

Creating High Quality Work in EL Education Schools: Multiple Levels of Support

In some schools, students are provided with very little support when creating a product resulting from a project. Too often, the products students create are simply “assignments” that students are expected to complete with a high degree of autonomy, often just following a set of directions, and often on their own time outside of school.

In contrast, EL believes that attending to many or all of the levels of support listed below is crucial to giving students clarity and a vision of quality when involved in a crafting a product. These steps do not represent a fixed or required sequence, but we hope that teachers use these strategies to support students in creating quality work.

1. **Identify specific learning targets.** Based on the skills and content that should be addressed and the agreed-upon characteristics of quality, teachers (or more powerfully, students and teachers) identify the important targets on which the project will be assessed.
2. **Name the non-negotiables:** For example, if the task is to create a poster showing what students have learned about ancient Greece, the non-negotiables might include:
 - The poster has to be 2 ft. by 3 ft.
 - It must represent culture, politics, religion, and architecture.
 - It must include a timeline.
 - There must be a title and caption for each illustration or photo explaining why it is important.
 - There needs to be a map of ancient Greece.
 - There has to be an example of how a particular aspect of ancient Greece affects our culture today.
3. **Generate characteristics of quality:** For example, characteristics of a quality poster might include: organized, good use of color, effective use of space, creative, pleasing to the eye, accurate illustrations.
4. **Analyze exemplars and models** to help students form a picture of each characteristic of quality. Look at student work and professional models to name the attributes of weak and strong work. What does “organized” look like? What makes illustrations accurate? How can color enhance meaning? What is effective use of space, fonts, contrast? What does “creative” look like?
5. **Design a rubric or checklist of features** describing quality. For rubrics, explain the difference between levels of quality.
6. **Plan lessons** to teach skills and content needed to complete the product. For example, lessons might focus on organization, determining importance, synthesis, word choice, sentence fluency, citation, layout, lettering, and illustration.

7. **Involve students in self-assessment.** They need to assume responsibility for their own learning. They can assess themselves on the rubric or checklist at different points in the process.
8. **Engage students in critique** from others. We have to teach them how to give descriptive feedback, based on the rubric, which is *kind, specific and helpful*. It is useful for the teacher to run formal critique sessions with the whole class to model how to analyze and improve selected aspects of the work; students can then formally and informally use this model in peer critique.
9. **Provide time for the creation of multiple drafts.** Students need to focus revision on one skill, concept, or strategy at a time. Ideally, each significant revision is followed by critique and feedback, possibly with more instruction.
10. **Confer with students.** Move around the room and support as many students as possible with brief check-ins that are focused on the target at hand. Particularly important is a final gateway conference, before a student produces a final draft.
11. **Have a public exhibition pre-planned.** Knowing that the work will be presented to an audience beyond the classroom creates a need to care about quality. The more formal the audience or exhibition, the more powerful the urgency and excitement will be.
12. **Make time for reflection.** Let students ponder: What did I do well? Where did I meet the learning targets? Where did I fall short? What do I need to work on to reach them next time? What did I learn from creating this product? What did I learn from engaging in the project as a whole?