

Citywide Instructional Expectations Case Study

Guiding Questions

Overview

The 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations help schools reflect upon and refine their practice in order to prepare all students to graduate college and career ready. One strategy for reflecting on practice is to examine how other schools have approached their work. These case studies offer insights on how teachers, school leaders and field support staff make decisions and engage stakeholders to develop school-wide practices to strengthen student achievement.

Case study schools have strong practices in building coherence among their culture, structures, and instructional core. The school communities voluntarily and generously shared their work in order to develop case studies that:

- Reflect authentic practice in a New York City school
- Include resources or artifacts from the school
- Connect to one or more of the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations components: Knowledge of Students, Instructional Focus, Collaborative Professional Learning

Guiding Questions: Instructional Focus

From the 2014-15 Citywide Instructional Expectations: An instructional focus is a school-determined priority that integrates multiple initiatives into a cohesive vision for strengthening student achievement. It is rooted in the school's needs and has a direct and evident impact on classroom practice. An instructional focus is developed after examining multiple sources of information, including the strengths and needs of students. It brings cohesion to a school's goal-setting process, comprehensive education plan, teacher and administrator development goals, and decisions about resource allocation. It is emphasized throughout the work of the school, including in school-wide professional development plans, the observation and feedback cycle, and communication with families.

1. What information in this case study suggests how the instructional focus is embedded in:
 - Structures
 - Professional Learning
 - Resources
 - School Culture
 - Classroom Practices
2. How has this school's instructional focus impacted students?
3. What decisions did the school leader make to support implementation of an instructional focus?
4. What questions does this study raise? What data or evidence would you like to add?
5. What practices does your school have in place that support the implementation of the instructional focus?
6. What systems and structures do you need to refine to better implement the instructional focus?

Potential Next Steps: Team activities and tools on the [Common Core Library](#)

- [School Reflection Protocol](#)
- [Instructional Focus Development Tool](#)

Raising Expectations One School at a Time

Six Case Studies of the Work of New York City Schools in Light of the District's 2012-13 Citywide Instructional Expectations

**Myles Horton Academy:
Relentless Questioning, Learning, Caring**

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Introduction

Myles Horton Academy: Relentless Questioning, Learning, Caring is one of six case studies in a series exploring how a select group of New York City schools are functioning in light of the Citywide Instructional Expectations (CIE). In 2012-13, New York launched its second year of these Expectations, asking school leaders and teachers to “adjust their practice as they work together to understand the learning needs of all students...in order to support them in developing the qualities and skills necessary to enroll, persist, and succeed in college and careers.”

To better understand what this work looks like in practice, six schools were selected for in-depth study during the second half of the 2012-13 school year. Eskolta identified these schools based on Quality Review (QR) data that suggested they had experienced moderate success with implementation of the CIE (according to QR indicators aligned to the CIE), along with socioeconomic data that suggested they served a proportion of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch that was equal to or greater than the average of all NYC schools. The research across all six schools was conducted by a team of two researchers and included 107 interviews and 91 observations over five months.

While this study provides insight into schools’ implementation of practices in their efforts to align to the CIE, it is neither intended to establish the impact of the CIE, nor is the fact that a particular practice is highlighted at a school intended to imply that that practice is encouraged by the CIE or the NYC Department of Education. Rather, the report is designed to investigate two research hypotheses: first, that schools that see the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) as two integrated parts of one initiative are able to create meaningful change in teacher practice; and second, that guided by the CIE, schools can take actions to improve student work and teacher practice. Five themes emerged across these case studies:

❶ Setting a Schoolwide Approach. Effective integration of the Danielson *Framework for Teaching* and the Common Core Learning Standards, both central elements of the CIE, improved with a schoolwide approach independently established by the school.

❷ Promoting Adult Learning. Changes in teacher practice arose when leaders promoted a culture of adult learning that highlighted internal needs over external pressures.

❸ Sustaining Critical Thinking. Instructional shifts pushed student learning when teachers coupled higher-order questioning with attention to academic behaviors.

❹ Enabling Regular Instructional Adjustments. Students experienced multiple paths to rigorous learning when school structures allowed for frequent assessment to drive strategic groupings.

❺ Optimizing Systems for Collaboration. Collaborative inquiry became central to teacher practice when leadership provided objectives and focused schedules on a common curricular area.

This particular case study of a New York City high school is comprised of three brief stories, each of which ties to at least one theme. These are outlined on the next page.

The case study is based on research conducted during approximately 42 hours of visits to Myles Horton Academy between February and May 2013, including fourteen interviews (with 10 teachers and the principal) and twenty observations. In order to encourage participation and candor, confidentiality was guaranteed to all study participants. All participants provided informed consent per Institutional Review Board guidelines and all names have been changed to protect confidentiality. (For more detail, see Study Methodology in *Part I: Themes, Implications, and Methodology*.)

Myles Horton Academy

Located on the fourth floor of a large school campus, Horton Academy (HA) is one of several small schools in the building. In its seventh year, over thirty HA staff members are responsible for nearly 350 students in ninth through twelfth grade. Of those students, about four-fifths qualify for free and reduced lunch, more than a quarter are Black, almost three-quarters are Hispanic, and a small number are White. About one-fifth of the student body receives special education services and about one-quarter are designated English language learners (ELLs), including 25-40 students who arrive during the year, mainly from the Dominican Republic.

Horton Academy’s emphasis on Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) and differentiation for English language learners and students with disabilities serves as a lens into understanding how public schools can respond to the Citywide Instructional Expectations and “ensure a culture for learning” for all students. Specifically, how English as a second language (ESL) and special education teachers are scheduled and how they collaboratively use their teaching and planning times raise important questions about the ways a small, understaffed school strives to help its most struggling students meet their yearly achievement goals, pass the Regents, and graduate from high school. The study highlights school leadership’s approach to providing a coherent instructional vision, a culture that engages teachers through collaboration and shared learning, and the impact of this collaboration and support on co-teaching in the classroom.

The three stories that comprise this case study each highlight different aspects of this work and tie back to one or more of the five themes that emerged across the entire research study.

Pages	Title	Themes	Focus
4-5	Bringing a Coherent Instructional Approach	① setting a schoolwide approach	Being relentless is a focus at this school, and the principal frames the school’s work around two guiding principles, both related to increasing rigor and achievement for all students.
6-8	Deeply Engaging Teachers	② promoting adult learning	The principal takes a strengths-based approach as she strives to find a balance between “pressure and support” for teachers.
9-13	Using Collaboration to Push Higher-Order Questions for All Learners	③ sustaining critical thinking ⑤ optimizing collaboration	The school has adjusted its approach to ESL and special education by increasing co-teaching partnerships.

Bringing a Coherent Instructional Approach

Being relentless is a focus at Horton Academy, and the principal frames the school’s work around two guiding principles, both related to increasing rigor and achievement for all students. Teachers use a consistent unit and lesson structure centered on using guided questions in all classrooms. As a result of the focus on planning, questioning and discussion techniques, and explicit instruction of work habits and organization, shifts in school culture and student engagement are evident to teachers and leaders. [key theme(s): **●setting a schoolwide approach**]

Last year, Laura Elvin, who had been assistant principal at Horton Academy for several years, took over for the founding principal of the school. She arrived in the position knowing her top priorities would be to shift the school culture and provide more focus and support to faculty. “My predecessor didn’t have a clear vision of instruction or of what he wanted in hiring. How are you communicating your vision and expectations to the staff? How are you getting the staff to buy in?” Ms. Elvin feels the school has been able to make some positive changes. “We started putting a lot of emphasis on department work, teamwork, giving people regular cycles of feedback and, because we had success, that started this sense of community. We had learned from our mistakes.”

Teachers repeatedly share a similar story of transformation and an appreciation of Ms. Elvin’s role in getting the faculty on the same page and putting the school on a different path. One teacher comments, “When I started here the school was a mess. It’s been cool to be part of this significant shift, this change in expectations. Laura took over and she has done a lot to shift the attitude.” Another comments, “Everyone agrees that teachers sitting down and talking together in departments and talking in grade teams has serious value. That kind of culture was not here a few years ago.” Declares one teacher, “The Common Core is raining down, but we’re grabbing the reins.”

Having received a low grade on the school’s Progress Report the year before, one of Ms. Elvin’s first orders of business was to focus HA teachers on a clearer vision of good instruction than had existed in the past. She explains, “It’s really important to focus on one or two things. We can’t focus on too much at once.” In trying to determine what that focus should be, Ms. Elvin realized perseverance could be the key to their students’ success. “There was a gap between our expectation and the kids’ motivation. We’re raising the standards, we want them to meet the standards, and we don’t want them to give up.” This understanding led her to define Horton Academy’s focus as, “Being Relentless.” That overarching value has led to two guiding principles for the school, which Ms. Elvin posed to the faculty at the beginning of this year:

1. How do we leverage our core value of character to increase student achievement?
2. How do we increase rigor without leaving students behind?

Attending to these two principles in combination with a focus on relentlessness has helped the staff to increase the level of rigor, the depth of student engagement, and the sense of strong school culture at Horton Academy.

As a way to practically address the guiding principles and also respond to the Citywide Instructional Expectations, Ms. Elvin then focused the faculty on two specific instructional goals: “developing higher-order questions and getting students to explain their thinking.” She explains that teachers are “really trying to understand and implement the Common Core” while also aligning their instruction with the City’s Special Education reform. Ms. Elvin believes they need specific structures and supports in order to enact the school’s goals, and so, since the beginning of the year, the expectation has been for all classes to adhere to a consistent unit and lesson structure based on Understanding By Design (UBD). Specifically, Ms. Elvin has set the expectation that, in each class, regardless of grade level or content area, units be planned according to Big Ideas and Essential Questions, and that

lessons be structured with a Do Now, Objective, and Guided Question. Students are provided with daily or weekly packets that include content, short answer questions, and opportunities to practice and/or demonstrate what they have learned that day. Teachers are expected to frequently ask students to annotate and support their ideas with evidence, both in writing and discussion.

Visiting a ninth-grade Living Environment class co-taught by Ms. Michel, a science teacher, and Ms. Lago, an ESL teacher, we see the school's UBD-inspired lesson format in place. "BRAINBUSTER: What do you think mutation means?" is written on the board. Students stop at a desk near the door, taking a packet before they take their seats. Some choose a Spanish packet, others work in English. Also posted on the board is the goal for what Students Will Be Able To (SWBAT) do or understand by the end of the lesson: "OBJECTIVE: SWBAT: Analyze the effects of mutations" and "THE GUIDED QUESTION: How can mutations be beneficial?"

Ms. Elvin credits this consistent lesson structure, oriented around guided questions, with an increase in rigor and student voice in many classrooms of the school. "If you had come here a year ago, you would have seen primarily PowerPoint-centered teaching. We still have Power Points, but it's not the majority of the lesson. It used to be teachers talking the entire time. Now kids are more engaged. They have the ability to form an opinion, show evidence in writing and discussion." One teacher explains how she sees the instructional goals, "It should be the students who are doing the real thinking."

Beyond Academic Skills

Driven by the value of being relentless, staff at Horton discuss how they strive to help students build more than just content knowledge and skills. The CIE highlights the importance of working with students on academic and personal behaviors, described as persistence, engagement, work habits/organization, communication/collaboration, and self-regulation, and staff at the school appear to embrace such efforts as part of their roles in their students' lives. On any given day, teachers can be found in conversations collaborating and problem-solving around the specific personal needs of individual students, especially those who are most at risk. "In grade-level meetings, we're always addressing kids who are falling off track, talking about behavior issues, interventions," remarks a teacher. "In Student Intervention Team [SIT] meetings we talk strategies," shares another teacher. "What's working with this kid? What else can we try?" Every week in Advisory kids have a progress report printed out and we target specific individual kids who are at risk for attendance, assignments, passing, and we figure out extra supports and interventions."

At one SIT meeting at the end of April, the eleventh- and twelfth-grade teachers get together to review their students' information. The first part of the conversation, which Ms. Elvin has asked them to have, focuses on seniors and their post-graduation plans. They move through a list of students and talk about the issues that may still affect where students end up, including summer school, changing their minds about college plans, staying at CUNY or going away to school, money, family, and fear.

Ms. Elvin has also requested a list of students who might still graduate this year, but who teachers feel need the boost of extra personal attention and coaching, so that she can schedule one-on-one conferences with them. The relentlessness of the teachers and principal in implementing these kinds of interventions seems to be making a difference. In early May, only three or four seniors have no chance to make up their credits or pass enough Regents tests in time to graduate, a significant drop in numbers since one year ago. A few weeks before the Regents, a new t-shirt appears on many students in classrooms throughout the school. On the front: "I AM...". On the sleeve: "ON TRACK". On the back: "RELENTLESS".

Deeply Engaging Teachers

The principal at Horton Academy takes a strengths-based approach as she strives to find a balance between “pressure and support” for teachers. By offering practical professional development experiences, providing quality feedback on planning and instruction, and creating structures for collaboration and teacher leadership, teachers are engaged with each other and the work. They consistently report that their principal is open and supportive. [key theme(s): **🎯 promoting adult learning**]

Horton Academy’s assistant principal position was eliminated when Ms. Elvin became principal, and she says that has made it harder to provide the quantity of instructional support she envisions, especially considering the fact that there are twelve non-tenured teachers at the school this year. Although the principal and teachers describe the school as understaffed and under-resourced, teachers consistently report that they appreciate the support she offers, and also find support from each other in grade level teams, departments, and co-teaching relationships.

“I’m very protective of my staff and my kids,” Ms. Elvin, principal of Horton Academy High School, explains, discussing how she strives to set a caring, supportive tone and demonstrate the value she has for people’s work. She stays tuned into what is happening in classrooms, in the halls, in people’s lives. Whether compensating teachers for extra work or meeting individually with students who are at risk of not passing their classes, Ms. Elvin strives to make sure people know that she notices and values their contributions and provides the support they need. “I pay *a lot* of per session—for Regents Prep, credit recovery, special education inquiry team, art clubs. It makes people feel respected. Your time is worth something.” While pushing the school in new directions, Ms. Elvin also puts an emphasis on what she calls “working from your strengths.” Throughout the year, she has facilitated discussions about what is going well and how to build on it across the school. Faculty members at Horton express appreciation of this attitude from their leader. One teacher declares, “I love our principal. She’s driving the train I want to be on. If I go to her, she’s very supportive.” Another teacher shares, “Support from the principal is really great. She’s very solutions-oriented and good about hearing everyone’s issues, complaints, concerns and then offering suggestions.”

As Ms. Elvin works to make teachers feel engaged and supported, her goal is to genuinely shift their thinking about pedagogy rather than simply elicit their compliance with mandates. Ms. Elvin is clear about her responsibility as a leader. “I need to set high expectations, and I need to provide support. It’s about finding the balance—pressure, support, pressure, support.” The main supports she aims to offer as she pushes for authentic change among teachers are effective professional development, quality feedback on instruction, and structures for teacher collaboration.

Teachers meet regularly for professional development and they report that the work they get to do together is practical and engaging. One teacher praises the professional development sessions that Ms. Elvin leads. “These PDs are the most effective PDs I’ve ever had in my life. Elvin comes in with a really applicable goal of saying, ‘We’re going to get something out of here that we can apply.’ And it’s like what our lesson would be, where we talk to each other and we deal with an issue. It’s not disseminated from on high. It’s really practical. They’re unbelievably well-organized and thoughtful in the scaffolding. How we start and build up, start in small group and end up in large group. Always about the kinds of challenges we face with the kids we have and how we can overcome those challenges to implement better instruction.” Ms. Elvin reports that she uses PD time to model using guided questions as she hopes to see teachers do in their lessons.

Ms. Elvin invests time each week to observe classrooms and give feedback to teachers on their lesson planning and delivery. She completes formal and informal observations of teachers on a regular basis, reviews unit plans from teachers over email, and meets for one-on-one reflections with teachers at the beginning, middle, and end of the year.

Aligned with two of the three Danielson competencies put forward in the CIE, Ms. Elvin's focus for her feedback to teachers this year is on the questions teachers are using and the instructional planning they do. By tying her feedback directly to the lesson structures for increasing rigor that the school is implementing, Ms. Elvin aims to make her feedback as useful as possible. "What is that guided question? Is the student asked the guided question? Is the student able to answer the guided question by the end of the class? When I do formal observations I'll ask kids at the end of class about the guided question. Teachers do a lot of practice with, 'How could we make this question more rigorous?' I collect unit plans and give feedback on the quality of those questions."

Teachers consistently report that this support from Ms. Elvin has contributed greatly to their practice and they repeatedly articulate a specific area they are working on along with the concrete suggestions Ms. Elvin has given them. One teacher says, "Ms. Elvin is very supportive. For example, I was struggling with downtime during transitions. So she suggested I observe other teachers." An art teacher shares, "I send a unit plan every month and get feedback by email. My guided questions are often too wordy or convoluted. She helps me to make them more accessible." A teacher who reports struggling early in the year relates, "She observes me informally and gives very constructive, not demeaning feedback. In the beginning of the year, I needed that support more. She would observe once or twice a week for about ten to fifteen minutes and would give me one suggestion, a concrete piece of feedback."

As part of her approach to engaging and supporting teachers, Ms. Elvin believes there have to be opportunities for teachers to collaborate with each other and participate in school-wide decisions. "Last year, almost a third of the teachers left. Right now out of my entire staff, half are untenured. Five of those are brand new. I wanted to create distributed leadership. Structurally, how can I build in collaboration? How can I make teachers feel like they have a say?" To move towards a distributed leadership model, Ms. Elvin has designated experienced teachers as mentor teachers and she meets with them once a week to help them help newer teachers. She has assigned guidance counselors to grade teams so that communication and collaboration around students' academic progress is smoother. Teachers note that the staff is now much more on board with the school's vision and approach to instruction. A veteran teacher affirms the principal's role in creating a school culture and structures that engage teachers and depend on their input. "It all comes down from leadership. She's open to hearing any ideas or proposals and she really believes in a collaborative process."

Teachers express that the positive tone and effective supports Ms. Elvin has put in place empower them to be supportive of one another, too. Many identify their grade level and department colleagues as people they go to when in need of help. Teachers report that this collaboration has been instrumental in their collective efforts to increase rigor and draw out student thinking as well as informing their efforts around preparing students for Regents exams. A Global Studies teacher shares, "In weekly history department meetings, we share practice. What are we doing to increase competency in reading, writing, learning? It's data-driven. We look at grades on Regents and interims and pass rates goals. We share student work and how we got there." A math teacher reports, "We do vertical planning between grade levels—geometrical thinking, functions, number theory, statistics and probability. The unit planning is mostly about questioning. Using UBD, what are the deep essential questions?"

Teachers explain in detail how they feel they have improved their instruction this year. They report that they are focusing significantly more on the rigor of the questions and revising their plans in order to encourage students to drive the discussion and engage with ideas.

One math teacher shares, “In the beginning of the year I was more process-oriented. Step one, step two, step three. But I wasn’t going into the concepts. Now, I’m asking more questions. Why did you get that answer? Why did you choose that step? It’s more towards content and concept than procedure.”

Another teacher describes new strategies she has adopted within the lesson structure, “I’ve tried to implement a lot of Stop-and-Jots, Turn-and-Talks, have the kids drive the lesson more rather than me. The lesson needs to be more student-driven, exploratory, driven by their comments and their thoughts.”

The principal and teachers acknowledge that there are still improvements to be made, but they are motivated by the impact they are observing on student work and engagement. One teacher describes, “Kids anticipate that they’ll have to respond to the guided question. They look for ways to find connections in the lesson. Two years ago it was the three highest performing kids who would have an answer. Now, it’s everyone.”

Using Collaboration to Push Higher-Order Questions for All Learners

This year Horton Academy adjusted its approach to ESL and special education by increasing co-teaching partnerships. For their ICT classes, teachers collaboratively plan and teach, scaffolding assignments and differentiating instruction so that all of their students have points of entry into CCLS concepts and skills. Teachers believe that an emphasis on annotation and vocabulary strategies, among other tools, has supported students to develop their higher-order thinking, and will also help them pass the Regents. [key theme(s): **Ⓢustaining critical thinking+Ⓢoptimizing collaboration**]

As she became principal of Horton Academy High School, Ms. Elvin took a close look at data on the performance of English language learners and students with disabilities. “ELLs weren’t passing the Regents at the same rate, and we have a growing number of ELL students. Students in self-contained [special education classes] were just doing horribly. They were barely getting promoted, and there were all kinds of behavior problems.” The CIE expects schools to “ensure that all students have access to learn within their least restrictive environment.” The combination of Ms. Elvin’s analysis of HA’s performance data, the CIE, and the City’s special education reform led to changes in the school’s approach to ESL and special education this year. Ms. Elvin hired two more people who work with ELLs and the school restructured their special education program. ESL and special education teachers partner with multiple core subject teachers. They co-teach rather than “push in,” a distinction emphasized by more than one Horton teacher. They provide differentiated instruction to students with special needs, with the goal of having all students engage with rigorous tasks and build CCLS skills.

The implementation of these structures in the beginning of the year introduced some challenges though, according to the principal and teachers. One teacher explained that early in the year teachers were sharing their concerns and frustrations about the imbalance of students with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) in ICT classes. Ms. Colquist, a special education teacher, remembers saying, “This isn’t what an ICT class is supposed to be.”

Consistent with Ms. Elvin’s rhetoric of openly engaging teachers, she started an inquiry group to look at best practices in ICT and to determine a way forward. “I said to the teachers, ‘You guys tell me who you want in these classes. We’re going to do everything we can to make that possible.’ And then we changed the teachers’ schedules to make it work.”

As a result of their discussions, they rearranged the ICT groupings for the second semester in order to more effectively and efficiently balance the numbers and combinations of students. Teachers report that they are seeing a positive difference as a result of these efforts. “It’s been an amazing difference this semester,” says Ms. Colquist, who goes on to describe the impact on one of her struggling IEP students. “There are general struggles with literacy, but students who are ‘lower-level’ and ‘higher-level’ learners are using each other more. All of a sudden, this one student is in a class with higher-level students and she’s participating and contributing her ideas.”

Ms. Elvin’s commitment to increase staffing in the ESL and SPED departments has also made a difference for teachers. “I was by myself; I *was* the ESL department until last year. But now we’ve been able to do more as a team. This year we’ve been able to focus on looking at student work and then evaluating it through rubrics,” comments Ms. Lago, the head of the ESL department.

Regardless of whether they are teaching on their own or with an ICT co-teacher, HA teachers strive for a level of questioning and discussion in which students are actively engaged with ideas and with each other. According to Mr. Olinick, a social studies teacher who co-teaches with Ms. Colquist in an ICT Global class, the

connection to the CCLS is clear. “I’d say that ninety percent of what I do is Common Core. I don’t have a Common Core unit, I have a Common Core curriculum.” Emphasizing short-answer questions that break up longer reading passages, he says, has “helped improve scores and grades. Kids have more success with the guided questions.”

According to the CIE, teachers are expected to use Universal Design for Learning as they “plan in advance for multiple access points and ways of demonstrating understanding so that all students engage in rigorous learning experiences.” Ms. Colquist offers insight into how she and her co-teachers work together to meet the needs of their students with IEPs. “There are struggles across the board with literacy. We do a lot of annotations and strategies like that as they’re reading. I’m a big fan of Universal Design. There have to be multiple points of access. Several different things they could read, look at, listen to, interact with, create—in order to learn.”

A look into Mr. Olinick and Ms. Colquist’s ICT class shows some of the ways they try to leverage their co-teaching arrangement within the school’s established lesson structure to push more analysis of reading:

The class has just finished the Reformation unit and moved into the Age of Exploration. Today’s lesson is oriented around the guided question: *Who was most responsible for the trans-Atlantic slave trade—Africans or Europeans?*

After the Review Now and Do Now, Mr. Olinick points out, “Legal ways to get money aren’t the same throughout history. Laws have changed. We’re trying to help you think more than learn history. You have to ask yourself, was this a decision that makes sense?”

He re-states the lesson’s guided question and begins the PowerPoint while Ms. Colquist starts drawing a chart on the board. The same chart is already printed on the second page of the students’ daily packet.

“This is double-entry note style,” she explains. “‘Notes from presentation’ on one side and ‘What I learned, thought, or wondered’ on the other side. Make sure you include at least three notes and at least two responses. Try this out, see if it works for you.”

As Mr. Olinick shares information and asks questions about the slideshow, Ms. Colquist models double entry note-taking and walks around the room checking in with a few students. Most students listen; only a few take notes.

The slide about the Middle Passage interests the students, especially when Mr. Olinick asks, “If you were selling iPads and the ship is leaving China, how many iPads would you want on that ship?”

A student replies, “As many as can fit.” The connection to an image of slaves inhumanely packed head to toe in the hold of the ship seems obvious to many students.

“Yes, the more that make it, the more profit,” reinforces Mr. Olinick.

Just before class ends, Mr. Olinick returns to the guided question and then asks the students to look at the Document-Based Questions (DBQ) on the last page of the packet. “Homework is these documents. A slave bill of sale, triangular trade, and a first-person primary source narrative of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Respond to the DBQs and Stop-and-Jots.”

In ESL classes, Ms. Lago has also been working on strategies, specifically ones that will help ELLs to deal with unknown words or phrases. “I’ve been really ambitious with the texts I’ve been using. Some of the data show that the eleventh-graders’ reading comprehension is behind in literature because of all the cultural nuances and idiomatic language.” In order to introduce some consistent approaches for ELLs throughout content areas, the ESL team worked this year to consolidate and share vocabulary strategies. One ESL teacher explains, “We’re trying to create a vocabulary structure for ESL, a vocabulary guide with different ways to work with vocabulary words.”

The ESL teachers work with their students in both ESL and content area classes, and, as a result, are better able to address their individual needs. According to Ms. Lago, “ELLs really need an English class that’s at their level. They need ESL methodology. One year we didn’t have stand-alone ESL—it was an awful decision. The combination now is really good. In the ESL classroom, I know what they need. And then I can bring that into the content area classes, as well. It’s an ideal structure for a school that’s not all ELLs. There’s a lot of language support.” Ms. Lago’s approaches to pushing the thinking and language skills of her ELL students are on display in one of her ESL classes:

Students are reading a *New Yorker* short story by Junot Díaz, a Dominican-American author. The guided question on the board reads: *Do you think the main character’s mother’s reaction regarding ‘that thing that happened’ was justified? Support your opinion with evidence from the text.* The objective reads: *SWBAT clarify, question, connect, infer throughout our reading, while making annotations; monitor, adjust, clarify for reading fluency.* Students take turns, each one reading a few paragraphs aloud with discussion in between.

“Before this, how did the mother treat the daughter?” asks Ms. Lago.

A student replies, “Like a slave.”

Ms. Lago immediately follows with, “What’s an example?”

After the student offers an example, Ms. Lago asks, “Even though her mother treats her like a slave, what drove Lola to tell her mother?”

Students respond. “She wanted help.”

“She was scared.”

Ms. Lago looks around the classroom, “Any other inferences about either, one, why the daughter chose to tell her, or, two, why the mother reacted that way?” A few students offer ideas, and she then asks, “What do you think is going to happen next? Let’s do some predicting.”

One student replies, “Mom is going to investigate.”

Another student disagrees, “No, she’s not.”

Ms. Lago probes and a rapid exchange ensues. “What makes you think that?”

“She was eight, right? And her mother didn’t want to listen. She said, ‘Shut up and close your legs.’”

At the end of the passage, Ms. Lago announces, “One minute! Talk to your neighbor about what you understood about that paragraph.”

While experiencing successes this year, teachers at Horton also see areas where their co-teaching arrangements still need to grow. Some challenges relate to how co-teaching can be supported by the collaborative structures the school has sought to put in place. Teachers express a need for increased opportunities for collaborative planning and problem-solving about curriculum. One explains, “We have 47 minutes each week to plan with SPED and ESL team teachers. We need more time in order to serve our students in the way they deserve.”

Ms. Elvin is also candid about the difficulties of differentiation and the supports she would like to have. “Without a special ed background, a leader can only take her staff so far. That’s where I’m feeling my gap,” she shares. “I need PD on how to implement the CIE with my staff. I can get my head around the Common Core. But meeting the needs of my students with special learning needs, I could really use some support in how to do that effectively. What are the models for that?”

Nonetheless, Ms. Colquist reflects on how Ms. Elvin has helped her to articulate what she wants to address with her co-teacher when they plan together so their time can be focused on the objectives of the lesson. The ways in which ESL and special education teachers collaborate with each other and with core subject teachers vary, but, at the very least, each pair plans together during a scheduled prep period once each week and both the ESL and special education teachers each have the opportunity to meet as a department to check in and coordinate their services. Teaching teams regularly refer to the lesson structure as they think through their plans together. This can be seen as Ms. Michel and Ms. Lago meet together to plan the guided questions for their next Living Environment lesson.

After some discussion of how DNA replicates prior to dividing, Ms. Lago thinks aloud, “Your guided question now is, ‘How are reproductive cells made?’” and goes on to suggest that if the students already understand reproduction then this could help them understand mitosis and meiosis.

Ms. Michel disagrees, “No, because it’s about the difference between mitosis and meiosis, which is cells, and asexual and sexual reproduction, which is organisms.” She continues, “So maybe we don’t do the steps of meiosis. We should focus on the difference between the two.”

“What about a Venn diagram?” brainstorms Ms. Lago.

After talking through how students would have the vocabulary words and concepts and would have to decide where in the mitosis/meiosis Venn diagram each one belongs, Ms. Michel concludes, “Coming up with where to put the terms puts more responsibility on them. I like that.”

Later, after their meeting ends, Ms. Lago points out, “If I’m team-teaching, I have to learn and follow the curriculum. That’s how we get stronger at differentiation for the students, by planning together.” Figuring out how to make the most of team teaching has been an involved process for the faculty at Horton Academy, but they are seeing a positive impact for many of their struggling students.

Teachers maintain their focus on differentiation even when they are not co-teaching. Ms. Lago explains that she scaffolds each project and assignment for her English language learners. During the first semester in her beginner ESL class, students analyzed and annotated articles, interpreted graphs and charts, learned about transitional words and phrases, read poetry, and wrote short paragraphs, all related to the topic of immigration. Over the course of two-and-a-half months, they developed their own ideas about historic and contemporary immigration. They then drafted a ten- to twelve-sentence paragraph in which they stated their opinion in a topic sentence, gave three reasons from the packets and articles to support their opinion, and wrote a concluding sentence. With one-on-one conferencing and the help of the rubric, they revised their writing and, when necessary, translated it from Spanish into English. Ms. Lago explains how this highly scaffolded experience helped students to learn how to annotate, comprehend complex ideas, and support her own ideas with evidence.

Ms. Lago shares the example of a student who begins her essay with a clear thesis. “Immigrants impact their new community over time. More immigrants are coming to the USA to live a new life. Since more immigrants are coming, the USA has the benefit of having people to work.” After including a direct quote from an online source, the student continues with her own explanation, supporting details, and a conclusion. From transition words to cited evidence to paragraph structure, the student has incorporated various conventions and skills she learned throughout the unit into her essay.

Similarly, Mr. Olinick describes the culminating project he designed for the Age of Exploration unit in Global History. Through the process of a three-day exploration of primary sources, students choose a perspective, develop a claim and evidence, and write an essay in response to the essential question: *Was the Age of Exploration a*

positive or negative time period? For Europeans? For Africans? For Native Americans? Students work in groups for parts of the process, interact with a variety of media, have graphic organizers to guide note-taking, and are repeatedly checking in with teachers as a form of informal formative assessment.

Looking over the essay of one student with whom he specifically worked on paragraph writing, Mr. Olinick reflects, “I got him to write in paragraphs on the second try. It’s not focused, but all the ideas are here. It’s still a struggle, but there has been a lot of progress this year.”