How to FRAME the First 10 Minutes of Class
Peg Grafwallner, Ronald Reagan High School, Milwaukee, peggrafwallner@gmail.com

This is an excerpt from Grafwallner’s upcoming book, working title: How to FRAME (Focus, Reach, Ask/Analyze, Model and Encourage) Your Class for Optimum Success (from Solution Tree)

In my role as an Instructional Coach/Reading Specialist, I am often asked to observe student teachers to offer feedback and recommend literacy strategies meant to enhance their lessons. Our biology teacher asked if I would observe her student teacher, who would benefit from another set of eyes. What ultimately emerged was a means of shaping or framing the first ten minutes of class, the initial interaction between instructor and individual students as they enter the room in order to ensure a proper learning environment and student success.

The Observation
On Monday morning I walked into the biology classroom about ten minutes before the bell, ready to observe the student teacher preparing students for the first day of presentations. I expected to see her in the hall greeting students. However, she had not yet arrived. Her door was open and students were milling about, but she was not there. About five minutes before class started, she walked in, went straight to her computer, logged in, and told students that they should get in their groups and “get ready to present.” She took off her coat, grabbed her clipboard, and motioned for the first group to stand in front of the class. They appeared unsure and nervous. As I watched them stumble through their presentation, I wondered if they could have benefitted from a structured introduction to the class, an organized beginning to prepare and support them for the learning ahead.
After each group presented, she listed a series of things they should have done, such as “You needed to speak louder” or “Your slide was difficult to read” or “Did you proofread your slideshow?” Since most of the comments were directed toward presentation techniques instead of content, I wondered what the goal of these presentations was. What were students supposed to know and be able to do?

At the end of class, she read a list of those presenting the next day. After that, the bell rang and class was over.

I took specific observational notes to share with the student teacher to modify the classroom culture and ways in which she could gather explicit feedback from her forthcoming student groups. When I reflected on the lesson and my notes, I realized that the students had missed the culture of learning and had missed the why and the how—the relevance—of their vital work. This student teacher knew her content and was excited to have students share what they had read and researched with their peers. However, she missed the opportunity to connect with the students personally and academically during the first few minutes of class and didn’t see how that might have undermined the content she wanted them to learn. I was excited to collaborate with her to help her realize the value of that connection.

I came to the second day of student presentations to determine if what I had witnessed the day before was an anomaly or standard procedure. Unfortunately, the pattern repeated.

**The Creation of FRAME**

I met with the student teacher after that second class and shared my observations and ideas in hopes of reframing the remaining presentations:

1. Since there had been no Learning Target (LT) or SC (SC), we could work together to write them for the remainder of the presentations.
2. If time was an issue for her in the morning, perhaps as students were getting organized, she could walk around to say hello or give students a conversation question (“What movie best describes you?”) to build a classroom community.

3. I offered to demonstrate how to call on two or three students to ask them to paraphrase the LT and SC for greater understanding, thereby helping them unpack the *what* of the work they were doing.

4. I offered to help create a mini-presentation she could model for the students. Viewing a finished presentation, maybe even two or three slides, might alleviate anxiety and support students in the *how* of the learning.

5. I presented the idea of creating a list of encouraging phrases to use as students completed their presentations that focused on process, and not necessarily product.

The student teacher listened but seemed overwhelmed with the suggestions. I recognized that it was simply too ambitious to implement all of these suggestions before the next set of presentations, so we started easy, with greeting the students at the beginning of class and writing an LT and SC, which I find to be a best practice for all classes. Modeling and instructing the work expected, and asking the students to paraphrase it, would provide a visual representation of what they were supposed to do and encourage them to highlight the value and relevance of the process.

It was then that I created the concept of FRAME and the components that make up those first 10 minutes of class: *Focus, Reach, Ask and Analyze, Model, and Encourage*. My collaboration with the student teacher helped me realize the value of using FRAME during the first 10 minutes and during the lesson in order to check for understanding.

**What Is FRAME?**

Most K-12 teachers, both novices and veterans, emphasize their content and deliver it in engaging and inspiring ways. While content is indeed important, it is equally important
to design a classroom structure that creates enthusiasm and excitement for learning. If a curious community of learners is not formed, the most interesting content will go untaught, unheard, and unlearned. When content is not delivered meaningfully, students get bored, tired and frustrated in order to “escape from the situation” (Jason, 2017). Therefore, as students lose interest, they look for ways to leave the classroom--the bathroom break, the nurse’s office, the phone call home--anything to escape.

FRAME is thus a protocol that clarifies learning expectations and provides a consistent structure of support. It eliminates wasted time and helps the teacher stay true to the lesson while students move systematically through the learning. Utilized within the first ten minutes of class, FRAME offers a comprehensible opener to ensure that all students make connections throughout the lesson:

**Focus (before the bell has rung).** It’s vital to Focus each class for optimal learning. A structured classroom, one prepared for learning, helps students take the guesswork out of what’s coming next. Meador (2018) explains that “A structured classroom often translates to a safe classroom, one where students can enjoy themselves and focus on learning. In a structured learning environment, students are more likely to thrive and experience personal and academic growth.” Therefore, before students arrive, Focus by writing in student friendly language the LT and SC in their own specific place on the board where students should expect to see them. Don’t merely recopy a standard and call it done. Does the student even understand it? In addition, Focus needs to be manageable. Have you set aside the necessary time for the work to be accomplished? Consider the LT and SC to be a “roadmap.” If students don’t know where they are going, they could become anxious and frustrated. Therefore, help them define the journey.

**Reach (before the bell has rung).** Reach gives each student the personal attention that is so important in developing a sense of classroom community. Wyatt-Ross (2018) clarifies that “School leaders and classroom teachers should view their school or classroom spaces as culturally inclusive classroom communities where everyone is welcome.” Therefore, acknowledging the presence of each student with an engaging smile, individual eye contact, and preferred name pronounced correctly demonstrates a sense of self within the
community. Students are energetic members whose ideas, critiques, successes, and challenges will be met with respect, empathy and mindfulness as they learn to become their best selves.

So, even before the bell has run, stand at your door in the morning and greet the students as they walk in. That greeting could be a handshake, a fist pump, a pat on the back, or an individualized hello meant for that student. Most importantly, use their names to make them feel valued and respected. Remember, we are our students’ academic family and our classrooms become their kitchen table. For some, the teacher might be the only consistent “family” member they have. Reaching out demonstrates a commitment to students and their socio-emotional learning.

Ask and Analyze (3 minutes). Staying true to the LT and SC is successful only if students understand what it is they are asked to know and do. Therefore, it is important to teach them how to Ask questions and Analyze what is expected. If they lack an understanding of the work ahead, Moss, Brookhart and Lang (2011) write, then “The teacher will always be the only one providing the direction, focusing on getting students to meet the instructional objectives” (p. 66). Therefore, it is important to demonstrate how to Ask robust questions and Analyze the “what” and “why” of the LT and SC through paraphrasing so they own their understanding about the tasks ahead and why those tasks are valuable.

During Ask and Analyze, read the LT and SC and ask students to paraphrase them. Afterwards, give them time to collaborate in pairs or small groups to ask questions or process how they can master the day’s learning. Give them time to analyze the task. What do the pieces of the SC look like? What do they need in order to be successful? How will they know if they have reached their goal? They can be successful only if they have time to Ask and Analyze the LT and the SC in their own voices.

Model (4-5 minutes). Modeling the process and the product helps students know that they, too, can meet the LT by taking the mystery out of the work. If they feel overwhelmed by directions or lost in the myriad of steps to get the work done, they may become
frustrated. Therefore, it is important to break the task into smaller steps. Clayton (2010) expresses that breaking down the task “sends the message that you value the process of learning, not just the products.” Adding to that, Alber (2014) suggests that showing the finished product first “can guide students through each step of the process with the model of the finished product in hand.” Using student work to demonstrate the process empowers them to know they, too, can reach their goal. As a result, they can begin to process their understanding of the task and what they need to do to complete it. In other words, during Modeling, the teacher is not telling the students what to do. Rather, the teacher is showing them what the work looks like in explicit and authentic ways.

*Encourage (2 minutes).* Encourage the work by praising the process of that work. You have designed a lesson that will support your students’ curiosity to become global learners; therefore, tell them the work might be challenging and, at times, perplexing. However, there is support within the classroom community to understand the LT and conquer the components of the SC. Therefore, let students know that Encouragement will focus on “their hard work, their strategies, their perseverance” rather than just “praising intelligence” (Dweck, 2014).

Offering Encouragement builds a relationship of community and trust. We know this work can be difficult, so explaining the value of “productive struggle” assures students they are not in this alone. Praise the effort with key language such as, “Show me how you solved that problem,” or “Explain the strategy you used to discover that answer,” or “Why did you complete the task like that?” While we need to support the learner and the learning, it’s imperative we praise the strategies students use to achieve the effort. We don’t want them using the same ineffective strategies: we want them to ask for help if they get stuck, but we also want them to try other resources for a positive outcome.

**Using FRAME to Enhance Learning**

The student teacher and I met again before the next class and created an LT and SC together. During our meeting, I learned the teacher did have each written but didn’t provide them to the class. In fact, while researching, planning, implementing, and
reflecting on her lesson, she had forgotten about them. I explained that many things can get lost in the shuffle as we try to design the best, most engaging classroom lesson we can, and using a framework for those first few minutes might keep her and her students on track. Once we developed the LT and SC, we wrote them down on butcher paper and hung them in the front of the classroom so students could see them as they walked ins. Then, as they were preparing for presentations and getting organized for the learning, she walked around the room, greeted each table, and offered positive words to those who had not yet presented.

Once the students were ready, the student teacher read the LT and SC out loud. Unfortunately, there was not enough time to unpack the why and how since presentations were on a tight schedule. Still, the teacher greeted her students specifically and we provided an LT and SC where there had not been one before. At the end of the presentations, the student teacher and I met one more time. She had implemented the two components in all of her other classes and noticed specific improvement. She shared that her students seemed more relaxed and less anxious about the presentations once she started providing that structure. As a result of their demeanor, she thought they appeared more confident. Also, she was learning things about her students she had never known before (“several of my students walked in the Dreamers March. I didn’t know that”) and appreciated them sharing their lives with her.

She explained that she had never really thought much about the beginning of class, but instead was more content-oriented. But, after our discussions, the student teacher wanted to continue working with me about ways to structure those first 10 minutes for optimal student success.

I shared my conversation with her cooperating teacher, who appreciated my support and especially valued the methodical approach I offered to student learning. She recognized the importance of the FRAME approach and since has implemented a pertinent LT and SC. She also now reaches out to every student by standing in the hallway and shaking hands and is working toward the Asking and Analyzing component. She usually read the LT and SC and simply moved on. Now she takes a more critical approach by asking her
students to paraphrase them and analyze the language in order to explain to her and each other the process of the task. In addition, she thought she could *model to instruct* in a more comprehensive way by demonstrating the process of the work students were supposed to do instead of just showing the finished product. Finally, her self-reflection offered the opportunity to encourage students using language that complemented the process and the effort, not the student’s brain power!

My experience helped me realize that focusing on an instructional target, intentionally building community in the classroom, demonstrating achievement, modeling desired outcomes, and encouraging students will develop a curious community of learners ready to engage with the content and understand why it is valuable.

**The Challenges of FRAME**

While FRAME is a systematic and structured approach meant to guide the teacher and support students, there could be challenges in its implementation. It was clear that the student teacher was doing her best to deliver the content; however, the method of delivery and the building of community was lacking. The implementation of “one more thing” can seem overwhelming to a novice teacher. My recommendation is to suggest, as I did, two or three of the components initially. Once the teacher becomes adept at applying those, suggest the remainder of the structure.

Also, one might argue that FRAME has to be implemented at the beginning of the year for it to be worthwhile or for students to embrace the structure. Again, I encourage the teacher to add components of FRAME in pieces until the entire protocol is executed. As an example, make it a point to post the LT and SC on the board before you leave for home. Then, tomorrow, stand outside your classroom door and take attendance. Apply these two components for a couple of weeks and then add the next component. You don’t have to wait until the semester or the new mark period to begin. You can begin right now!

Finally, if one is a traveling teacher, it might be difficult to logistically apply FRAME, for even getting the LT and SC posted before students walk in the door can be challenging.
Perhaps write the LT and SC on large butcher block paper and hang the paper on the wall as you enter the room. Then, greet your students as they walk in and give them a chance to read the LT and SC and encourage conversation. While initially cumbersome, students will begin to look for the LT and SC, knowing they will drive their learning forward.

**The Significance of FRAME**

Teachers are eager to implement the content they have learned or the lesson they have designed. They are excited to support students and help them become better readers, writers, mathematicians, historians, artists, and global thinkers. However, we sometimes forget that, as valuable as our content is, it will be moot if our students aren’t prepared and poised for learning.

Unfortunately, many teachers dive right into the material without considering the implementation of a structure or routine to their class. Students want to know the “big picture”: they want to know where they’re going and how to get there. If there is no structure, they are apt to be disengaged and disinterested. The purpose of FRAME is to eliminate the anxiety and trepidation they might feel upon entering the classroom. FRAME removes that concern and, instead, provides a basis for community building and learning.

FRAME was borne out of a need to help a fellow teacher whose lesson was complete; there is no doubt she knew her content and wanted her students to know it, too. However, without properly organizing their thinking, the lesson fell short. As a result of her experience, I designed FRAME to help teachers get their students ready for the important job of learning. If students aren’t ready to learn, the best lesson will fail. Therefore, prepare them for what you have created and designed especially for them. In fact, both advanced and developing learners will appreciate the consistency that FRAME offers and will be able to use the time to organize and prepare their mind and body for learning. It is the suggestion of routine and structure that gives intention and significance to your lesson plans.
FRAME offers a structured guide to daily teacher preparation and planning while building a firm foundation for student readiness. Its components—**Focus, Reach, Ask and Analyze, Model, and Encourage**—are grounded in research-based methods and practical strategies meant for all abilities and for all grade levels. FRAME is all about establishing routine and structure before students enter the room, building community in an authentic and relevant way, showing students how to ask and analyze the learning they will be doing, modeling the process and the product, and supporting students in using strategies and encouraging productive struggle to learn and grow. FRAME supports all learners, all grade levels and all abilities in respectful and honorable ways...

Now, let’s get our FRAME on!

**References**


