFOOT

Answer the following questions as accurately as you possibly can.

1) What did the people of the town think the Bigfoot was?
   They thought he was a Chinese legend.

2) In what part of the United States do you think the story took place?
   I think that at Arizona.

3) What did Mr. Plummer do wrong? Name two things.
   He tried to get the gorilla back and hit the sheriff on the head. And then he was chosen a kid and then he got arrested for being a butcher.

4) What is the main conflict in the story?
   The people are being attacked by a bigfoot. And they were horrified.

Excerpt from Student’s Notes

It starts by a dog barking to his owner that somebody was there. The owner gets outside and he is attacked by a bigfoot. His grandson and his grandpa were in the road to go pick up a car because the car had been attacked by a bigfoot. The man who got attacked by the bigfoot is Mr. Bamer. There are three guys that are having like a picnic while bigfoot is moving their car and then . . .

READING COMPREHENSION

Assignment Scored a 1 for Overall Quality of Assignment

For this assignment, students read *Bunnicula*, by Deborah and James Howe, a book recommended for children between the ages of 9 and 12. After reading two of the chapters, students were asked to complete a worksheet on which they answered basic reading comprehension questions. The level of challenge was rated a 1 because the reading level of the book was barely appropriate for seventh-graders, and more importantly, the questions that students were given required students to recall only very basic facts from the story, for example, “What did Mrs. Monroe and her family find next in the kitchen?”
The teacher’s learning goals of the assignment were as follows:

To understand the literature read. To go beyond basic recall of facts.

This dimension was scored a 2 because the teacher’s learning goals were somewhat clear about what the teacher wanted the students to learn or practice as a result of completing the assignment.

The grading criteria for this assignment, in contrast, provided no information about what the teacher was looking for in assessing students’ responses. The grading criteria for this assignment were as follows:

One point per question. Total 10 points possible.

The learning goals for this assignment were that students would understand what they read and go beyond basic recall of facts. The assignment task, however, in which students answered only very simple, comprehension questions, did not require students to develop an understanding of the text beyond the recall of basic facts. The alignment between the goals and the grading also was considered to be poor both because the goals were only somewhat clear, and because the grading criteria were simply unknown.

In summary, this assignment was rated a 1 for overall quality because of the low level of cognitive challenge, the somewhat clearly stated goals, the lack of stated grading criteria, and the lack of alignment between goals and task and between grading criteria and task.

Student Work

Bunnicula

a) What did Mrs. Monroe and her family find next in the kitchen?
Mrs. Monroe and her family found a variety of white vegetables.

b) What did Peter think caused the vegetables to change and what was his solution?
Peter said the vegetables changed because of DDT and said to buy organic vegetables.

c) Name two things Chester did to show the Monroes that he thought Bunnicula was a vampire?
Chester pretended to be dead and wore a cape like a vampire.
d) What awful odor did Harold smell and why was it in the air?
Harold smelled garlic because Chester was wearing it.

e) What happened to Chester after the Monroes got a whiff of him?
Mrs. Monroe gave Chester a bath which he hated.

f) Why did Chester try using a “steak” to kill Bunnicula? What should he have been using instead?
Chester thought he was using the right type of stake he should have been using a stick type of stake.
Appendix A

CRESST Language Arts Assignment Rubric
### Cognitive Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to construct and transform knowledge and to engage with less obvious meanings or nuances of a text, and this is evident in the students' work. Students also may be required to marshal well-supported and elaborated evidence to support a position. Assignment task also requires students to engage with grade-appropriate, academic content material and to write extensively on a topic (i.e., compose a multi-paragraph composition).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to construct and transform knowledge, and this is evident in students' work. However, students may engage with surface-level details more than less obvious meanings or nuances of a text. Students also may be required to use evidence to support a position, but that evidence may not be well-supported or elaborated. Assignment task also requires students to engage with grade-appropriate academic content material and write extended responses on a topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to summarize straightforward information, infer simple main idea, or apply the appropriate format for a given genre, and this is evident in students' work. Students may be required to provide reasons for their position but are not required to support their positions with evidence. This is evident as well in students' work. Assignment task may not require students to engage with grade-appropriate content material, or write extended responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Assignment task requires students to recall very basic information or definitions (e.g., What color was the character's car? Where did the character go after he left the store? etc.); or to write on a topic with no structure or focus. This is evident in students' work. Assignment task may not require students to engage with grade-appropriate content material, or write extended responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Clarity of the Goals for Student Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The teacher's goals are very focused on student learning. Goals are very clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment. Additionally, all of the goals are elaborated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The teacher's goals mostly are focused on student learning. Goals are mostly clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The teacher's goals are somewhat focused on student learning. Goals are somewhat clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The teacher's goals are not focused on student learning and are not clear and explicit in terms of what students are to learn as a result of completing the assignment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Clarity of the Grading Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The teacher's grading criteria are very clear, explicit and elaborated. The teacher uses a rubric that is very detailed and provides specific information to help students improve their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The teacher's grading criteria mostly are clear and explicit. The teacher may use a rubric or an elaborate scoring guide (i.e., a detailed list of the dimensions upon which student work will be scored). The rubric or dimensions are fairly helpful for students' use in improving their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The teacher's grading criteria are in the form of a scoring guide (i.e., a list of criteria), or an extremely rudimentary rubric. The list of criteria is not elaborated or detailed and provides little help to students to improve their performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The teacher's grading criteria are unclear and unspecified. The grading criteria do not help students in improving their performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Alignment of Learning Goals and Task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>There is exact alignment between the teacher's stated learning goals for students and what the task requires students to do. The task fully supports the instructional goals. The tasks and goals overlap completely—neither one calls for something not included in the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The teacher's stated learning goals and what the task requires students to do are mostly aligned. The task supports the instructional goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>There is only some alignment between the teacher's stated goals and what the task requires students to do. The task only somewhat supports the instructional goals. Or the goals may be so broadly stated that the task and goals are aligned only at a very general level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>There is very little or no alignment between the teacher's stated goals and what the task requires students to do. The task does not support the instructional goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Overall Quality of Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Excellent quality in terms of level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good quality in terms of level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Limited quality in terms of level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Poor quality in terms of level of cognitive challenge, clarity and application of learning goals, and grading criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>