

Using the DOK Framework to Strengthen Instructional Culture

Depth of Knowledge (DOK) is a framework that is widely used by schools and districts as a central component of instructional culture. DOK is a powerful tool that can be used to promote coherence in curriculum and assessment development, lesson planning, and instructional practice. The lens of DOK helps educators to differentiate difficulty from complexity, as well as from other factors. These distinctions are valuable for purposes of content development and evaluation. These distinctions also help to focus classroom goals, to inform instructional decisions that support struggling learners as well as advanced learners, and, overall, to understand the different types of challenges students face as learning unfolds.

Informed by the DOK framework, these five checkpoints can help to build a strong instructional culture that advances student success:

- 1. Differentiate the concepts of difficulty and complexity.**
- 2. Know that the learning process does not occur strictly from low to high complexity.**
- 3. Separate the learning process from the learning outcome.**
- 4. Work to maintain complexity and adjust difficulty when supporting struggling learners.**
- 5. Ensure classroom learning and assessment opportunities reflect the cognitive demands of the academic standards.**

Systemic implementation of DOK supports a strong instructional culture in which educators have a common language they can use to work toward existing goals of systemic coherence and student success. As a practical tool, the DOK framework helps educators to describe and define the types of complex engagement expected within K-12 standards, ensure that the intended complexity plays out in learning and assessment opportunities, and differentiate complexity from difficulty to better promote learning for all students.

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