

Performance for Danielson's Four Domains

The levels of performance are especially useful when the components are used to support mentoring, coaching, or professional growth. The levels can inform a professional discussion and suggest areas for further learning. Although the levels are also useful for supervision and teacher evaluation, it is important that they be used to structure professional conversations and not in a “gotcha” manner.

Unsatisfactory

The teacher performing at the *Unsatisfactory* level does not yet appear to understand the concepts underlying the component. Working on the fundamental practices associated with the elements will enable the teacher to grow and develop in this area. In some areas of practice, performance at the Unsatisfactory level represents teaching that is below the licensing standard of “do no harm.” For example, students are treated with sarcasm or put-downs (Component 2a), the environment is chaotic (Component 2c), or learning is shut down (Component 3c). Therefore, if a supervisor encounters performance at the Unsatisfactory level, it is very likely time to intervene. For a mentor, a component at the Unsatisfactory level represents a first priority for coaching.

Gaining Proficiency

The teacher performing at the *Gaining Proficiency* level appears to understand the concepts underlying the component and attempts to implement its elements. But

implementation is sporadic, intermittent, or otherwise not entirely successful. Additional reading, discussion, visiting classrooms of other teachers, and experience (particularly supported by a mentor) will enable the teacher to become proficient in this area.

Performance at the Gaining Proficiency level is characteristic of student teachers new to the profession – those for whom virtually everything they do, almost by definition, is being done for the first time. So it is not surprising that not everything goes according to plan. Even when experienced teachers try a new activity, its implementation may be rough or inconsistent (for example, it may take longer than planned or not as long, or the directions for the activity may not be clear). In fact, when trying a new activity or when teaching a new assignment, experienced teachers may perform at the Gaining Proficiency level for the same reason a new teacher might – they are doing something for the first time.

For supervision or evaluation purposes, this level is generally considered minimally competent for teachers early in their careers; improvement is likely to occur with experience, and no actual harm is being done to students. But enhancement of skill is important, and a mentoring or coaching program will ensure that such improvement occurs in a supportive environment.

Proficient

The teacher performing at the *Proficient* level clearly understands the concepts underlying the component and implements it well. Most experienced, capable teachers will regard themselves and be regarded by others as performing at this level.

Teachers at the Proficient level are experienced, professional educators. They thoroughly know their content, they know their students, they know the curriculum and have a broad repertoire of strategies and activities to use with students, and they can move easily to Plan B if that turns out to be necessary. And they have eyes in the backs of their heads! Many of the routines of teaching have become automatic, and proficient teachers have developed a sophisticated understanding of classroom dynamics and are alert to events that don't conform to the expected pattern.

Teachers performing at the Proficient level have mastered the work of teaching while working to improve their practice. They can also serve as resources to one another as they participate in a professional community.

Exceeds Proficiency

Teachers performing at the *Exceeds Proficiency* level are master teachers and make a contribution to the field, both in and outside their school. Their classrooms operate at a qualitatively different level from those of other teachers. Such classrooms consist of a community of learners, with students highly motivated and engaged and assuming

considerable responsibility for their own learning. All the common themes are manifested, as appropriate, in the classroom of a teacher performing at an Exceeds Proficiency level.

A classroom functioning at the Exceeds Proficiency level seems to be running itself; it almost appears that the teacher is not doing anything. It is seamless; the students know what to do and get right to work. When novice teachers observe a class at this level, they typically don't recognize what they are seeing; they can observe the results of what the teacher has created but aren't always aware of how the teacher did it.

Exceeds Proficiency performance is very high performance, and, indeed, some teachers (particularly with some groups of students) may never attain it consistently. As some educators have phrased it, "Exceeds Proficiency level performance is a good place to visit, but don't expect to live there." The student component is important, because with some groups of students it is a daunting challenge to create a community of learners. It may take all year to make much progress at all. But Exceeds Proficiency level remains a goal for all teachers, regardless of how challenging it may be in any particular set of circumstances.