

Conferring for Agency
How to Reveal Productive Struggle to Students

If you see a student stall during independent practice *then* begin the conference

Teacher's Role: WATCH (look, listen) (identifying the what)	Student's Role: ENGAGE (showing and telling) (honoring the how)	Next Steps SHARED INTENTIONS (defining the why)
<i>Ask, "What have you tried so far?"</i>	<i>The student uses charts, tools, and books (they can read) to show us what they are trying to use in service of the skill.</i>	<i>Monitor the student's energy. If the student seems to have a lot of energy and the perceived stalling was really just a moment for thinking, or a pause to gather more stamina to keep working, then this productive struggle. Leave an inspirational artifact like a star on a post-it naming the strategy, and keep working!</i>
<i>Ask, "How is it working? Would you show me?"</i>	<i>The student does the teaching, for the strategy that they are practicing in service of the skill. They show us what they are using and how.</i>	

If this is an issue of strategy, and there is evidence of productive struggle, *then try*

Teacher's Role: WATCH (look, listen) (identifying the what)	Student's Role: ENGAGE (showing & telling) (honoring the how)	Next Steps SHARED INTENTIONS (defining the why)
Ask , <i>"What else can you try?"</i>	<i>Students reflect on their other known options. This where they look at other tools, books, and charts. Then show how they might use it to keep working.</i>	If it seems that this new option is a viable one, and the student has a positive response to it, name it together. Rehearse the strategy together. Then leave an artifact as a scaffold.
Encourage, say , <i>"When you figure this out, it is going to feel so much more amazing than</i>	<i>Look for evidence that the student believes you. What was said? Did the student go right back to work? Did you see a smile and a nod? Be sure to record what the student is</i>	Be sure to check in with the student to monitor the student's progress and to gauge stamina. Do this to confirm that this remains a productive struggle. In doing so, the student is also learning how to identify productive struggle from unproductive

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<p><i>if I told you. Just wait and see!"</i></p>	<p><i>doing, and their emotional response to it.</i></p>	<p>struggle.</p>
<p>When the student is successful, celebrate it and say, "You did it!" then say, "You, (name the thing) yourself, how do you feel?"</p>	<p><i>The student explains feelings that come with success. They show what they did and used to be successful. They identify the moment the strategy worked. Be sure to scaffold their language, paraphrase back to them all that was shared by using full sentences. "You are saying... you did this... it worked.. Now you feel.. because you did it yourself."</i></p>	<p>Decide together how to memorize the student's accomplishment. Will the student teach the class how to do it? Will they teach a small group? Will the student become a strategy expert that can help others who are working on the same thing? Will the student create a helpful tool to offer in a work station? This boosts both confidence, and stamina for productive struggle in the future.</p>

<p><i>If the student seems exhausted or frustrated this is unproductive struggle then try</i></p>		
<p>Teachers: WATCH (look, listen) (<i>identifying the what</i>)</p>	<p>Students: ENGAGE (showing & telling) (<i>honoring the how</i>)</p>	<p>Next Steps SHARED INTENTIONS (<i>defining the why</i>)</p>
<p>Ask: "Do you need a break?"</p>	<p><i>Watch for and take note of the student's body language, word choices, was there a sigh when you offered the break? Relief?</i></p>	<p><i>Giving a student a dignified off ramp during times of struggle is a positive step towards growing the concept of productive struggle.</i></p>
<p>Confirm, say, "Yes, I agree with you. You are really working hard. You did all these things." Share your observations of all that the child did. Ask: "How does working hard make you feel?"</p>	<p><i>The student describes the feelings that come when working hard. Encourage the student to tap into the physical, and emotional sensations that come when working hard. It is important to lead your responses to what is shared with "you" not "I" because that sends the message that you value</i></p>	<p><i>This is a time for shared empathy (we all know what struggle feels like). Together create an artifact that shows what struggle feels like. For example, this can be an index card with an emoji that captures how the struggle feels for this student. That way the student can recognize it when it happens again. Discuss what was happening when the child</i></p>

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	<i>what the student is saying, more than what you want them to do.</i>	<i>became aware of the struggle.</i>
Ask , “When will you try again? What would you like to try next time?”	<i>Students review their repertoire of strategies, and decide which one they will try next. This sends the message that the student is in control over the learning. They are deciding what to do and when to do it. The student also decides when will be a good time to try again (specifically), maybe it’s the same period, sometime later in the day, or tomorrow.</i>	<i>Write the plan together, name the strategy the student is going to try, and when. You may want to plan for some explicit teaching for that strategy at some other point of the day. Better yet, do it the whole class, so the student feels connected to their learning community. Like, “Here are some things learners are working on...” It’s efficient because it can be done as a whole group. Chances are others are struggling with it too.</i>
Encourage, say , “When you figure this out, it is going to feel so much more amazing than if I told you. Just wait and see!”	<i>The student will show you if this statement is believable. Body language is essential here. Does the child believe you? What makes you know that? If you see a nod, a smile, and affirmation is uttered this may be some proof that the child believes.</i>	<i>Leave an artifact behind that will reinforce the teaching. Make sure that artifact captures something positive about the student. Make sure the child will know you believe that he/she/they are capable of great work, while also developing greater capacity for productive struggle.</i>