

DETROIT FUTURE SCHOOLS

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# Guide to Humanizing Schooling

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4126 3rd Street

Detroit, MI 48201

DFS@alliedmedia.org

## Guide to Humanizing Schooling

### Developed By

Ammerah Saidi, Nathaniel Mullen and Jeanette Lee

### Written and Edited by

Ammerah Saidi, Nathaniel Mullen, Muna Danish  
and Jeanette Lee

### Designed by

Sean Coté and Nathaniel Mullen

### Special Thanks

The Work Department

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# Acknowledgements

## **Detroit Future Schools Staff (past and current)**

Ammerah Saidi, Nate Mullen, Bobby Colombo, Isaac Miller, Conja Wright, Joey Rodriguez-Tanner, Angie Allen, Corey McCord, Piper Carter, Domonique Baul, Maya Stovall, Alicia Castañeda-Lopez, Andrea Claire Maio

## **Detroit Future Schools Teachers (past and current)**

Khadigah Alasry, Doha Aman, Kevin Ashford, Morgan Barbee, Anthony Battaglia, Amy Bielat, Patrick Butler, Sheena Crenshaw, Adelaide Fabiilli, Danielle Filipiak, Allison (Allie) Gross, Monique Guest, Andrew Kemp, Liz Kirk, Ashley Kline, Caryn Kralovec, Brooke Leiberman, Helen Lee, Ung-Sang Lee, Hui-Ling Malone, Anna Marschalk-Burns, Jasmine Noble, Tamyra Rhodes-Oneill, Dunya Sandiha, Janine Scott, Jared TenBrink, Kamelya Youssef

## **Detroit Future Schools Researchers**

Emery Petchauer, Stacey Krueger

## **Allied Media Projects Staff**

Diana J. Nucera, Mike Medow, Jeanette Lee, Anderson Walworth, Morgan Willis, Muna Danish

## **Our Network**

Dozens of educators, artists, students, administrators, community members and parents across the Metro-Detroit area have also contributed heart, sweat and intellect to make DFS what it is.



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# Part One: Overview



Welcome to the *Detroit Future Schools' Guide to Humanizing Schooling*.

What do we mean by “humanizing schooling”?

Detroit philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs first issued a call for humanizing schooling in the late 90s, as she witnessed droves of young people dropping out of school. She interpreted these young people as “voting with their feet” against a failed school system that resembled, at best, a factory, and at worst, a prison. She asked, “Just imagine how safe and lively our streets would be, if, as a natural and normal part of the curriculum from K-12, school children were taking responsibility for planting community gardens, organizing neighborhood festivals, painting public murals?” Boggs’ ideas echoed 19th century education reformer John Dewey’s call for education as a process of living rather than preparation for future living.

Founded in 2011, Detroit Future Schools works towards humanizing schooling. DFS explores how digital media can be a tool for transformation in Detroit classrooms. We have honed a set of instructional practices that engage students and educators in meaningful investigations of themselves, their communities and their classroom curriculum. We have also built planning and assessment tools that allow us to know when humanizing schooling is happening, and when it’s not, and documentation tools that allow us to accurately describe our findings to others.

Through this work, we have come to understand humanizing schooling as what happens when educators, students, artists and community members are all invested in a process of cultivating essential human skills.

This guide is made up of three parts. In part one, we share the story of our work and how it has developed over time. In part two, we guide you through the “Rida Framework,” our primary planning tool and the anchor of our work in the classroom. In part three, we lay out our best practices and resources through a series of how-to instructions and worksheets. We invite classrooms throughout Detroit and beyond to adapt and evolve these tools to make them their own.

Our goal is to catalyze system-wide changes in education that emanate out from classrooms, rather than from the top down. We believe this approach will humanize schooling and lead us towards a more just, creative, and collaborative world.



# History of Detroit Future Schools

Allied Media Projects (AMP) is the founder and host organization of Detroit Future Schools. AMP produces the Allied Media Conference and supports art, media and technology projects that are advancing social justice through its Sponsored Projects Program. AMP's mission is to cultivate media strategies for a more just, creative and collaborative world.

In 2009, coming out of the Allied Media Conference, AMP launched the Detroit Digital Justice Coalition as a collaborative effort to secure a federal broadband adoption grant aimed at closing the digital divide in Detroit. In 2010, the coalition was awarded \$1.8 million for programs that would integrate digital media arts and technologies into education, entrepreneurship and community organizing in Detroit. These programs included a 20-week training for Detroit community members called Detroit Future Media, a network of 12 youth leadership programs called Detroit Future Youth, and an in-school arts program, Detroit Future Schools.

The initial strategy of Detroit Future Schools was to partner digital media artists with classroom teachers in order to produce student media over the course of the school year that would make core content relevant to students' lives.

In our first year, we quickly realized two things:

1. For our program to be effective in transforming classrooms, we had to transform not only students but also the adults;
2. Before youth and adults could claim their power as media-makers and agents of positive change, they first had to create more humanizing classrooms, in which authentic learning could occur.

These realizations expanded our conception of DFS, encouraging more extensive professional development and simulations for teachers, teaching artists and students to create the conditions for humanizing schooling. We developed a list of "11 Essential Skills" that we believe should be evident in classrooms where humanizing schooling is occurring. We built tools for documentation and evaluation that would measure for the presence of these skills. Our strategy was designed to not only identify problems in classrooms, but to support teachers and artists to address those problems through research-based practices that are anchored in critical pedagogy.

In our second year, DFS began to hone

the documents and infrastructure needed to advance our purpose. Our greatest success for our second year was our effort to integrate youth voices into all levels of our programming. We organized our first Network Gathering at the Allied Media Conference, which brought together representatives of all major partners (students, teachers, artists, etc.) of our program in order to collectively envision the future of education in Detroit.

In many of the 12 classrooms of our inaugural year, we saw increases in:

1. Student attendance
2. Test scores
3. Overall engagement

Even more profound than these outcomes was the transformation we saw in students' sense of ownership; ownership of their education and by extension, their lives and the fate of their communities. In one DFS classroom, students successfully organized a "freedom school" in the park across the street from their school to protest injustices within the school and project a vision for what real education could look like. In a student interview, a high school junior stated that his DFS classroom was different than others in his school because **"it makes me feel more human."**

The end of our third year marked the completion of the non-renewable federal grant under which we launched Detroit Future Schools. This prompted

us to re-envision the program structure for long-term sustainability. We needed to figure out how to operate the program with anywhere from a quarter to a half of the original budget. The solution at the end of this process was to focus our energies on a smaller number of schools, called anchor schools, where we work with teachers and administrators to have a more concentrated impact.

At the same time, we created more local and national spaces through which to share the lessons emerging from the in-school program. Through our three day Rida Institute, we walked teachers through the DFS "Rida Framework," a curriculum-planning tool that flips the test-driven approach to education on its head. Instead of working backwards from the goal of test scores, the DFS Rida Framework supports teachers to articulate a clear purpose of education within the specific contexts of their communities, the principles and skills they need to actualize that purpose in their classrooms, and the metrics they will use to measure learning and growth.

Ultimately, we believe this scaling-down-to-go-deep approach is strengthening the root system of DFS for the long-term.



# DFS at a Glance

**Detroit Future Schools is a digital media arts program committed to humanizing schooling in Detroit. We work in a small number of anchor schools in addition to coordinating an afterschool program, called the Out-of-School Project. Through these programs we develop and evaluate core instructional practices. We then share our best practices through a local and national DFS network of educators.**



## IN-SCHOOL PROGRAM

For one year, classroom teachers in anchor schools are paired with digital media artists to integrate critical instructional elements and to design media projects that sync up with and enhance the core curriculum. Through these projects, students create media that explores essential questions about their lives and their communities, empowering them to use media to shape their worlds. In DFS classrooms, media-making is not the end goal but one of the vehicles through which we develop essential skills. This yearlong in-school program consists of teacher professional development modules that support teachers in designing their classrooms as incubators of the DFS “11 Essential Skills” as well as student media-projects that put those skills into practice.

## OUT-OF-SCHOOL PROJECT

The Out-of-School Project (OSP) is an afterschool program that brings together students ages 13 – 21 from all over the city – including Detroit Public Schools, charter schools, private schools, alternative schools, and college. In this program, students create media that inserts youth voice into the conversation about the challenges and opportunities facing Detroit’s public education system.

The goal of the OSP is threefold: 1) to confront the systemic problems in our schooling landscape, 2) to address the lack of youth voice in organizing around school reform and 3) to provide an opportunity for youth to follow their passion to make media.

## THE DFS NETWORK

We are committed to an “open source” approach to humanizing schooling that will allow the maximum number of people to benefit from the practices and ideas that emerge from our anchor schools. Towards this goal, Detroit Future Schools thoroughly documents and evaluates our core practices and exchanges them with a network of educators, youth, researchers and artists – in Detroit and beyond – who are engaged in work for humanizing education. This exchange takes place through DFS network gatherings and training institutes and through our participation in other local and national networks of social justice educators.

# Theory of Change

**DFS adapts Allied Media Projects' theory of change to the context of education.**



**We believe creating our own media\* is a process of speaking and listening that allows us to investigate the problems that shape our realities, imagine other realities and organize our communities to make them real.**

**When we train participants\*\* to use media in this way, we transform them from consumers of information to producers, from objects within dominant narratives to authors of the transformation of the world.**

\* DFS values all forms of non-digital communication, but we focus on digital media because of the ubiquitous consumption of digital media within our culture and the need to shift our roles from media consumers to producers. For DFS, digital media includes the Internet, video, audio, graphics, games, mobile apps and other technologies.

\*\* DFS does not isolate students as our target audience for transformation. We believe in processes that foster mutual transformation. So, when we use the word "participant," we mean youth and adults – teachers, students, parents, administrators, etc.



# Impact

Between 2011 and 2014, DFS operated in 24 schools, employed 12 artists, partnered with more than 30 teachers and worked with over 3,000 students across the Metro Detroit area. Some teachers and their students partnered with us for multiple years and some for just one. DFS has demonstrated a lasting impact on individuals that resonates even after our partnership ended. We conduct interviews with all DFS teachers and with a sample of students from every classroom at the end of each school year to understand our impact. Here are some of the things they've told us.

"[DFS is] what gets me up in the morning. Because like, let me see how can I put this...basically without this class, school would be boring ...It's like you do your work and you can associate with your students. In other classes, you got to be quiet and do your work. In this class – when the DFS artist is here – we get to talk to other people. We get to express ourselves."

– High School student

"The media project was the first project that had to do with writing and other steps to it that I completed ever. No lie. Ever. I never complete, like, my writing projects or whatever. But the media project – it was the first project I completed ever."

– High School student

"Immersion in the DFS network dramatically transformed how I conceptualize my role as an educator and my own vision for how a successful classroom functions. Before DFS, I had a much lower bar for measuring success. Since DFS, I look for elements of rigorous engagement, character development and student leadership to signify the success of my classroom."

– 2nd Grade teacher

"As an 8th grader, I never thought I had the power to change my city. But with DFS, I see I can start with myself and my class then eventually the city...I learned that the economy is very bad and we have the possibility to change it. And we can increase the amount of people living in Detroit in a good way and we can help Detroit with community service and other types of things. I learned that it's not always about you – you have to care about the community and what's going on outside of your home and your situations because if you don't then you won't know what's going on and like – it's not just about watching news. Because you're just watching what's going on – you're not actually helping."

– Middle School student

"DFS has given me a strong theoretical framework as well as ways to bridge those theories into the classroom. It also helped me become more critical in the way I approach education. What I learned through DFS still informs my work significantly. A large part of my identity as an educator was developed through my work with DFS and I still hold a big part of that identity today. Also, its given me a great reference point as a successful critical pedagogy program so I often catch myself thinking "I wonder how we would've worked through these challenges at DFS?"

– 5th Grade teacher

"I develop curriculum for LEAP (Learning for the Empowerment and Advancement of Palestinians) and my work with DFS is directly applied to the curriculum we are developing. The processes, the activities, the critical thinking strategies that I was exposed to and was inspired to develop in my work with DFS are being used in the curriculum. Teaching people to be producers and not consumers of media is something that is foundational in the work I am doing."

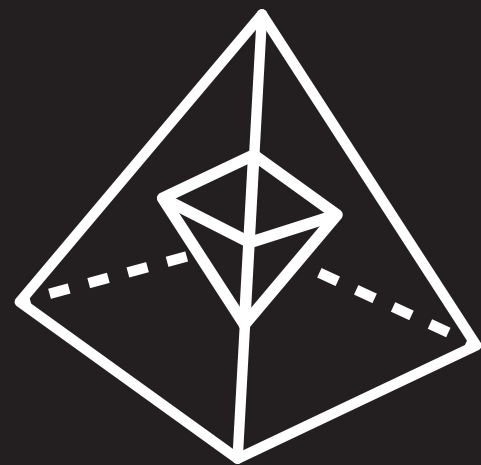
– Former High School teacher

"This is the best, most honest and reflective professional development I've ever attended. We were all deeply engaged in the work, because the leaders made this content so engaging. I became a teacher 20 years ago and so wish I had this kind of opportunity in my first years of teaching like other participants. Regardless, it has transformed how and what I will do with the remainder of my career."

– K-12 educator/consultant



# Part Two: Rida Framework



The Rida Framework is the primary tool that DFS uses to humanize schooling. Inspired by Brazilian educator and theorist, Paulo Freire, this planning and evaluation tool asks educators to engage in continuous cycles of action and reflection. Freire believed that such cycles of critical thinking and action were key to any transformative learning process.

The term “Rida” comes from the popular culture expression to “ride or die,” referring to people who can be counted on during times of extreme duress. Education scholar Jeff Duncan-Andrade applied the term to teaching in his seminal article, “Gangsta, Wanksta, Rida,” in which he analyzed the practices of four South Los Angeles teachers and articulated a framework for effective urban teaching.

From these diverse influences, DFS developed the Rida Framework as a practical tool that can support educators to develop clear visions for humanizing education in their classrooms, practices for implementing those visions, and evaluation methods for tracking their progress.

The DFS Rida Framework consists of the following elements:

**Context >> Purpose & Principles >> Vision >> Skills & Curriculum >> Metrics**

Traditionally, schools demand that educators develop curriculum by first looking to the content and state standards they are required to meet. This approach fuels a culture motivated by test-taking and scores, rather than a culture of meaningful learning. It also makes school irrelevant to the students’ everyday lives. The Rida Framework, instead, requires that the teacher first deeply reflect on the context of their classroom, the purpose of education within that context and their ultimate goals as an instructor. This big picture approach gives school content a critical sense of place and purpose. From this approach, users of the Rida Framework articulate practices (action) that will result in desired/outlined outcomes within their classrooms, which they will document and evaluate via pre-determined metrics (reflection). Throughout the year, teachers revisit their Rida Framework document in order to make edits and adjustments as they move through cycles of action and reflection.



# CONTEXT

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## RIDA FRAMEWORK

In order to begin the process of building humanizing classrooms, you must first understand your context, i.e. the place and community in which you teach. Our communities act as ecosystems, comprised of many interdependent elements: our schools, the economy, our systems of governance, our infrastructure and the stories we hear and tell about our communities. In order to address problems within our communities we must consider the whole network of relationships that comprise our context.

Our context extends beyond our cities and into the world. We are living in a world that is increasingly connected and fast-paced. Despite a rapidly changing global context our schools are still using a static approach to teaching, where the teacher presents information and the students must memorize that information. Our world demands that we change the way we are teaching to reflect our greater context.



# Activity: Context Brainstorm

One way to gain perspective on your context is to map it out.

Context Brainstorming is a simple exercise to generate a complex map of relationships that make up your community. By making these relationships explicit you can start to see the web of relationships that are playing out within your classroom. These maps are not perfect, static maps of your neighborhood or city. Instead they represent our relationships, which are complex, evolving and dynamic. By mapping out our context, we can begin to change and impact those relationships.



## MATERIALS

- Sticky notes
- Large paper
- Writing implements
- Timer

## STEPS

1. Gather a group of 1-5 participants, ideally colleagues who are familiar with your context.
2. On a large sheet of paper or on a board, draw out two concentric circles. Label the outer circle "greater" and the inner circle "immediate."
3. Set the timer for five minutes.
4. Starting with the inside circle, take five minutes to generate as many short answers as you can to the questions:
  - a. What are the defining features of your school, your school's neighborhood, your city?

Give them different colored sticky notes for positive, neutral, and negative features.
5. Say your ideas out loud and then write them down on sticky notes and place them in the inner circle.

As you all share your ideas aloud, you can build upon each other's ideas. Write down the new ideas and place the sticky note next to the original idea.
6. Now move to the outer circle, set the timer again and repeat steps 4-5 using the questions below.
  - a. What values and trends are you observing in the nation?
  - b. What values and trends are you observing in the world?
  - c. What do you think will be the defining features of the world your students experience as adults?

## WRAP UP

Consider the following questions:

- How does the immediate circle impact your classroom?
- How does the outer circle impact your classroom?

For general debrief guidelines, see the "Root Practice: Debrief" on page 58.

Don't forget to document your map when the activity is done. You can take a photo of your map and upload the photo to your Rida Framework or type up the ideas. You can also continue onto the next context activity in which you will cluster themes that emerged in the brainstorm or you can move on to the next section: Purpose & Principles.

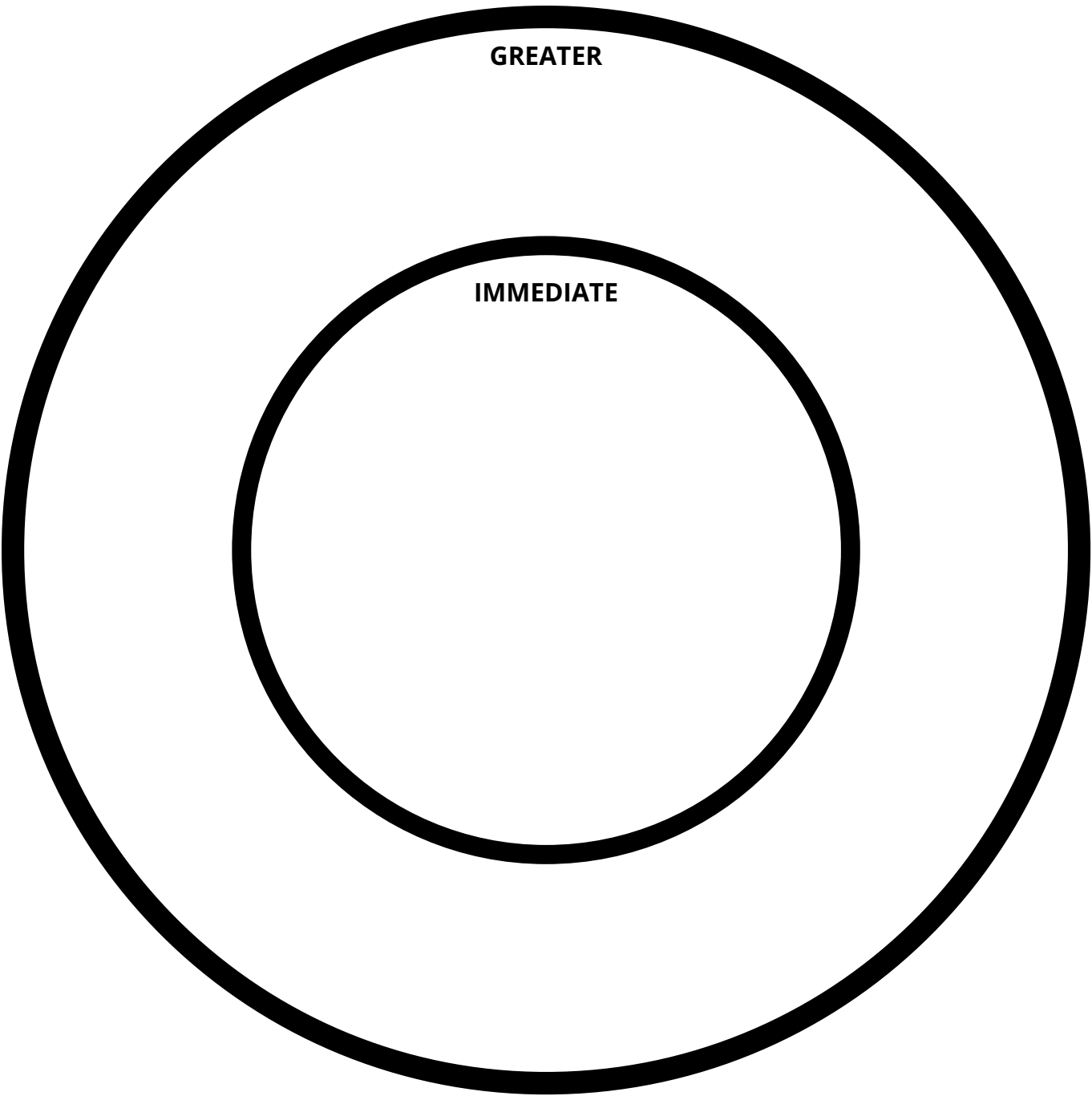
# Example: Context Brainstorm

This is a completed sample of a context brainstorm for your reference.



# Context Brainstorm

This is a blank template of a context brainstorm you can use to complete the activity.





# Activity: Find Themes

Now that you have mapped your context, you can explore common themes that may have emerged during your brainstorm.

In this activity you will draw connections across ideas that reveal larger themes about your classroom’s context.

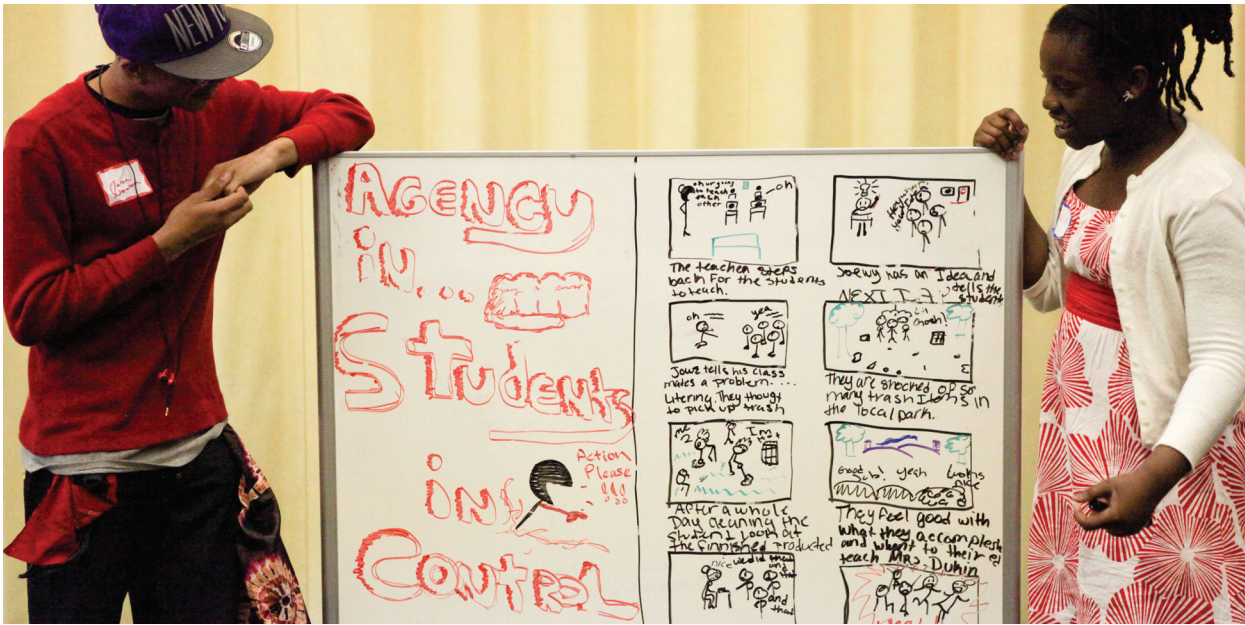
For example, you might find that your school has an abundance of community partners or that there is a lack of youth spaces in your community. Being able to cluster these recurring themes make it easier to return to your map when trying to develop curriculum around your context or when trying to reevaluate your context.

## MATERIALS

- Your map from the context brainstorm
- Sticky notes
- Writing implements

## STEPS

1. Looking at the answers you have come up with in the “Context Brainstorm,” start reading them out loud to the group.
2. When you find answers that relate or overlap move these sticky notes to the same area on the board – do this until you have arranged most of the ideas into clusters.
3. Then try to come up with a name or title for each cluster. For example if one cluster contains “not enough books in the school” and “budget cuts,” you could name this cluster “lack of school resources.”



## WRAP UP

Consider the following questions:

- Are there any themes that emerged that surprised you?
- What assets and/or shortcomings do the themes reveal about your classroom’s context?

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

You can take a photo of your themes and upload the photo to your Rida Framework. We recommend you type up themes directly into the Rida Framework to remember the major ideas that emerged from this activity.



# PURPOSE & PRINCIPLES

## RIDA FRAMEWORK

The next step in the Rida Framework is developing your purpose of education and the accompanying principles. Your purpose is a broad foundation for your work in the classroom – it is your anchor, your reason for being in the classroom. Your principles help ground your purpose in the day-to-day activities of the classroom. These principles should be clearly visible in the classroom, shared, discussed and referenced repeatedly throughout the year.

We introduce our principles at the start of the year and reference them at least once a week, especially when a teacher or student exhibits or breaks a principle. Such moments should be seen as teachable moments that bring a dynamic sense of life to what can otherwise become static phrases that may or may not resonate with students. Simply put, making them visible and saying them is never enough. Principles should be utilized within a committed process of discussion and analysis to remain relevant and accessible to your classroom.

# Activity: Writing Workshop

Your purpose is the cornerstone of your work in the classroom. It is vital that the purpose statement clearly lays out why you are an educator. First working alone and then in a group, you will challenge and push each other’s ideas to develop the most rigorous purpose statements possible.

After a first draft, purpose statements can be vague, general and often misleading. At the end of this activity you should have a clear purpose statement (ideally one succinct sentence) that speaks to the challenges of your context, and how you plan to address those challenges.

## MATERIALS

Writing implements  
Timer

## STEPS

1. Do a “freewrite” using the prompts below. During a freewrite, you set a timer and write non-stop for the whole time, never taking your pen from the paper. If you run out of ideas, write something meaningless until you arrive at another idea. The important thing is: do not stop writing.

For each of the prompts below do a freewrite for 5 minutes.

What is knowledge? Where does knowledge come from?  
How is knowledge created?

What knowledge is most appropriate for your context?

What is the purpose of education in the context you described above?

What is the purpose of your school?

Why did you become an educator?

2. Read back through your notes. Highlight the key words and concepts that stand out to you. From there, come up with a single sentence that describes your purpose as an educator. Underneath the sentence write a short paragraph (2 or 3 sentences) to further explain your purpose statement, if necessary.

3. Then partner with a colleague for a feedback session, ideally someone who is familiar with your context and who is also writing their purpose. Take time to read over each other’s purpose statements and freewrites carefully. In providing feedback, give dedicated time to each purpose (at least 10 minutes per person).

- a. Start with what you notice about the purpose statement.
- b. Then pick apart the words in the purpose, paying special attention to the verbs. As teachers we often write that we will “give,” “open” or “show.” These terms imply that action is to be done by the teacher to the student. Push yourself and your partner to develop purpose statements in which both teachers and students are taking action. Make sure every word in the purpose statement is accurate and intentional.

4. Take the feedback and then rewrite your purpose statement, and if necessary go through the writing process again, until your purpose sentence is clear.

## WRAP UP

Consider the following questions:

- Where did you get stuck?
- What did you learn about yourself as an educator through this process?

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

Make sure to transfer the completed purpose to your Rida Framework.



# Activity: Define Your Principles

If your purpose is a roof, then your principles are the walls of the house – you see them more often, you touch them, you use them for support. Principles are guiding truths, like mantras, that you repeat to yourself and to your students again and again. If your principles have an impact, you might even hear your students repeating them in conversation.

In this activity you will work to develop a set of principles that become pillars of your classroom.



## MATERIALS

Writing implements  
Timer

## STEPS

1. Looking at your purpose statement, draft 2-3 short statements that you can use to remind yourself and/or your students of your purpose of education. Some examples used in other classrooms:

### Process over Product:

The strongest solutions and learning happen through the process, not in a moment at the end of the process. Scientists set-up experiments with the aim of having their theories fail.

### Seek not to be right but to be true:

You can say/explore anything if the pursuit is towards truth and justice. Respect and evidence are great equalizers.

2. Principles are vital, especially in challenging moments when you need to explain the values underpinning the classroom. Principles should also be used to reinforce and amplify positive behaviors in the classroom.

See if your principles can be applied in these scenarios:.

- a. You look around the room and you see your purpose of education fully evident in your classroom. You say to your students, “class, you are really embodying the principle of \_\_\_\_ right now”.
  - b. Your students are frustrated with a process and push back asking why they have to do something. What principle will you remind them of?
  - c. You’re disappointed in your classroom. What principle will you use to help steer things back on track?
4. Make any necessary edits to your draft principles. Ideally, these will be your principles for the entire year so they should feel right and reflect your purpose and context.

## WRAP UP

Consider the following questions:

- How do your principles relate to your context and purpose?
- What specific behaviors do you want your principles to encourage?

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

Make sure to transfer the completed principles to your Rida Framework.



# VISION

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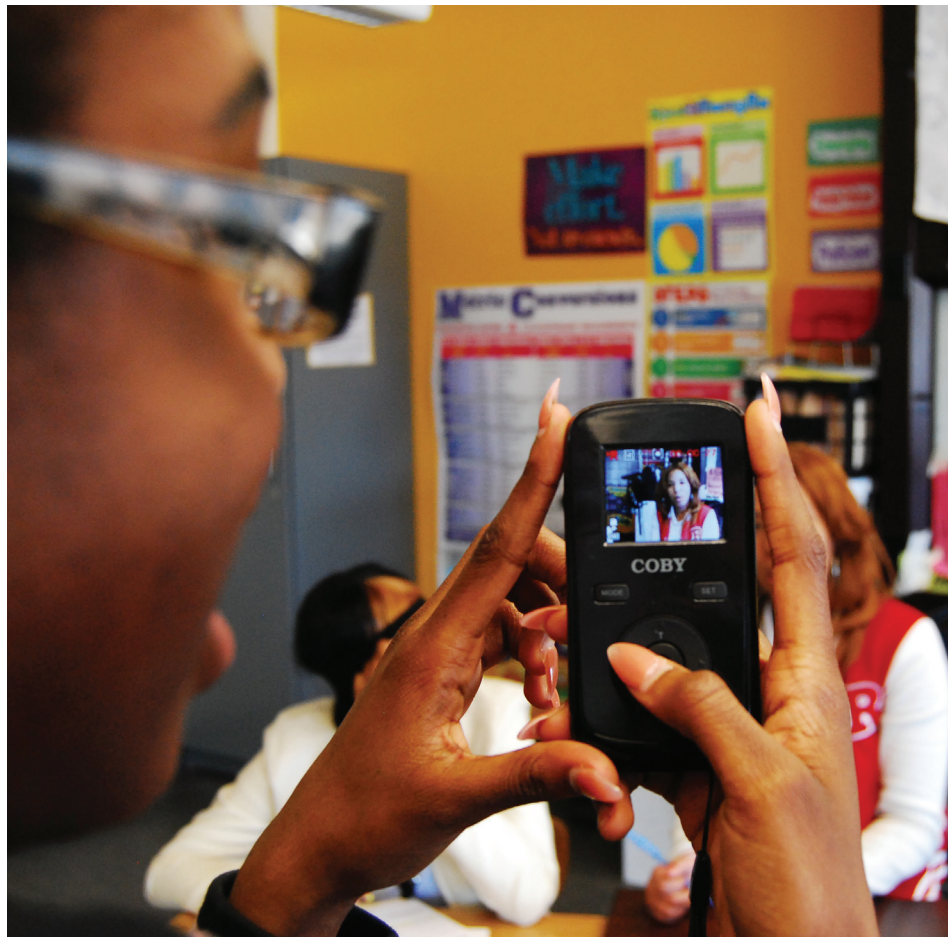
## RIDA FRAMEWORK

The vision for your classroom should grow out of a deep understanding of your present context and your purpose within that context. A vision is an ideal scenario of what happens when you achieve your purpose in the classroom. When you project your purpose into the future, you might see something unexpected. A liberated classroom full

of empowered youth is not necessarily the peaceful, obedient classroom that many of us have been trained to see as the ideal. This is what makes visions so powerful. They help us identify observable outcomes that become a tool for measuring the effectiveness of our work in our classroom.

## Activity: Tell a Vision Story

A vision story should describe, in detail, what it looks like when you put your purpose into practice. In this activity you can write or record a story about what your classroom looks like at the end of the school year. You should be examining your purpose and projecting how your purpose will translate into actions, events, and behaviors in the classroom.



### MATERIALS

Writing surface  
Writing implements  
Timer  
Optional: audio recorder

### STEPS

1. Imagine what a day in your classroom looks like at the end of the year if your purpose is achieved.
2. Write or record a story detailing this scenario – give yourself at least 15 minutes. The story should be written in the present tense. Use the following prompts:  
Tell the the story from the 3rd person perspective, observing your classroom from the outside looking in.  
Describe how the the students look, sound, speak, think.  
What is your role as the teacher in the classroom?  
Describe how you look, sound, speak, think.
3. Read or listen back to your story and write down or highlight key details that stick out to you.
4. Then compare the story to your purpose. Take a moment and write out the reasons why your story does or does not support your purpose. What specific moments in your story reflect your purpose? For example, if your purpose is for students to be empowered, where does empowerment show up in your story? Who has the power in the story – is it you, the teacher or the students?
5. After comparing your story to your purpose, make any necessary changes to your story.

### WRAP UP

Consider the following questions:

- What was easy to imagine?
- What was hardest to imagine?

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

Make sure to transfer the completed vision story to your Rida Framework.





# SKILLS & CURRICULUM

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## RIDA FRAMEWORK

It is not a mistake that we are just arriving at curriculum in our Rida Framework. Traditionally, curriculum is the starting point in a classroom, but the goal of the Rida Framework is to help us see that our role in the classroom is not only to deliver curriculum, but to develop the leaders that our world demands.

Your curriculum should be tailored to achieve your purpose, whether that is empowerment through teaching math skills, or building strong community through science. When you have a purpose-driven curriculum, it becomes more directly relevant to you and your students. Skills help anchor your purpose within your curriculum, the way that principles help anchor your purpose within your classroom culture.

DFS has identified “11 Essential Skills” that we believe will prepare individuals to solve real world problems, imagine

new realities and build movements that span communities across the world. They are: **observation, curiosity, innovation, metacognition, collaboration, grit, empathy/ solidarity, purposefulness, critical consciousness, foresight, and optimism/hope.** We developed these skills through research that identified the role of character development in preparing at-risk youth for academic success. That research was accompanied by focus group conversations with our network of students, educators, artists and community members where we brainstormed the skills we need for the world we want to build.

In this section you will identify the skills you need to develop in your classrooms in order to achieve your purpose and vision. From there you will develop curricula that cultivates those skills.

# 11 Essential Skills

Ultimately, we need agents of social justice who are able to solve deep-rooted problems, imagine new realities and build movements that span communities across the world.

DFS has identified the following 11 essential human skills that we believe will prepare our participants to do this work, with a commitment to ethical agency and interdependence.

## Optimism/Hope

Belief that the best possible outcome is attainable.

## Grit

Perseverance of effort in the face of obstacles or challenges.

## Curiosity

Genuine desire to know more about the topic or practice at hand evidenced by analytical questioning (versus procedural).

## Observation

A push to observe the world critically, objectively and in detail.

## Innovation

A culture of looking at what could be possible beyond what already exists.

## Foresight

Awareness of the future and understanding of how actions today impact tomorrow.

## Metacognition

Practices to effectively think about one's thinking (understand one's own cognitive process) and the thinking of others.

## Purposefulness

Clear intentions behind the "why" of tasks in the classroom, especially in relation to how the work connects to one's life and future.

## Empathy/Solidarity

A push to understand the thoughts, feelings and motivations of others in the world.

## Collaboration

A culture of resourceful interdependence; people understand their limits and reach out to others for support and direction.

## Critical Consciousness

Questioning of established systems, practices, hierarchies, processes and histories, both macro and micro.



# Activity: Big and Essential Questions

This activity will help you generate your “Big Question” and more specifically your “Essential Questions” that will help you incorporate the skills you want to develop into your curriculum. These questions are the building blocks for the major projects and units of your curriculum.

These questions serve as the “thread” for the school year; the Big Question is a broad question that the classroom returns to throughout the year, while the Essential Questions are the smaller questions that help you start to unravel the larger, Big Question.

## MATERIALS

- DFS 11 Essential Skills
- Big Question Grid
- Sticky Notes

## WRAP UP

Consider the following questions:

- What are you most excited to explore through your Big Question?
- What surprised you in the process of connecting your classroom curriculum to the 11 Essential Skills and your context?

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

Once you have the final questions, you can include them in the long term unit planner.

## STEPS

1. Begin by choosing 3-4 skills from the DFS list of 11 Essential Skills that you want to actively develop in your classroom; these skills should connect to your vision for your classroom. We ask you to choose only a few because we see these skills as connected cogs, as you turn one they all start to turn.
2. List your major curriculum goals for the year. For example, do you need to cover the Industrial Revolution? Do you have assigned textbook chapters or specific learning goals, like getting students reading at a certain grade level?
3. Once you have your skills and curriculum laid out in the Big Question Grid, gather 2-3 other people who are familiar with your context and your vision for your classroom.
4. Review your selected curriculum and skills.
5. Take 5-10 minutes to brainstorm topics and questions that relate to both the skills and the curriculum. Think of it as a venn diagram – you need to find the connections and the points of overlaps between the skills and content. Say your ideas aloud, so it is easier for everyone to build upon each other’s ideas. Write the ideas down on sticky notes and place them on the Big Question Grid.  
  
For example, if your chosen skills are optimism and hope and your content area is geometry, you might identify topics such as architecture or design and explore questions such as “Can we use geometric principles to build a better city?”
6. Once you have generated questions and topics you can identify common themes and cluster related sticky notes into smaller groups.
7. Take these themes and use them to develop your Big and Essential Questions. The final choice should be up to the educators who are going to be leading the classroom. You as the educator should be genuinely inspired by your Big and Essential Questions.

The Big Question should be broad and deep enough for you to investigate for the entire year. Your Essential Questions should help you answer your Big Question. For example, in one english classroom the Big Question was “Who am I in the world?” and one of the Essential Questions was “How do writers use literature to tell stories about their communities?”

Essential Questions should be tailored to engage with your curriculum goals and context, so in the earlier example of the question “Can we use geometric principles to build a better city?” try to be more specific – what are some real problems in your city that geometry could address?

# Example: Big and Essential Questions

| CURRICULUM GOALS  | ESSENTIAL SKILLS  |
|---|---|
| 3D Geometry<br>Volume & Surface Area<br><br>Solving for "X"<br>(5+X=30) | Rational Numbers<br><br>Multiplying fractions<br><br>Optimism and hope<br>Innovation<br>Collaboration |
| CONNECTIONS   |   |
| Using math to build stuff   | Urban planning building models  |
| Planning a community art show   | Architecture to solve community issues  |
| Community surveys   |   |
| POSSIBLE QUESTIONS  |   |
| How can we use math to improve our community?                           |   |
| How can we use math to learn new things about our community?            | How can we use illustration to show what we learn from math?  |
| How can we use math to bring our community together?                    |   |

# Big and Essential Questions

This is a blank template of the Big Question Grid you can use to complete the activity.

| CURRICULUM GOALS   | ESSENTIAL SKILLS |
|--------------------|------------------|
| CONNECTIONS        |                  |
| POSSIBLE QUESTIONS |                  |

# Activity: Planning Deliverables

Deliverables should serve as tangible goals for the year, and they often include a concrete product or completed actions at the end of a process. In this activity, you will develop plans for your classroom’s year-end goals. Deliverables usually evolve over the course of the year so we don’t expect you to have all of your deliverables now. As the goals become more clear you can return to your Rida Framework to update your deliverables as they develop.



## MATERIALS

- Big Question Grid
- Long Term Planner

## STEPS

1. Reflect on your Rida Framework as a whole, consider your Big and Essential Questions and the time frame you have for delivering specific content.
2. Considering your Rida Framework, write out ideas for the deliverables that your classroom will produce, along with a brief 2-3 sentence description of your deliverables.

Examples of past classroom deliverables:

### Simple machine comics and videos

In the 1st semester, as a class we will work in small teams on a long term project on simple machines. We will define all of the simple machines, describe how each machine works to change direction and size of a force. Then each group will have to find examples of where you find simple machines in everyday life. Each group will create a comic and/or video showing what they learned.

*In this 7th grade Science classroom the teacher wanted to develop the skills of observation and collaboration, while covering physics. In this deliverable you'll notice how the skills and curriculum show up in the description. They are working in groups (collaboration), they are finding examples in the real world (observation) and covering small machines (physics content).*

3. Now plot out an ideal timeline for your deliverables. Often deliverables are completed around the midpoint of the year and at the end of the year. Consider what needs to happen before the deadline and develop concrete milestones that lead up to the deadline. Use your Long Term Planner to help you plot out milestones and deadlines for each deliverable.

## WRAP UP

Consider the following questions:

- Is this plan feasible?
- Is this plan valuable to the classroom and the community?

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

# Long Term Planner

The Long Term Planner is a diagram that helps you organize your “Big” and “Essential” Questions and deliverables from your Rida Framework. The goal of the planner is to help you move from a Big Question to more detailed lessons and projects that help you arrive at your deliverables.

We often create multiple versions of the Long Term Planner throughout the year, creating one at the start of the year for each of the four quarters of the year. Then, in the fall and winter, we create more detailed versions that plan out month by month or even week by week.

# Example: Long Term Planner

**BIG QUESTION :** Who are you in the world? \_\_\_\_\_

| 1ST QUARTER   | 2ND QUARTER   | 3RD QUARTER  | 4TH QUARTER  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <b>ESSENTIAL QUESTION :</b><br>Who am I?<br><br>The Individual - Agency   | Who am I within family and friends?<br><br>Micro - Family & Peers   | Who am in within history?<br><br>Macro - History                                     | Who am I within society?   |
| <b>CURRICULUM MATERIALS</b><br><br>Code of the Street<br><br>“Audacity” by Dream Hampton  | Film: “Do the Right Thing”<br><br>Longer Novel TBD  | “Indian Education” by Sherman Alexie<br><br>Johnathan Kozol<br><br>National Disgrace | Film: “Grown in Detroit”<br><br>This American Life: Harper High School                                 |
| <b>PRACTICES &amp; ACTIVITY</b><br>Improv Skits (collaboration)<br><br>“Where I’m From” Poem<br><br>Intro Google Docs<br><br>Debate | Social Commentary: (narrative writing)<br><br>Editing Workshop<br><br>Audio Workshops (how to record your work) | Social Commentary: (Persuasive writing)<br><br>Peer Editing workshops<br><br>Debate  | Social Commentary: Research Paper<br><br>Layout & Illustration Workshops for Zine<br><br>Final Debates |
| <b>RESOURCES</b><br><br>1. Duckworth Grit research<br><br>2. Google Docs test   | Community Field Trip TBD  | Apathy: TED talk   | Reflection Work sheets   |

1

Make an Audio Collection of student recorded pieces.

DELIVERABLES

2

Produce a collection of student work in a zine

DELIVERABLES

# Long Term Planner

**BIG QUESTION :** \_\_\_\_\_

| 1ST QUARTER                     | 2ND QUARTER | 3RD QUARTER | 4TH QUARTER |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>ESSENTIAL QUESTION :</b>     |             |             |             |
| <b>CURRICULUM MATERIALS</b>     |             |             |             |
| <b>PRACTICES &amp; ACTIVITY</b> |             |             |             |
| <b>RESOURCES</b>                |             |             |             |

1

DELIVERABLES

2

DELIVERABLES





# METRICS

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## RIDA FRAMEWORK

The last section in the Rida Framework is metrics, or how you measure success in your classroom.

Metrics drive all major decisions in our school systems today. The data derived from standardized testing is used to justify everything from school closures to teacher pay rates and

student tracking. This creates a culture of high-stakes testing that discourages authentic teaching and learning. With this in mind we must develop more humanizing forms of assessment that are appropriate for our unique contexts.

# Activity: Documentation & Evaluation Outline

Honest reflection and evaluation is not possible without documentation. In this activity, you will develop tools for documenting your classroom’s progress and a format to reflect on your year. You will also design evaluation tools to measure your growth towards your purpose and vision.



## MATERIALS

- Writing surface
- Writing implements
- Timer

## STEPS

1. First you have to decide what you want to measure throughout the year – this is a good time to consider your vision. The tools you choose should be informed by what you want to measure. Most classrooms use a combination of tools including transcripts, surveys, interviews, video and rubrics to document the learning that is happening.
  - a. Transcripts are often used to measure growth during practices like debates and/or fishbowls. They are a powerful way to track the evolution of conversations in the classroom, i.e. do questions become more complex or frequent during debates throughout the year?
  - b. Video is a great way to track the group behaviors of the classroom. It is an easy way to document whether or not students are making eye contact with the speaker or staring into space, or how students enter the classroom and their traffic patterns in the classroom.
  - c. Short surveys are useful for tracking the thoughts and ideas of individual students. Many of the most powerful surveys are delivered at the start and the end of a process and ask the same questions. You can measure the impact of the process by the difference in student responses.
  - d. Rubrics are a set of observable criteria ideal for measuring very specific aspects of a classroom. For example, in a writing exercise a rubric could measure growth based on use of vocabulary or length of the piece.
2. Plan when and how you’re going to use documentation in your classroom, and who specifically will be doing the documentation. Documentation can be used in a number of ways throughout the year. For example, transcripts are often used for debriefing practices like debates, rubrics can help the classroom collectively plan how to improve practices and measure their progress, and surveys can be administered at the start and end of every major project.
3. Lastly, make sure that you as the educator have space to reflect about what you are learning in the classroom. Plan reflection times for yourself.

## WRAP UP

Take a deep breath, because you just completed your Rida Framework!

# Part Three: Resources

In this section you'll find a few of our favorite tools and practices for DFS classrooms, including the Root Practices and Classroom Basics. We use these resources to help us achieve the goals we outlined in our Rida Framework.







# ROOT PRACTICES

## RESOURCES

“Root Practices” are ritual activities that have the potential to transform classroom culture from the ground up. They can be adapted and used within any content area or age group. The “fruit” or takeaways from these practices are patterns of thought and action that ultimately make learning transformational as opposed to transactional— they feed students’ capacities for creating their own knowledge versus reciting established knowledge.

DFS Root Practices have been developed and refined over three years of experimentation, observation, and adaptation. In order to be effective,

Root Practices must be repeated over and over again, even if they deeply challenge participants (including you, as the teacher). At first, they can be difficult, but over time they reveal the tremendous capacity for self-governance that is latent within all of us, and which we systematically undermine through traditional schooling practices.

In the following section, we outline the Root Practices that, when integrated with the Rida Framework, will allow instructors to establish dynamic classroom cultures which yield most, if not all of the DFS “11 Essential Skills,” while also delivering core content.

# Root Practice: Debrief

Our first practice often happens at the end of an activity, but is the heart of all the Root Practices. Debrief is the practice of reflecting on our activities in the classroom. At the end of every activity, we take 2-10 minutes to talk about what we noticed during the activity. Classrooms can engage in highly effective activities, but if we don't stop and reflect, we lose the opportunity to fully process what made the activity so effective. Debrief allows the classroom to actively grow by being a space where students and teachers can consider the strengths and weaknesses of an activity and construct ways to improve it.

Every debrief should address two aspects of the activity: PROCESS (the actions during the activity) and CONTENT (the ideas that were formed during the activity). This allows you to reflect on what was done and how it was done.

## MATERIALS

Timer

## STEPS

1. After an activity, have the participants take a seat. Set your timer and be mindful of the time you have allowed for the debrief.
2. Begin the discussion by explaining that you are going to lead the class through a reflection on what happened during the activity, including both the process (how we interacted during the activity, how we talked to one another, how we worked together) and the content (the ideas that came up in the activity).
3. To start debriefing the content, ask questions about what the participants noticed about the ideas. Often the ideas are the topics that were brought up and the statements that were made during the activity. Below are some example questions. You don't need to ask all the questions listed.
  - a. What were the most powerful ideas that came up during the activity?
  - b. Did any of the ideas surprise you? If so, why? If not, why not?
  - c. Were there any interesting connections between the ideas?
  - d. Was there anything left unsaid?
4. Then move on to debrief the process. Ask questions about the participants' actions and behaviors during the activity. Often participants want to continue to talk about the ideas, or what was said during the activity. Try to get the participants to talk about specifically about behaviors. Example questions you might ask:
  - a. Was the practice (debate, fishbowl, conversation) a success?  
What evidence can you use to support your claim?
  - b. What did you notice about how we completed the activity?  
When were we loud, quiet, organized or disorganized?
  - c. What were the most focused moments in the activity?  
What was happening? What drew your attention?
  - d. What skills are we using in this practice?  
Where are these skills useful outside of the classroom?
5. Last, ask the participants what they would change if they were to do this again. When you repeat this particular practice, make sure to remind the participants of what they wanted to do differently.

# Root Practice: Deep Debrief

Deep Debrief is usually employed as a way to track the progress and impact of classroom activities and/or practices using documentation. Deep Debrief is employed less often than basic debrief, because the purpose of a Deep Debrief is to analyze documentation of classroom activities for growth and patterns over time. Activities and practices in the classroom should be reviewed regularly as this is what allows us to improve our practices. Any documentation of processes can be analyzed for both content ( the ideas that came up during the activity) and process (how participants interacted during the activity).

Be creative in how you integrate this practice into your classroom – it can improve everyday aspects of the classroom, not only debates or fishbowls but even the day-to-day behaviors of students in the classroom. The teacher or the students can do the documentation.

## MATERIALS

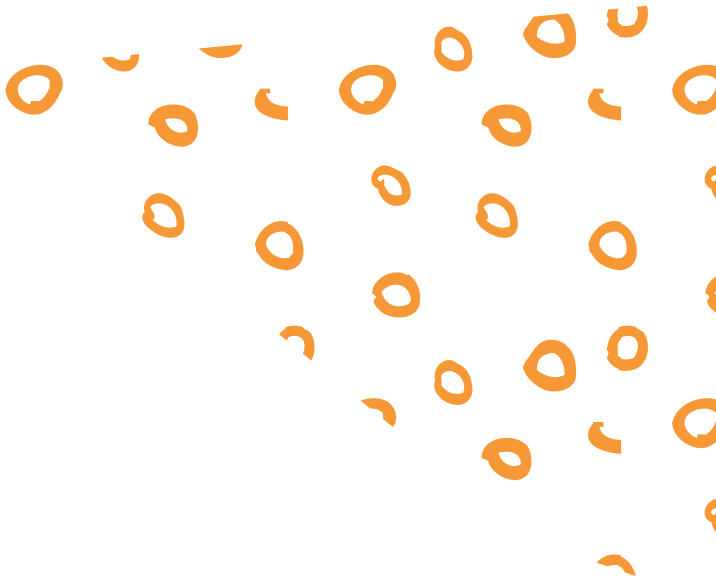
- Classroom documentation, which may include:
- Typed transcripts of a practice/activity
  - Photos of an activity
  - Videos of an activity

Everyone in the classroom should have access to the documentation, whether it is made publically visible in the classroom or provided to each individual separately.

## STEPS

1. Take a few minutes to review the documentation.
2. Move into a conversation analyzing the documentation.
3. Using the same questions as a normal debrief (see “Root Practice: Debrief”), this time ask the students to point to specific evidence in the documentation you are reviewing together.

For example, a student might suggest that the class has improved their listening skills because they watch two videos and in one, students are yelling over each other, and in another, they are letting each person take their turn speaking.



On the next page is a transcript pulled from a high school English classroom. This transcript represents a verbal documentation of a debate without the use of photos or videos.

# Debate Statement: Technology makes us better humans.

(Students standing there-- beginning to chit-chat) you agree? There's a difference?

I'm still thinking

(low noises)

(Some students move around)

marquis-- wanta be here

still thinking

Alize: you shoulda thought

did you make up your mind?

Alize (speaking to Ammerah) We're good with our positions

(Alize staring blankly at ammerah)

oh we're supposed to start debating?

I disagree, technology makes us lazy. We text what we'd talk into phone. Don't read a book just look it up online

Technology help me to do what I need to do-- look up info on a project or application

when its used properly it works better

technology wasn't invented back then

they sucked back then

no they were actually smart

people died bc they didn't have new technology to get medicine

back then when?

People were smarter bc looked up in books,

now we just go to instagram, facebook

no you go to google, look up stuff

technology gonna take over you'll have robots walking around

you don't have a reason you disagree

it don't make us better humans

you got phones? Don't you?

Ok if your phone went off?

If it was a blackout what would you do?

...

Ask how many people can go without their phone?

If you lost your phone yesterday you'd be mad as hell

it effects you it mess your whole day up

but it doesn't make a better human. It brainwashes. Makes it seem like you have to have tech. When you don't?

kids watch all day on tv

parents won't teach them that red is red

you can learn that from techn.

(people talking over each other)

We don't have robot teacher- that's what teachers are made for

everything in the book is original

if tech was so important- everyone would have an ipad in school

...

it makes it easier but it doesn't make us better people

New tech. Every year, every other day, gets better

our mamas didn't have no phones, they were way more productive than us.

times were a lot slower

beepers been out for years

## DEBATE STATEMENT

This is a transcript pulled from a High School English classroom. This transcript represents a verbal documentation of a debate without the use of photos or videos.

Below are statements pulled from the Deep Debrief that happened after the debate.

## PROCESS

This line shows that the debate has started and the students were still literally looking to the teacher for direction.

## CONTENT

"it don't make us better humans" this became a theme that came up over and over again, where students were trying to keep the debate on topic by reiteration of the debate statement.

## PROCESS

Anytime the transcript has to move from what is being said to describing the actions in the classroom, is a great example of process. These are a great points to focus on when debriefing the process.

## CONTENT

Students are using a lot of opinions, but nobody is using specific evidence yet.

# Root Practice: Debate

A debate is a self-facilitated discussion where participants are asked to take a position on a provocative statement.

This practice immediately reverses the traditional power dynamics of a classroom. When the teacher steps back and offers the floor to the students, multiple aspects of the classroom culture are put to the test: the students’ knowledge of a topic, their ability to listen and speak to one another, and most of all their capacity to self govern.

## MATERIALS

Four debate signs (with the words: agree, disagree, strongly agree, strongly disagree)  
Timer  
Documentation tools (laptop, video, audio, etc.)

## DEBRIEF

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

After the first debate, introduce and discuss the following debate rules.  
Before the start of every debate that follows, review the rules. During the debrief, ask participants what rules were upheld and which rules were broken or ignored.

## STEPS

1. Introduce a provocative statement in a clearly visible location in the room.
  - a. Examples: “Anyone can learn anything” or “Students learn best when they struggle.”
2. Ask participants to stand next to one of the four positions (using the debate signs listed above) that best represents their agreement or disagreement with the statement.
3. Then clarify the following guidelines:
  - a. This is a self-facilitated discussion meaning the facilitators are not allowed to manage the conversation during the debate. Facilitators will track time and document the debate via video or transcripts.
  - b. The objective of the debate is to try to get as many people to gather at one position as possible.
  - c. We seek to be true, not to be right, so if you are compelled to move to a different position, because of something someone has said, you should.
  - d. The time limit for the debate depends on the purpose of the debate and the skill -level of the participants. When doing a debate for the first time, the length of debate should be short. As participants improve at debating, the time period can grow.
4. Set the time limit and turn the classroom over to the participants.
5. The participants use this time to facilitate a classroom conversation, where they explain their positions on the statement and/or change position on the statement. This can be a messy and awkward process, especially when just beginning this practice. As the teacher / facilitator, do not interfere. document the conversation and allow the conversation to happen.
6. The debate concludes when the timer goes off. After the debate has concluded, lead the participants through a debrief.

# Debate Rules

PROJECT your voice; don't yell.

SEEK first to understand the statement, EVERY WORD.

RESTATE the previous point made, make your point, and move on.

Your PERSONAL experience is NOT the rule. Connect it to a bigger example.

MOVE from general statements and opinions to more specific evidence grounded in facts.



# Root Practice: Spontaneous Synthesis

The goal of this activity is to get participants to see connections between seemingly disconnected concepts. The ability to see connections between disparate ideas is a skill that births innovation and creativity. Spontaneous Synthesis is a fun way to get participants practicing this habit.



## MATERIALS

- Paper
- Scissors
- A container for paper slips

## STEPS

1. Have participants cut paper into small slips. On each slip they should write a noun from different categories. Example categories could be:
  - A popular fictional person or place
  - A historical person or event
  - A present-day person, place or eventYou can tailor the categories to fit your context or curriculum, but it is important that the nouns on the slips are seemingly random.
2. Collect all the slips of paper and place them into a container.
3. Select a participant to choose at random two slips of paper. Now the selected participant must make a connection between the two random people, places or events.
4. The participants who didn't select slips of paper will rate the connections 1-3, with a 1 for the most simple connections, and 3 for the most complex connections.

For example if you were connecting Lady Gaga with Cleopatra, here are some examples of possible connections and their scores:

“They are both women.” (1 point)

“They were both idolized and followed by people and respected as women who held a lot of power.” (2 points)

“Cleopatra’s brother took her throne and Cleopatra fought back with an army. Similarly, Lady Gaga is being challenged as an artist and performer for her unique ideas and she is fighting back with an army of supporters who have also felt left out of society.” (3 points)

## DEBRIEF

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.

# Root Practice: Gap Fill In

Gap Fill In is a powerful tool that allows us to “think about our thinking” (i.e. metacognition, one of the DFS “11 Essential Skills”). In this practice participants visually describe the process that happens when we make decisions or formulate opinions and ideas. By simply answering a question and then moving backwards to explore how we arrived at that answer, we can examine our own thinking patterns.

In many classrooms, Gap Fill In starts with asking questions about topics that the facilitator presents, but the practice can eventually evolve to investigate the surrounding environment. In one 3rd grade classroom students took a walk around the neighborhood and did Gap Fill Ins on abandoned buildings, investigating the question “Why are these buildings abandoned?”

## MATERIALS

Writing surface  
Pen or pencil  
Timer

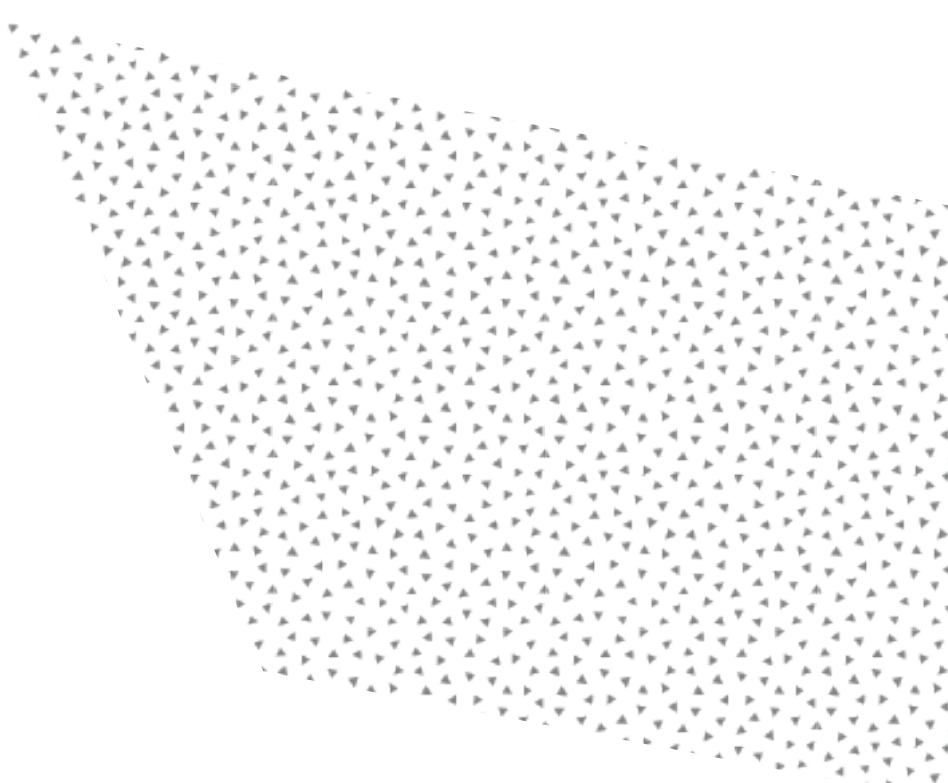
## STEPS

1. Participants fold a sheet of paper into thirds.
2. The facilitator introduces the topic (using an image, video or a body of text) and a question about the topic.  

For example if students were doing a Gap Fill In about the play Othello, you could ask: “Is Othello a hero or a villain?”
3. On their folded paper, participants will write the question at the top of the sheet.
4. Then they answer the question with a simple statement at the very bottom third of the same piece of paper, leaving a gap in the middle third of the paper.
5. In the middle, participants will write down at least three pieces of evidence to support how/why they came up with their answer.

## DEBRIEF

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.





# Root Practice: Fishbowl

A Fishbowl is a practice for structuring an equitable conversation. The conversation begins with a small group discussion on a topic, with one group of participants in the middle (this group is called the “Fishbowl”) and the rest of the participants observing. This practice can grow from small group conversations to more involved group processes.



## MATERIALS

- A clear, open space for participants to sit
- Timer
- documentation tools for the facilitator
- documentation tools for the observers

## STEPS

1. Set up an inner circle (the “Fishbowl”) and outer circle.
2. Introduce the topic using a provocative statement or a series of images.
3. Allow participants to reflect on the question or statement individually.
4. Then select a small group of students to initiate the fishbowl and have those students move into the inner circle.
5. Set a timer and have the inner circle engage in the topic of discussion, while those in the outer circle observe without comment.
6. The outside observers should be documenting the conversation by taking notes. The facilitator can document using transcription or video.
  - a. As a possible modification, students on the outside may tap a participant of the inner group out of the conversation by tapping them on the shoulder and then replacing him/her in the inner circle.

This modification allows for more voices to participate in the conversation.
7. Once they are done, have the outer circle debrief the fishbowl, using the questions from the “Root Practice: Debrief,” while the inner circle listens without comment.

## DEBRIEF

For general debrief guidelines, see the “Root Practice: Debrief” on page 58.



# CLASSROOM BASICS

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## RESOURCES

Every aspect of the classroom, from how the desks are set up, to how students enter or leave the classroom, contributes to the culture of the classroom. Classrooms without clear expectations and routines create a culture where the students are always depending on the teacher to tell them what to do before they can start learning.

In this section we share routines and protocols for setting up your classroom that will, if applied consistently, help create a culture of focus, self-direction, and shared responsibility for what happens in the classroom.

# Classroom Basics

## The Classroom Layout

The physical layout of the classroom contributes to group behavior. When setting up your classroom consider your purpose and principles and try to create an environment where you can achieve your goals.

### ON THE WALLS

Make the images and media on your walls directly relevant to your purpose. Below is a list of things we try to make clearly visible in every DFS classroom:

- The daily agenda
- Your “Big” and “Essential” questions for the year
- Your purpose of education
- Your principles
- The DFS 11 Essential Skills

### THE DESKS

Structure the desks in your classroom in a “U” formation. We have found the “U” formation allows for a more dynamic classroom, greater participation and engagement. It also allows for the teachers to easily observe the entire classroom and for students to be visible at all times. If they need to work in small groups, students can cluster at different parts of the “U.”





# Classroom Basics

## Class Protocols

Once the physical aspects of the class are arranged, you can consider the protocols, or daily routines, of the classroom. Successful classrooms have clear protocols, which allow students to become comfortable enough to eventually start to take the lead in the classroom. This can only happen when students are clear on how the classroom works.

Classroom protocol is usually comprised of:

- A daily agenda
- A starter activity
- An entrance and exit policy

We'll explain each aspect of the protocol below.

### A DAILY AGENDA

The agenda is the daily schedule of the classroom, which provides an outline for all the activities that will take place. Each day, the content of the activities may change but the overall structure of the agenda should remain consistent. This is what allows for a routine to be established, which is vital for creating a stable classroom environment where everyone knows what to expect and students can feel ownership of the classroom.

The agenda should be clearly visible in the classroom because this allows for a higher level of transparency. The agenda also makes planning easier, because the the flow is always the same, regardless of the content.

An example agenda:

1. Do Now
2. Daily Check In
3. Activity
4. Debrief
5. Exit

### ENTRANCE POLICY

The best classroom entrance policies allow the students to “self start” meaning that once the students are familiar with the routine they should be able to start class by themselves. When students come into the classroom, they should know where they need to be, how to set-up their desks, and how the day starts without the teacher having to direct them.

Some classrooms might use a “Do Now” or “Bellwork” as a part of their entrance policy, while other classrooms might want students to start together as a large group. Whatever the policy is, you want to make sure it is consistent and allows you to easily start your lesson. Below are two methods we use as starter activities for DFS classrooms.



THE “DO NOW”

One way to start your classroom is the Do Now. The Do Now should not be busy work but rather high-level, mini-challenges that the students are eager to engage in and sad to miss. Root practices, like debate or spontaneous synthesis, often make great Do Nows.

The Do Now must be posted in the classroom in the same place every day so students know where to look without having to be directed by the teacher. Once the students have completed the Do Now, it should be reviewed, shared out or collected. Ideally, there would be time for students and the teacher to challenge one another’s claims or answers. Once the Do Now portion of class is complete, the teachers should then be able to transition smoothly into the lesson of the day.

CLASSROOM CHECK-INS

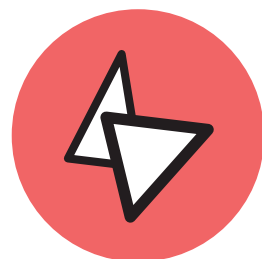
Classroom check-ins are another way to start class. This is when all the students begin the day with a check in activity, such as going over the agenda and doing a short ice breaker that requires every person to say at least one thing. Students should practice checking in, and eventually they should not need to be directed by the teacher to do this activity.

EXIT POLICY

One of the benefits of students taking ownership of a classroom is that students take care in how they leave the classroom. The Exit Policy should allow for students to make a smooth transition out of the classroom, which means not running out of the classroom when the bell rings and cleaning up their individual work spaces. Too often, this responsibility falls solely on the teacher. The transition out of the classroom should be smooth and orderly, which can mean lining up or waiting for the teacher to dismiss the class.

An ideal exit policy allows for

1. Any last statements
2. Time to clean up
3. A smooth transition out of the classroom



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