

The Developmental Continuum of Teacher Abilities: A Roadmap to Growth

by Nahara Stamm, Hollister New Teacher Project Advisor

Teaching is both an art and a science. The art we develop over time, adding personal touches that make it our own. Our beliefs and passions add texture and color to our curriculum. Our personality adds style, shaping the tempo and setting the tone of our classroom. The art of teaching is hard to quantify, but we can readily recognize it. We feel a flow, a special energy, perhaps even inspiration.

Just as every great artist masters the basic elements of the craft before going in a unique direction, so we as teachers must understand and be fluent in the basic elements of good teaching. This science of teaching is the foundation of our art. The *Developmental Continuum of Teacher Abilities* lays out these elements in easy to identify steps that serve as stepping-stones to mastery.

Teachers have a lot to think about during their first year in the classroom. The challenge can be overwhelming. This can lead new teachers to believe that they “can’t do enough,” which then affects their self-esteem and sense of efficacy.

Although the *Continuum* may first appear to be more of “that paperwork”, my experience using it with new teachers has been positive. When we have taken the time to go through the *Continuum* together, it has actually “lightened the load”. The *Continuum* takes much of the guesswork out of teaching. As one of my first-year middle-school teachers said, “I really like the way each of the steps is laid out so clearly with specific things to do at each level. When I read this, I know where I am and where I want to go next in my teaching. I was feeling confused about all I



Nahara Stamm assists beginning teacher Richard Lust as he self-assesses on the Continuum.

had to learn. Going through the *Continuum* helps me focus. This is really powerful!”

Recently, I visited my daughter in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Although I had been there just four months previously, this was my first experience navigating the town alone. After taking three hours to make what should have been a fifteen-minute trip, I was flustered. I was grateful to find a map of the city in my borrowed car. With roadmap in hand, I was more successful in my travels and felt calmer and more capable negotiating new territory.

We can liken the *Continuum* to a roadmap for our teaching. It relieves the stress of being in new territory by making the next steps clear. As one of my new fourth-grade teachers said after self-assessing,

“I feel so much better. I can see a lot of things that I’m already good at. It helps to know that no one has mastered every element to an innovating level. We’re all at different places, and we all have some area in which to grow. I don’t feel so alone.”

It is reassuring to see what we’re doing well. It’s also valuable to be able to set specific, attainable goals, then monitor our progress toward them. Such concrete feedback builds our efficacy and in so doing, our self-esteem. Thus, the *Developmental Continuum of Teacher Abilities* helps us feel confident and competent by giving us a roadmap for our professional growth. It makes mastery of this craft called teaching a tangible goal.



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