

# Specific Considerations for Teachers of Theater

## About this Resource

Danielson’s 2013 *Framework for Teaching (FfT)* provides teachers and school leaders with a common language to describe and discuss effective teaching in order to achieve continuous growth in teacher practice and student learning. The *FfT* was created as an overarching framework that describes the commonalities in every classroom—those aspects of teaching that are common across grades, disciplines, and students’ backgrounds. Thus, the *FfT* is appropriate for use with and by teachers of the Arts. For the 2014-15 school year, teachers are evaluated on only eight components in the Danielson 2013 *Framework for Teaching*. The remaining components (those shaded in the following pages) of the Danielson 2013 *Framework for Teaching* may be used for non-evaluative (i.e., developmental) purposes only.

Many school leaders and teachers have requested additional support in using the *FfT* in classrooms in which student characteristics, subject content, or program models may differ significantly from other courses or subjects. In response, this document offers specific considerations<sup>1</sup> for school leaders and theater teachers through component-aligned questions. These questions may be discussed when providing feedback, engaging in pre- and post-observations, and planning next steps; they are not to be used for evaluating teacher practice. In addition, these questions can be used by teachers voluntarily as a resource to guide their thinking as they plan and reflect on their instructional practice in how they are meeting the needs of their students. While these questions may be useful for informing teachers’ usual planning, preparation, and professional learning processes, teachers may not be required to provide written answers to these questions as an additional professional assignment.

This document is not a separate rubric for teachers of the Arts, nor is it to be used as a checklist in classroom observations. Each *FfT* component’s “Rationale,” “Performance Levels,” “Critical Attributes,” and many of the “Possible Examples” are relevant to teachers of the Arts and should be used by school leaders when considering evidence of each component. This document only seeks to present additional context to consider, keeping in mind that not every question will be applicable depending upon the students’ need and context. Those components for which it was agreed

*“Understanding how the Arts, specifically theater in my case, deal directly with [the] Danielson [Framework for Teaching] and therefore furthers Danielson’s principles in our classrooms only adds to our building’s collective knowledge of how to best work with our students.”*

*–NYC Theater Teacher*

<sup>1</sup> New York State’s Education Law 3012-c requires that lead evaluators have appropriate guidance regarding specific considerations in evaluating teachers of English Language Learners and students with disabilities. While not required for teachers of the arts, this document was inspired by the Specific Considerations of Teachers of English Language Learners and the Specific Considerations of Students with Disabilities and follows a similar design.

that there were no significant special considerations for theater teachers (4a: Reflecting on Teaching and 4f: Showing Professionalism) are not included in this document.

Embedded in the questions are good instructional practices for students; this document is not an exhaustive guide of those good instructional practices.

The Office of Arts and Special Projects contributed significantly to the creation of this document, and these questions align to the *Benchmarks for Arts Learning* as described in *The Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts: Dance, Music, Theater, and Visual Arts*. These specific considerations align with the work of the Office of Arts and Special Projects to support students by helping to create rigorous learning environments that focus on academic and artistic achievement.

*“The Specific Considerations document...supports teachers, administrators, and students by empowering them with a tool of specific examples to help navigate the distinctive and unique needs of the theater classroom. The document helps clarify responsibilities and expectations of arts teachers in light of the Danielson Framework for Teaching. It is a supportive document with concrete and excellent examples, aimed at facilitating more specific and productive dialogue between arts teachers and school administration.”*

*–NYC Theater Teacher*

## Domain 1: Planning & Preparation

### 1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy

- How do you align lessons with appropriate learning standards in the NYC *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theater, PreK-12*?
- In what ways do you plan learning experiences that address specific learning goals as well as important concepts about performing, creating, responding to, and connecting through theater?
- What are some ways in which you plan warm-up exercises led by you or an appointed student leader, including physical, vocal, and “imagination play,” such as:
  - light stretching and breathing?
  - projection and articulation using a provided phrase from a theater text?
  - group theater activity that promotes ensemble and anticipates the lesson’s learning outcome (e.g., “hot spot” improv game to prepare actors for character work)?

### 1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students

- What are ways in which you use assessments and surveys to attain some of the following knowledge about:
  - students’ previous experience and skill level in the unit’s focus, such as playwriting, design, and acting?
  - students’ special gifts or special needs, such as a gifted singer or a non-verbal student who moves well?
  - students’ experience with public speaking and performing?
  - students’ interest in and willingness to take creative risks?

### 1c: Setting Instructional Outcomes

- Over the course of the year, how do you ensure that learning outcomes include objectives that address all Five Strands of Teaching and Learning in Theater in the NYC *Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theater, PreK-12*?
- How do you ensure that planned instructional outcomes over a unit and the school year include:
  - rehearsing and performing a published scene?
  - conceiving and building a set design?
  - researching and writing original dialogue?
  - critiquing a scene from a professional theater production or film clip, citing evidence to support opinions?

### 1d: Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources

- In what ways do your planned learning activities make use of resources such as professional theater performances, guest artists, videos of master theater productions, and a variety of texts (e.g., play scripts, reviews, theater production photos, film clips, costume sketches and photos, sound recordings, and design materials)?

### 1e: Designing Coherent Instruction

- What do you do to ensure that planned major concepts of theater instruction are clearly stated, *Blueprint*-aligned, and matched with the instructional outcomes and instructional activities?
- In what ways do you plan opportunities for rehearsal and revision based on reflection and feedback (e.g., planning for structured time to give notes to actors, which enable them to apply feedback in scene work)?
- How do you plan for student choice of theater roles within the learning activities?

### 1f: Designing Student Assessments

- How do you develop clear and observable theater assessment criteria (e.g., vocal projection, staging and playing an objective, learning lines, active listening)?
- In what ways do your plans include multiple opportunities for teacher, peer, and self-assessment?

## Domain 2: The Classroom Environment

### 2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport

- In what ways do you establish a sense of ensemble (a team with all members contributing equally) and facilitate students using protocols for observing and respectfully sharing feedback with one another (e.g., Liz Lerman's *Critical Response Protocol*, *Ladder of Feedback*, and Notice-Like-Wish)?

### 2b: Establishing a Culture for Learning

- What are some ways in which you share your own theater practice with students (e.g., participating in theater, attending live theater, and sharing professional theater reviews or reviews of their own theater work)?
- In what ways do you enable students, as directors, to share their artistic vision for a unified scene with their student actors and designers in order to stage a cohesive performance?
- In what ways do you enable students, as actors, to learn lines, rehearse with peer actors, and respond to director and designer feedback?
- In what ways do you enable students, as designers, to support and interpret directors' vision through set, costume, props, and lighting design, in a way that is mindful of serving the story and the actors?
- In what ways do you support students, as stage managers, as they coordinate communications and logistics among director, designers, and actors, keeping all on task in service of the production?

### 2c: Managing Classroom Procedures

- What are some ways in which you establish routines to maximize instructional time? For example:
  - Students independently place their belongings at their chairs, move to designated "playing" space, and stand in a circle prepared to participate in or lead warm-ups.
  - Students move to sit in the clearly designated "audience" space to prepare for student performances.
  - Students sit quietly while actively focusing on performing students, prepared to provide constructive feedback.
  - Students smoothly transition from a performance activity to a reflection process (e.g., the routine of rotating from acting to providing feedback to their peers).
  - Students stand in a circle or sit on the floor to reflect collectively on the work.

### 2d: Managing Student Behavior

- In what ways do you assign students leadership roles (e.g., student directors, designers, stage managers) so students learn from and take responsibility for one another in lessons, rehearsal, and reflection?
- How do you ensure that students are respectful (verbally and physically) while learning, performing, creating, observing, and responding to theater?
- What actions do you take to ensure that students respect personal space even when staging may require physical contact (e.g., in a scene, musical theater choreography)?

### 2e: Organizing Physical Space

- How do you ensure that the designated theater space is cleared of furniture or other impediments to support design and rehearsal? For example:
  - The space is arranged so theater materials and scripts are easily accessible.
  - The space allows areas for small group break-outs as well as a dedicated, more formal performance space.
  - The space is equipped with storage tubs to store theatrical props, costumes, and set design pieces.

## Domain 3: Instruction

### 3a: Communicating with Students

- In what ways do you use clear, precise theater terminology, descriptive language, and accurate, expressive theater demonstration to explain the purpose of a task as it relates to the larger learning goals?
- How do you periodically remind students of varying aspects of theater learning, explaining why the group needs to physically warm-up each day, how the physical space impacts scene work; and why establishing trust and collaboration between student actors enhances scene work?
- What are some ways in which you lead warm-ups by side coaching and modeling? For instance, you might:
  - model “actor neutral” to prepare students physically.
  - direct students to work on projection by breathing from the diaphragm.
  - lead tongue twisters for articulation and diction.

### 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques

- How do you give students opportunities to describe how their design model effectively supports the mood and/or story of the scene?
- How do you facilitate student-led discussion with actors about what it was like to play objectives and obstacles and how to negotiate staging and spatial relationships while playing a scene?

### 3c: Engaging Students in Learning

- How do you facilitate students’ individual responses to or critiques of theater text, performance, or production values?
- What activities do you lead to enable students to engage in text analysis, articulate a directorial vision, or design a scenic or light plot?
- How do you facilitate student learning through purposeful repetition to master the skills of musical theater? For example:
  - Students sing through and rehearse to learn lyrics and melody.
  - Students collectively interpret the meaning and story of the musical number through acting, singing, and choreography.
- How do you facilitate student engagement in active theater roles simultaneously? (E.g., while several students rehearse and others run light and sound cues, still others move sets into place.)
- How do you use student groupings that are appropriate for the activity, including:
  - large group(s) to learn musical theater choreography?
  - small groups or pairs to practice scene work?
  - solo to practice monologues?

### 3d: Using Assessment in Instruction

- What are some ways in which you monitor student learning, for example by:
  - circulating and observing students as they rehearse their partner scenes?
  - asking students to stop a scene to articulate their character’s motivation, their physical choices for the character, or their prop choices?
- How do you provide (or, how do you model and enable student directors to provide) clear notes and feedback for students to immediately incorporate into their rehearsal work?
- How do you ensure that high-quality feedback comes from many sources, including students? (E.g., How do you encourage student facilitators to ask peer “audiences” for observable evidence so actors might clarify whether their actions were received as intended?)
- In what ways do you provide digital media to showcase scenes from professional theater productions for students to critique and reflect on theater practice?
- How do you support students in generating and using criteria from the scene to inform their own choices as actors or designers?

### 3e: Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness

- How do you adjust direction based on a student's desire to "try something else" to better serve her character's objectives (e.g., the student chooses to drop to her knees upon hearing that her brother is back from the war)?
- How might you use paraphrasing and physical work to differentiate for student actors who have not memorized their lines?

## Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

### 4b: Maintaining Accurate Records

- In what ways do you capture or record formative as well as summative assessment data on student rehearsal, collaboration, and contributions to discussion?
- How do you maintain accurate records of student progress in acting, set design, improvisation, directing, choreography, and lighting design (e.g., through photos, videos, student papers, and online apps)?

### 4c: Communicating with Families

- How do you ensure that notices and permission slips are sent home with students in a timely fashion for upcoming performances and field trips?
- In what ways do you encourage families to attend student performances?
- In what ways do families contribute to productions (e.g., paint sets with their children, share artifacts from family or cultural traditions to help students generate original plays)?

### 4d: Participating in the Professional Community

- In what ways do you collaborate with other arts teachers to enhance student research and preparation for working on a scene or play (e.g., asking the music teacher to provide a rationale for the type of music that might play during a party in the play)?
- What are some ways in which you collaborate with teachers of other content areas (e.g., asking a social studies colleague to provide materials to illuminate the social status of characters in a play)?
- How do you plan and implement school initiatives including exhibitions and performances?

### 4e: Growing and Developing Professionally

- What are some ways in which you participate in ongoing school-based and off-site professional development opportunities during the school day?
- What do you do to enhance your professional practice by, for example,
  - attending regular professional development provided by the NYCDOE and at school?
  - participating in productions and training provided by professional theater companies and theater education organizations?
  - attending professional theater productions?
  - participating as a member of a theater company?
  - remaining current on theater education practice and research through journals, performance attendance, and use of online theater resources?