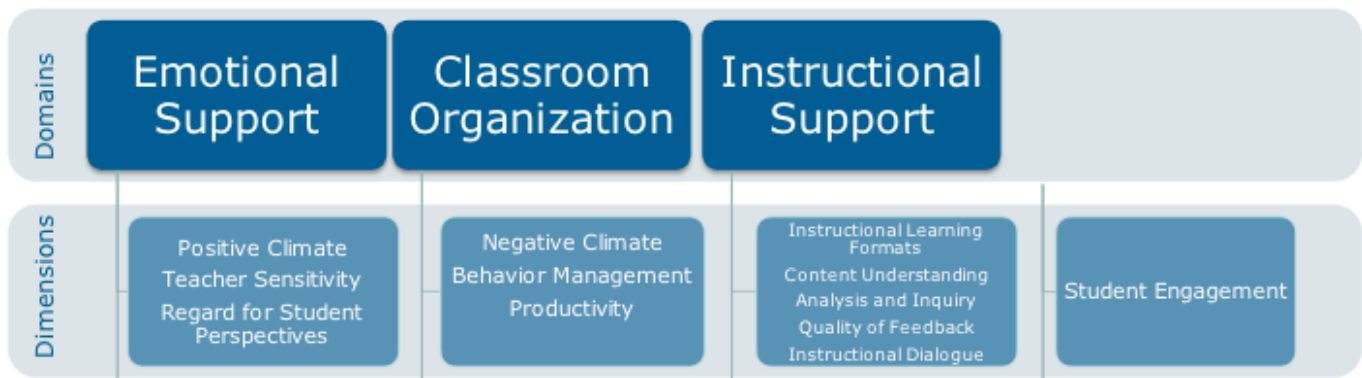


Upper Elementary CLASS® Coding Tips

How to use this resource: This tip sheet doesn't cover everything you need to remember when coding with the Upper Elementary CLASS. Instead it focuses specifically on the most common points of confusion and things observers often forget when coding. While this is a great tool to support testing preparation, refer to your Upper Elementary CLASS Manual for comprehensive coding information.

The Upper Elementary CLASS Framework



Domain-Level Tips

- The interactions considered in the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization domains set the stage for effective Instructional Support interactions. If teachers don't support students' social-emotional needs and provide an organized setting, it is unlikely that teachers will have time to engage in much Instructional Support or that students will be poised to learn from any Instructional Support interactions that do happen. These same types of interactions are linked to Student Engagement.
- The Classroom Organization domain is ultimately about managing time in the classroom. The less time teachers spend managing behavior and time, the more time will be available for learning each day.
- Negative Climate is part of Classroom Organization at the Upper Elementary age level, because research has shown that the level of negativity in upper elementary classrooms is closely associated with the effectiveness level of the Behavior Management strategies in place.

- Instructional Support at the Upper Elementary age level considers the strategies teachers use to engage students, present new content, promote higher-order thinking, provide process-oriented feedback, and use discussion to build students' understanding of content.
- Student Engagement sits by itself in the Upper Elementary CLASS, because it is an outcomes measure. It looks at the effectiveness of teacher interactions in the other three domains in getting students engaged in learning. This is the only dimension that focuses solely on student behavior.

Dimension-Level Tips

Recommendations for using Chapter 3

Classroom Examples: You may notice that the Upper Elementary CLASS Manual contains charts at the end of each dimension section with low and high range examples of what the behavioral markers may look like. These charts can be very helpful in visualizing these classroom behaviors, and we recommend observers read these charts carefully before they begin collecting data. However, these are not to be used as substitutes for the long descriptions when coding.

It's also important to remember that just like the behavioral markers are just examples of what evidence for the indicator may look like, these examples are just samples of what the behavioral markers may look like. As you read the examples, remember to think about what these markers might look like at other times of day and while students are focusing on other academic subjects.

Underlining: Unlike the manuals for the younger age levels, the Upper Elementary manual is printed with some text pre-underlined in the long descriptions. While this text was chosen to emphasize certain phrases, we strongly encourage you to do your own underlining and highlighting to emphasize any parts of the long descriptions that they find most useful when coding.

Positive Climate

Definition: Positive Climate reflects the emotional connection and relationships among teachers and students, and the warmth, respect, and enjoyment communicated by verbal and non-verbal interactions.

Things to Remember

- Remember to pay attention to the level of connection and enjoyment in the interactions among students when scoring this dimension, not just teacher-student interactions.
- You don't need to see all of the behavioral markers for high range. These are just examples of what the indicators might look like in a classroom. For instance, if you see frequent physical proximity and shared positive affect between the teacher and students, you may determine that relationships is in the high range, even if the activity doesn't provide much opportunity for peer interactions or social conversation. While this is true for all the dimensions, observers are especially likely to over-rely on the behavioral markers when scoring Positive Climate.
- Respect is something that varies considerably cross-culturally. Depending on the context in which you are collecting CLASS data, some of the behavioral markers listed in the CLASS manual may not reflect respectful behavior. In these cases, before going into the classroom think about what types of behaviors would indicate that respectful interactions are occurring in the context where you'll be collecting data. Look for those behaviors when you go into the classroom.

Teacher Sensitivity

Definition: Teacher Sensitivity reflects the teacher's timely responsiveness to the academic, social/emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs of individual students and the entire class.

Things to Remember

- Teacher Sensitivity is not an assessment of how nice a teacher is. The "sensitivity" referenced in the dimension name is about the level of teachers' awareness of and responsiveness to students' emotional and academic needs.

- The manual often uses words like “problems,” “difficulties,” and “concerns” when talking about what teachers need to respond to. It’s important to remember that a student’s problem could be something like needing more poster board to continue working on a group project. The focus here isn’t just on big problems that students get upset about. At the high range, we want to see teachers noticing and responding to all the needs in their classroom.
- Even when a teacher addresses a problem, it doesn’t mean that they have effectively resolved it. Observers should look to the students involved to see if they appear helped in order to determine whether a problem has been resolved.
- There are rarely large problems for Upper Elementary teachers to respond to within a single observation cycle. In these cases, observers should focus on any small needs that arise (e.g. how quickly a teacher notices and responds to a raised hand) when coding. In rare cases where there truly are no problems for teachers to respond to, it is possible to score Teacher Sensitivity in the high range.

Regard for Student Perspectives

Definition: Regard for Student Perspectives captures the degree to which the teacher is able to meet and capitalize on the social and developmental needs and goals of students by providing opportunities for student autonomy and leadership. Also considered are the extent to which student ideas and opinions are valued and content is made useful and relevant to students.

Things to Remember

- Teachers can score in the high range for flexibility and student focus while having a plan for the day, as long as they integrate student's ideas and choices into their plan. For example, if a teacher is leading a lesson about mollusks and a student raises her hand to tell the teacher about some shells she found at the beach last summer, the teacher can acknowledge the student’s story and make an effort to integrate it into the lesson rather than dismissing her comments for being only tangentially related.

- The connections to current life indicator can be a challenging one to score. While the description of connecting content to student life in high range focuses on examples from popular culture, any connections that the teacher makes between content and something students would care about fits here. For the “communicates usefulness” marker, it isn’t sufficient for the teacher to just tell students they’ll be able to use a fact or skill in a practical way. Instead the teacher should elaborate in a way that makes it explicit how this content can help them in their daily lives.

Behavior Management

Definition: Behavior Management encompasses the teacher’s use of effective methods to encourage desirable behavior and prevent and redirect misbehavior.

Things to Remember

- In classrooms with high-range Behavior Management, teachers spend minimal talking about or redirecting behavior because students understand what to do. If a teacher is spending a lot of time reinforcing expectations and redirecting behavior, this indicates that students don’t understand expectations.
- Behavior Management focuses on active misbehavior. The strategies teachers use to keep students engaged in desired activities are instead captured in Instructional Learning Formats.
- If you see few to no behavioral problems in the classrooms, it is safe to assume effective strategies are in place. The classroom can score in the high range even if you don’t see teachers provide many explicit behavioral expectations.
- Behavior Management is a dimension where it can be tempting to overweigh single incidents or a single student’s experience. When collecting CLASS data, it’s important to make sure that your scores reflect the average experience of the average student over the full duration of the cycle.

Productivity

Definition: Productivity considers how well the teacher manages time and routines so that instructional time is maximized. This dimension captures the degree to which instructional time is effectively managed and down time is minimized for students; it is not a code about student engagement or about the quality of instruction or activities.

Things to Remember

- Productivity doesn't look at the quality of activities or at students' engagement level. It is just looking at whether students are consistently provided with activities to do.
- The transitions indicator is unique, because you don't always score it. If the same activity continues for the entire cycle, then you only code the other three indicators of Productivity. However, transitions within an activity and transitions between activities are codeable. If the cycle is solely during Language Arts, but the teacher introduces content about haiku and then the students begin silently writing their own haiku, you would still score transitions by looking at the transition from the teacher talking about haiku to the students writing. You would only skip it if, for instance, students were independently writing haiku for the whole cycle.
- Be careful when assessing pacing; there is a lot of variation in how much time students need to complete activities. Only consider this when pacing is slow enough that most students are spending significant time waiting.

Negative Climate

Definition: Negative Climate reflects the overall level of negativity among teachers and students in the class; the frequency, quality, and intensity of teacher and student negativity are important to observe.

Things to Remember

- This dimension is scored opposite of the other dimensions. A low score is desirable.

- If there are any instances of very intense negativity like a physical fight between students or a teacher hitting a student, Negative Climate can be scored in the high range.
- While sarcasm is a form of disrespect, when weighing evidence of sarcasm, it's important to think about frequency and intensity of sarcasm and whether it is directed at students. Rare, lighthearted sarcasm that doesn't offend students should be weighed very differently than frequent harsh comments.

Instructional Learning Formats

Definition: Instructional Learning Formats focuses on the ways in which the teacher maximizes student engagement in learning through clear presentation of material, active facilitation, and the provision of interesting and engaging lessons and materials.

Things to Remember

- While there is significant overlap between this dimension and Student Engagement, Instructional Learning Formats focuses on what the teacher is doing to promote student engagement, while Student Engagement looks at the resulting engagement level of the students.
- Teachers cannot be everywhere at once. For high range, it isn't necessary to, for instance, see a teacher actively facilitate students' involvement in every small group during a given cycle, as long as they are making an effort to move around the room and help students get the most out of activities.
- While there is often alignment between the range chosen for the effective engagement indicator and the code selected for Student Engagement, these do not always match. It is important to evaluate these independently using the long description for each, rather than making an assumption about one based on following the typical coding process for the other.

Content Understanding

Definition: Content Understanding refers to both the depth of lesson content and the approaches used to help students comprehend the framework, key ideas, and procedures in an academic discipline. At a high level, this refers to interactions among the teacher and students that lead to an integrated understanding of facts, skills, concepts, and principles.

Things to Remember

- The Content Understanding indicators can be hard to understand for new Upper Elementary observers. Refer to your face page for concise descriptions of what these indicators look like at the low, mid, and high range.
- The first step in scoring Content Understanding is identifying what content, if any, is being communicated during a cycle. Here are some tips:
 - This will typically be easy to do when teachers are engaged in direct instruction for at least part of the cycle.
 - Ask yourself what information did the teacher communicate during this part of the cycle?
 - Was any other content communicated in other parts of the cycle?
 - It is more challenging to discern what the content is when students are engaged in other activity formats throughout the cycle. If students are working in small groups on a science lab, writing independently in their journals, or playing math games with a partner for the whole cycle, your evidence for this dimension will be found primarily in the back-and-forth exchanges teachers have with students as they support them in these activities and students have with one another as they work with the content.
 - It is also possible to have a full cycle where no content is communicated. In these instances, Content Understanding will score a 1, because there is no evidence of interactions around content to consider. Here are some common examples:

- Students spend the whole cycle doing silent reading or taking a math test, and the teacher doesn't interact with students to provide any feedback.
- Students transition for the duration of the cycle.
- Students are engaged in a social activity like a class party.
- Opportunity of practice of procedures and skills is only scored during cycles when teachers introduce new procedures and skills. If students have an opportunity to practice a procedure or skill, but this doesn't occur in the same cycle where the procedure or skill is introduced, you cannot score this indicator. If a procedure or skill is introduced, but the students don't have a practice opportunity during that cycle, then this indicator is scored in the low range even if you can anticipate that students will have a practice opportunity during a later cycle.
- The multiple and varied perspectives behavioral marker can be a challenging one to understand. Perspectives in this case can mean different approaches to a problem or different sides of an issue. These perspectives can come from the teacher or the students.

Analysis and Inquiry

Definition: Analysis and Inquiry assesses the degree to which students are engaged in higher-level thinking skills through the application of knowledge and skills to novel and/or open-ended problems, tasks, and questions. Opportunities for engaging in metacognition, i.e., thinking about thinking, are also included.

Things to Remember

- Not all activities where students work with data or information contain significant evidence for the facilitation of higher-order thinking indicator. Think about the extent to which students are using higher-order thinking skills when working with the data.
- Open-ended tasks do not have one correct answer. At the high range for opportunities for novel application, the novel and open-ended that tasks students are given should actually be challenging for them.
- Be careful not to overweigh single incidents of metacognition. As always when coding, consider the average experience of the average student in the classroom.

Quality of Feedback

Definition: Quality of Feedback assesses the degree to which feedback expands and extends learning and understanding and encourages student participation. In upper elementary classrooms, significant feedback may also be provided by peers. Regardless of the source, the focus here should be on the nature of the feedback provided and the extent to which it “pushes” learning.

Things to Remember

- Remember that feedback can be provided to encourage students to participate or to expand learning or understanding. This feedback can come from teachers or peers.
- Not all back-and-forth exchanges are feedback loops. In order to count as feedback, the exchange has to be in response to a student’s comment or action and aimed at increasing participation or understanding. Back-and-forth exchanges that don’t meet these criteria are considered in Positive Climate or Instructional Dialogue instead. Feedback loops are also considered in Instructional Dialogue as they are back-and-forth exchanges connected to content.
- Not all activities where students work with data or information contain significant evidence for the facilitation of higher-order thinking indicator. Think about the extent to which students are using higher-order thinking skills when working with the data.
- The type of evidence considered in encouragement and affirmation either encourages a student to persist in a task (“Keep going! I know you can read the rest of the story.”) or recognizes a student’s effort (“Wow! That’s a really great idea.”). Positive comments like “good job!” and “nice work” that tell students they have completed an activity fit in Positive Climate instead.

Instructional Dialogue

Definition: Instructional Dialogue captures the purposeful use of content-focused discussion among teachers and students that is cumulative, with the teacher supporting students to chain ideas together in ways that lead to deeper understanding of content. Students take an active role in these dialogues and both the teacher and students use strategies that facilitate extended dialogue.

Things to Remember

- The cumulative content-driven exchanges indicator looks at back-and-forth exchanges that are about academic content. Back-and-forth exchanges about social topics are considered in Positive Climate, while back-and-forth exchanges about classroom expectations are considered in Behavior Management.
- Dialogues between teachers and students and among students are of equal value when scoring this dimension. For this reason, a cycle where students are engaging in academic discussion while working in groups can score in the high range even if the teacher participates in relatively few conversations.
- Similarly, facilitation strategies looks at both teacher and student behaviors. So, facilitation strategies isn't necessarily low range in cycles where students are primarily engaging in instructional dialogue with one another.

Student Engagement

Definition: Student Engagement is intended to capture the degree to which all students in the class are focused and participating in the learning activity presented or facilitated by the teacher. The difference between passive engagement and active engagement is of note in this rating.

Things to Remember

- While there is significant overlap between this dimension and Instructional Learning Formats, Student Engagement looks at the resulting engagement level of the students, while Instructional Learning Formats focuses on what the teacher is doing to promote student engagement.
- While there is often alignment between the range chosen for the effective engagement indicator in Instructional Learning Formats and the code selected for Student Engagement, these do not always match. It is important to evaluate these independently using the long description for each rather than making an assumption about one based on following the typical coding process for the other.
- Remember that evidence of active engagement isn't always verbal. While many of the examples of active engagement in the manual include opportunities for students to talk, the distinction between active and passive engagement is ultimately about whether students are in a receptive (passive) or active mode, not how much they get to speak as this is just one way to actively participate. If, for instance, students are engaged in writing or creating artwork, these behaviors would also be signs of active engagement, because students are still actively doing something.