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MINI-MANUAL

# Community Building: Freedom Within Form



INSTRUCTIONAL  
COACHING  
GROUP

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For more detailed information regarding the information contained in this mini-manual, refer to:

*High Impact Instruction: A Framework for Great Teaching*

Chapter 12

By Jim Knight

Also view the High Impact Instruction introduction video:



**Community Building: Freedom Within Form**

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# *Freedom Within Form*

*“Anyone can improvise with no restrictions, but that’s not jazz. Jazz always has some restrictions. Otherwise, it might sound like noise. The ability to improvise...comes from fundamental knowledge and this knowledge limits the choices you can make and will make.”*

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WYNTON MARSALIS (IN LYENGAR, 20120, P. 214)

*“If the structure does not permit dialogue, the structure must be changed.”*

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PAULO FREIRE

## KEY CONCEPTS FOR COACHES

### FIVE WAYS TEACHERS CAN PROMOTE FREEDOM WITHIN FORM

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- 1 Use a variety of dialogue structures.
- 2 Teach students clear expectations for procedures.
- 3 Provide choices based on criteria.
- 4 Adopt a caring attitude toward students, while also maintaining control of the learning.

## *Turning Ideas Into Action*

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### STUDENTS

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- 1 Give the students the Tripod Survey to see how they feel about their experiences in the classroom.
- 2 Prompt students to complete exit tickets or other informal surveys that ask about their interest in learning.

### TEACHERS

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- 1 Video record yourself to observe how your physical actions communicate that you care about your students and that you are in control.
- 2 Observe other teachers to see how they communicate care and control.
- 3 Watch videos of presenters on websites to identify communication skills presenters use to communicate care and control.
- 4 Experiment with different ways in which you can give your students more choice and monitor students to see if choice changes their interest in learning experiences.

### INSTRUCTIONAL COACHES

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- 1 Use the various engagement assessment tools to monitor the impact of the freedom within form strategies.
- 2 Develop a video library of teachers implementing various freedom within form strategies.
- 3 Offer to interview students to see if they truly do feel autonomous in their classroom.

PRINCIPALS

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- 1 Lead a book study with teachers around Chapter 12 Freedom Within Form from *High Impact Instruction* and consider questions such as these: How important is choice for student motivation? Will students be motivated to learn if they don't have choices about what they learn? What choices are possible? What are non-negotiables in the classroom?

## What It Looks Like

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One way to assess the impact of freedom with form is by assessing student engagement. Students will most likely be engaged in learning when they are free to make choices that lead them to see learning as meaningful *and* when sufficient structure is provided for them to act on that freedom. If there is a lack of engagement, probably one of those two factors needs to be adjusted—more freedom, or more form. There are many ways to assess engagement, many of which are described in Chapter 12 of *High Impact Instruction*.

ASSESSING TIME ON TASK

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When you are gathering time-on-task data, you are taking a snapshot of student behavior at the moment you look at the student. Your observation is a sample of that moment, and it should reflect exactly what you see only at the moment of observation.

More than anything else, “time on task” means that students are engaged in the learning activity proposed for them by the teacher. Thus, if the teacher is asking students to write a paragraph, students who are on task (doing the task given them) are writing the paragraph. If the teacher is leading classroom discussion, the student should be listening or asking questions or responding to questions. As a general rule, a teacher’s goal should be 90% time on task or higher.

**What It Looks Like**

Time on task may include some of the following student behaviors:

- 1 Doing the assigned task, which could include (but is by no means limited to)
  - Conducting an experiment
  - Reading
  - Working on a cooperative learning project
  - Writing in their notebook, engaging in classroom debate
  - Completing a learning sheet

- 2 Making eye contact with the teacher or other students engaged in the assigned learning
- 3 Responding verbally and nonverbally to teacher prompts, which could include (but is by no means limited to)
  - Smiling
  - Doing assigned tasks
  - Asking questions
  - Engaging in hands-on activities
  - Taking out materials needed to work on a task

**What It Doesn't Look Like**

Time on task usually does not include some of the following student behaviors:

- 1 Doing something other than the assigned task, such as
  - Sleeping
  - Not taking out materials
  - Texting
  - Engaging in side conversations
  - Reading unassigned reading material
  - Touching or bothering other students

